

MILLBROOK UMC
LENTEN DEVOTIONS—2014

March 5

Ash Wednesday

Anne Galamb

¹Sound the alarm in Jerusalem! Let the blast of the warning trumpet be heard upon my holy mountain! Let everyone tremble in fear, for the day of the Lord's judgment approaches.

(The Living Bible) Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

What I Learned in Disciple III Class

I read the Bible, but when I get to the Minor Prophets my mind tends to wander. Why do the prophets get so hung up on doom and gloom? I often wonder what they are trying to say. Recently, I've been participating in a Disciple III class. Through the class, I learned a lot about Old Testament prophets.

Prophets spoke the message God gave them. Ezekiel was unable to speak until God gave him a message to say.

The prophets tended to repeat their warnings. God loves us and always will, no matter how unloving we have been to Him. Just like a good Father, He warns us when we are going astray to provide us with the opportunity to turn back to Him. Even though we do not like the warnings, they are for our own good.

The people, who the prophets warned of destruction unless they changed their ways, did things like we do. They put things or people ahead of God, were unloving to their neighbors, and didn't observe a holy day of rest.

When I started Disciple III, I knew I'd have trouble with parts of the Old Testament. Rather than giving up or ignoring these readings, I picked an easier-to-understand (paraphrased) version of the Bible and it really helped.

When I saw the selection of Bible verses to use for this reflection, I was drawn to the one from Joel. I understand what he is saying a lot better now and see that there is hope for redemption.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father: Thank you for forgiving us just because we ask you. Help us to see others and ourselves through your eyes. Amen

Thursday, March 6

Anne Weathersbee

...But you have kept the good wine until now.

John 2:1-11

Jesus, his disciples and his mother, Mary, were attending a wedding in Cana, a town located on the west side of the Dead Sea in Galilee. Weddings then, as today, were very special events and sometimes lasted as long as a week. Some Biblical authorities think that this was an event which involved some of Mary's close relatives. At any rate, it would seem that she was concerned with the fact that the wine had all been consumed. In those days there would have been no variety of drinks available like today. Everyone would have drunk wine—it would have been a social disgrace to let the wine give out.

Mary spoke to her son because she realized that He was the only one who had the power to keep this disgrace from happening to the family. Jesus did not wish to call attention to himself or his powers, so his answer to her statement sounds almost like he is not concerned about the wine but his actions proved differently. He commanded the servants to fill the stone water jars. Can you not see the questioning look on these servants' faces? Jesus then told the servants to serve some of the contents of the stone jars to the master of the banquet. Later the master proclaimed to the bridegroom, "What is going on here? Everybody else serves the good wine first!"

As the order of the wine was reversed at this wedding, so is the order of our lives as Christians. The best comes after we have made our choice to follow Jesus and have been blessed with the birth of the spirit and the marvelous realization that we are members of God's eternal kingdom. We have been bought by the price of Jesus' blood on a Roman cross some two thousand years ago. Oh, the wonderful glory of knowing that Jesus is our Savior! That He has forgiven us of our sins! That He is our eternal friend who promises us eternal life with Him! Can we really grasp what this means? This is what Jesus promised. We will enter heaven when life here ends. So truly the best is at the end of life's earthly journey.

Let us praise God forever for this everlasting truth.

Praise ye the Lord. Amen

Friday, March 7

Pete Rodrigues

³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God.

Turn, then, and live.

(Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32)

Repent and Live

Repent means to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin. This reminds me of when I was 19 years old and wrecked my car one night doing something I wasn't supposed to be doing. I was crushed spiritually and emotionally, and knew my parents would be very upset. The dust settled the next morning and we had a talk. I told them I knew what I did was wrong and that I was sorry. Later that day I already had plans to go somewhere, and they told me to take the old truck.

As I drove off, it felt weird—I felt like I shouldn't be driving, that I deserved more punishment. I realized, however, that my parents trusted me. Yes, they trusted me to do the right thing. WOW!

When we truly repent, our Heavenly Father trusts us to sin no more and invites us to experience freedom. This freedom comes from doing the right thing and from not getting hung up on our past mistakes.

Repent and live—live a life of hope, each and every new day, forgetting the sins of your past.

Prayer: Dear Lord, your grace and mercy are so abundant! Help us to stop, turn toward you, and receive all that you offer. Amen.

Saturday, March 8

Deborah Johnson

¹⁵But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

¹⁶Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Romans 5:12-19

I recently read a story about an 86-year-old woman, Joy Johnson, who was the oldest person to run in the November 2013 New York City Marathon. She finished in just under eight hours. This was her 25th NYC Marathon. In an interview before the race, she commented, "I'll be at the back of the pack, but I don't mind...I just praise the Lord I can get out of bed each morning and run. A lot of people my age are in wheelchairs."

Unfortunately, she fell and hit her head at the 20th mile but refused medical treatment, got up and continued on to finish the race! The next day, as she had done in the past after running the marathon, she went to see Al Roker on the *Today* show in the Rockefeller

Plaza. With her head bandaged on one side, she made a comment that it looked worse than it was. Later that afternoon, Joy told her sister that she was tired and went back to her hotel for a nap. Joy never woke up. Joy's daughter said that her mom told her that she wanted to die running. "That's the way she wanted to go".

I am totally inspired by Joy Johnson's legacy. This one person inspires me to get out there and exercise every day.

One person can definitely have a big impact on our lives. The Romans passage reminds me that one perfect man—Jesus—came to save all of us! In the beginning, Adam, one man, brought sin into the world by disobeying God—but God sent Jesus to give life to all who accept His abundant grace.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending your perfect Son to take all of our sins upon himself. We praise you! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Monday, March 10

Ed Maxa

⁴...I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,

⁵we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶We have not listened to your servants the prophets..." Daniel 9:3-10

Lent is an opportunity to take stock of where I am in my walk with Christ. Pastor Leo's message on February 16 smacked me right between the eyes, and the Sunday school lesson on James 2 that same day was a gut check. I stand convicted. I have sinned and done wrong. I have been wicked and rebelled. I have turned away from his commands and laws. I have not listened to the prophets.

Why has this happened? It's just Ed being Ed. I choose to not do daily devotionals. I choose to not read my Bible. I let myself get angry over unimportant things. I have not been bringing others to Christ. The only thing I have done right is to say "Better than I deserve" when people ask how I am. This is where I am but not where I will stay. I do not want my last closeness to Christ or act of discipleship to be two years ago or even two weeks ago. I want people to see my faith through my works, I want a dynamic relationship with Christ that will make a difference for others, and I am not going to wait for the Lenten season to begin. Our God is an awesome God and He is big enough.

Oh God, I pray that you will come into my life and into the lives of others who can relate to where I am. Join us Lord, right here, right now, and take control of our lives. Let it be what you would make it. Amen

Tuesday, March 11

Craig Clapsaddle

Amazing Statement of Faith

Habakkuk 3:1-19 (NIV)

Hidden amongst all the "minor" prophets we find three chapters written by Habakkuk. He was complaining about his and his people's woes, when God gave him a vision. The vision was of a savior coming back to dispense judgment and punishment. Reading Habakkuk I realized that I was unaware of the end-of-days prophesy found in these chapters of the Old Testament.

As I meditated and studied on this scripture to find its meaning, I was pulled to an amazing statement of faith uttered by Habakkuk. Focusing on verses 16-19 we find: "I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet, I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."

Wow, what a testimony, and what an attitude to take when things are bad! Although I've never literally had a failed olive crop, or had no sheep for wool and food, or had no steer for meat, the feelings of defeat, despair, and hopelessness evidenced by Habakkuk have happened many times in my life and most likely yours too. I must admit that I don't always maintain Habakkuk's attitude that God supplies what I need to get through these troubling times. That is when I turn to my small group Christian friends, my spouse, and my Bible for prayer and for support. Eventually, I am reminded that God came to us through Jesus Christ to save us from our sinfulness, and Christ promised to return again to bring perpetual peace, love, and joy to all believers.

Pray with me: God, thank you for loving me, an unworthy sinner. Thank you for offering me the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Help me to be like Habakkuk—praising and rejoicing in you at all times but especially in times of defeat, despair, and hopelessness. Amen.

Wednesday, March 12

Kevin Nelson

Even the wise die!

¹⁰For he sees that even the wise die: the fool and the stupid alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Psalm 49

I recently lost a friend and co-worker. Danny died from a heart condition due to complications of diabetes. It was wonderful to sit through the funeral and witness the impact that Danny had on his family and community. The church was packed. The Pastor brought a wonderful message in which he did not hold anything back. He started out by saying, "Everyone in the room is going to die!"

It is always a kick in the reality when we lose a friend or loved one. It is a moment in time that forces us to reflect. Am I ready? Am I where I need to be in my relationship with Christ? Are others able to see Christ in my life, in how I deal with my family, friends, co-workers, strangers? As we take time to reflect this Easter season I hope that you will read all of the Psalm 49. None of us is immune to the inevitable. Even the wise will die! I say this not to upset anyone but to encourage you to embrace each day. Tell your loved ones that you love them every day. Evaluate how you are going to use your time and your possessions. We can't take it with us so we must prayerfully consider how Christ would have us use it.

Lord, my prayer this Easter season is that you will use me to influence others to know you, and to help them realize that even though everyone will die an earthly death, we can have eternal life with you in heaven. Amen.

Thursday, March 13

Phillip Reynolds

⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:1-12

The Bible is full of stories of Jesus' compassion, forgiveness, and ability to heal the sick and even raise the dead. This story is nothing short of miraculous, yet we sometimes allow the miracles and blessing to blend together into one long parable without thinking much about the specific details. When I first read this passage out of the list that was provided to me, I must admit that I read it but nothing stood out to me. In fact, I actually meant to choose another verse but accidentally said I would use this one. After I realized my mistake, I went back and read it again and something stood out to me that I hadn't thought about before. The paralyzed man was actually blessed even before Jesus forgave and healed the man. The man was blessed because there were four men, who are not identified as being related to the man, who had the conviction of faith to go to extraordinary lengths to bring the man before Jesus. By today's standards, that's a miracle in its own right.

I wonder whether most of us could identify four people, unrelated to us, who have that much faith, not to mention patience and resourcefulness, to go to the lengths the four men in Mark went to for the paralyzed man. How many of us would be one of the four for someone else? I would like to think I would, but I admit that I can't say for sure. I often let my own life and fear of letting someone down (no pun intended) get in the way of serving others as we have been called to do.

Sometimes we're the one laying on the mat in need of others to bring us to Jesus either for the first time, or guiding us back to him after straying away. Sometimes we're called to be one of the four being asked to overcome whatever obstacles are in our way to gently lower someone before Jesus. Whether we realize it or not, we've likely been in both positions and both are a test and a testament to what Jesus asks of us—to bring all things before Him, and answer His calling to serve others in His name.

Dear Lord, whether we find ourselves paralyzed and in need of your healing hand, or whether we find ourselves being called by You to be one of the hands gently helping to bring someone in need before You, I pray that we have the faith to seek you in all things. Please bless us with others who are willing to carry us to You in our time of need, and please help us to answer Your call to do the carrying for others in need. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Friday, March 14

Dianne Austin

A “New” Song

³He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Psalm 40

The Psalmist tells us how he trusted in God, how he waited patiently for the Lord. The Lord saved him and he was rewarded by having God place a new song in his mouth.

As I read Psalm 40, I pondered about this “new song”. I wondered what it might have sounded like. Was it actually a hymn set to music? Was it a new feeling within his heart brought on by his thankfulness? He goes on to say that he “speaks” of God’s faithfulness and salvation. He says he cannot conceal God’s love and truth. His “new” song simply had to be sung!

Lent is traditionally a time for all Christians to focus on repentance. With true repentance comes forgiveness and renewal. Every time I kneel to pray after receiving Holy Communion, I always pray the verse from Psalm 51 – “Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” I understand, and am thankful for, the renewal found in forgiveness.

But Psalm 40 reminded me that I can do more than just be silently thankful. I need to “sing” of God’s faithful renewal in my life. He has given me my salvation and the renewal of forgiveness of sins each and every day. As I enter into this most holy period of the Christian year, I am asking God to put a “new” song in my mouth. I want this song to be one of praise and thanksgiving for all of the wonders he has done and all the things he has planned for me – which according to Psalm 40 are simply too many to declare!

During Lent, I pray God will show me and all of Millbrook Church new ways to “sing” for Him. On Easter Sunday morning may we all feel renewed and ready to “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise and give thanks to him and praise his name! For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” (Psalm 100)

Our Prayer: Lord, thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for your never-ending love. And thank you for our “new” song! Amen.

Saturday, March 15

Ann Ashburn

Psalm 121

Psalm 121 is subtitled “A Song of Ascents.” It is believed to be one of the songs that pilgrims sang while traveling the road ascending to Jerusalem. These faithful travelers would have been walking to Jerusalem to observe one of the holy feasts. The psalm is meant to be sung or recited responsively, with one group answering another group as they traveled. The words of the Psalm are very familiar.

Verse 1: I lift mine eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

In 2014, we do not spend days traveling to celebrate the seasons of the church. We do however travel through life, metaphorically. Each day is a journey. Just as the pilgrims of the Psalm looked for help and guidance on their journey, we too need a source of strength and help as we travel through life. From where does your help come?

Verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 121 assure us that God will guide our steps and keep us steady as we climb. It also states that our God never sleeps, but is with us constantly. These statements are comforting, especially during the times of our lives when the journey is difficult and the road rough. Our help in times of trial, grief, loss, sadness or confusion can be found in the one true God who made us all.

Verses 5 and 6 tell us that God is providing shade for us as we travel. He is a source of comfort and rest as we climb through life. Verse 8 ends the Psalm with the assurance that God keeps our travel in His hands not just today, but forevermore. Thanks be to God that we are never alone on our life journey!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for being our constant companion and our source of strength and comfort as we travel through life. Help us to echo our understanding of your faithfulness to others as we travel. Amen

Monday, March 17

Nancy Dickson

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! ... Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies...

Psalm 8:1-2

Have you ever cried like a little girl? I have heard my daughters cry when they were small. And I have heard my granddaughter cry. They cry with their whole bodies! Their mouths open wide, their fists tremble, they hold nothing back! You cannot help but hear them!

Have you heard a little boy laugh? I have heard my son laugh when he was small. And I have heard my grandson laugh, and watched my infant grandson learning to laugh. They laugh with their whole bodies! They bubble, their faces light up, the sound permeates the air all around them!! You cannot help but laugh too!

Where am I going with this?

Through laughter and tears, children speak their innermost thoughts. They don't hold back. As a parent, our hearts fill with anguish, or overflow with joy, to hear them.

But oh, when they sing!!!! It's a melody so sweet, so genuine, that even if the tune is hard to recognize, we melt with love to hear the sounds! And we want to hear their songs, over and over.

How sweet is the sound of praise to God, sung by children! Note by note, the sincerity rings true.

There is a child still inside us, waiting to be set free! Unembarrassed, free from fear of judgment or criticism, wanting to sing praise to Him...and He longs to hear our joyful noises! So what are you waiting for?? Easter?

Make your joyful noise – sing, Child of God!!!!!!!

Dear Lord, help us to sing out Your praises, every day, in sunshine, in rain, in light, in darkness, always! Amen!

Tuesday, March 18

Lara Dick

So Joseph stored up grain in abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

Genesis 41:49

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread.

Genesis 41:53-54

As many of you know, our family is moving to Pennsylvania this summer. Change is on the horizon. As I have reflected and prayed over these verses over the past two weeks, I have come to realize that our time at Millbrook has been like Joseph storing up grain in Egypt. Since Jonathan and I got married ten years ago, Millbrook has provided us with a bounty of blessings that we have worked hard to store up. There are many aspects of our big move that are unknown. Where will we live? Will Jonathan be able to get a job? Will we be able to sell our house? In these times of uncertainty, because we have stored up and rested in God's blessings, I am confident that God will provide for us in our time of need.

In Pastor Heather's sermon the first weekend in March, she encouraged us to get off the mountain and step into the valley to confront the uncomfortable in the world around us. For us, moving is uncomfortable. We do not know exactly how God plans to use us or what our life will look like. Yet, we rest in the comfort that out of God's bounteous provisions for us, we can give back to God. It is out of gratitude for his continued blessings that we trust that God is in control and that like Joseph knew, God will provide.

Prayer: Father, encourage us to continue to store up your blessings, recognizing that it is out of your bounty that you provide for us in times of famine in our lives.

Wednesday, March 19

Molly Beck

¹*My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.*

²*He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

⁵*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.*

⁶*He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*

Psalm 62:1-2, 5-6 (NIV)

This powerful psalm of David was meant to be sung by the choir in worship. There is a note in the heading: “for the director of music.” When you read the whole psalm, you can recognize the parts to be sung by two choruses: the bad guys against the good guys (the God guys.)

Yet what stands out to me is the wavering of David’s faith from verse 1 to verse 5. Notice his strong claim in verse 1: “My soul finds rest in God alone.” In verse 5, he seems to beg for rest for his soul: “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone.”

I often feel that same wavering; I claim God’s love for myself and others one moment and plead for it the next. It is not God who changes in that instance; it’s me. God is always ready to give his children rest, peace, and comfort. But it is often hard for us humans to remember we are made in God’s image and God expects us to rely solely on his love, power, and provision. Even though David cried out to God many times: “how long, Lord, how long?” he always returned to claim the God who first claimed him.

God of power, God of love, encourage us to remember your promises as we reflect on Jesus’ journey toward the cross. May this time of self-examination allow us to walk more closely in the shadow of the one who gave his life for us. Amen.

Thursday, March 20

Natasha Handel

²⁰ *And these are the ones sown on the good soil:*

they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit,

thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.

Mark 4:1-20

This passage reminds me of relationships—relationships here on earth and with our heavenly father.

Some people are like the seeds that landed on the path. They walk into our lives but nothing develops. These are the people that we may pass at a store.

Other friends are like the seed in the rock. The friendship springs up quickly and it seems amazing, but it quickly begins to fade. For example, we may make a new friend while at a camp or retreat but once it is over and we are back home, the relationship dries up.

Other friendships are like the seed that landed in the thorns. They start off good and the relationship begins to grow roots until it reaches a major disagreement and cannot be resolved. The friendship may stay but it will not develop further.

However, the most precious friendships are similar to the seed that landed in the good soil. These friendships start off smoothly and begin to grow roots. When tough times arrive, the relationship does not die but grows closer. We learn that a strong relationship grows during the good times and the bad.

This is how our relationship with God is! We know that He is with us at all times, through thick and thin. We know that we can always turn to Him for help and guidance. He is our best friend!

Dear Lord, thank you for all the friendships that I have here on earth and for all the lessons I have learned from each one. Please lead me to many more friendships that will help me grow closer in my relationship with you. Amen.

Friday, March 21

Leo Reich

A Lamp on a Stand

²¹ *He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed?
Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"*

²² *For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed,
and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open..."*
Mark 4:21-34 (NIV)

Light is a powerful illustration of God's presence in our world. Jesus himself said that He was the light of the world. The scriptures declare that they are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psalms 119:105)

I once heard that new life and growth in our spiritual lives might be compared to walking on a dark street in the middle of the night when suddenly we are drawn to the light of a distant street lamp. Our walk with God begins when we see and choose to walk toward light. It's exciting in that for the first time we no longer have to stumble in the darkness; instead we have purpose and direction to our walk.

In addition, God said that the lamp is to be put on a lamp stand so that whatever is hidden might be exposed. God not only wants us to turn from the darkness of our sin and stop stumbling, but he also wants us to live in the light.

Living in the light is about being transformed daily into His image and character. The closer we get to the light, the more fully we see the beauty and meaning of the world around us. We also see the effects of brokenness that sin has had on our lives. We notice the dirty ragged clothing of sin we wear, and the worn-out shoes from walking in darkness.

We learn that God's desire is to expose our sinfulness not to judge us but to forgive us and to allow us to daily experience the wonder of His grace and the world he has created.

The "Good News" is that God delights in our coming near; for it is then that He can expose and strip away that brokenness. The light of His grace brings renewal, warmth, healing and wholeness.

I invite you to draw near each day to the light through prayer time and through reading His word. You need not fear the light for it is the light that keeps us from stumbling, it is the light that produces growth, it is the light that allows us to more fully see His loving plan for our lives.

Father, thank you for allowing the light of your saving and life-changing grace to reach us. Help us have the desire to seek you daily in prayer and through your word, allowing the illuminating and life-giving light to dwell within us. Amen.

Saturday, March 22

Helen Gallagher

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
through whom we have gained access by faith
into this grace in which we now stand.*
Romans 5:1-2

While contemplating this writing I first, of course, focused on the Scriptures. While doing so, some hymns popped into my head for some reason. Eventually I looked one up because it, in particular, was very persistent and was keeping me from what I felt I should focus on.

Interestingly, when I opened the hymn book it went right to *The Church's One Foundation*:

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is his new creation by water and the word.

From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;

With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

That tells the whole story. The believer's salvation lies in Christ's blood and in his resurrection, whereby we are forgiven and reconciled to God.

Prayer: Lord, remind us each day of your Son's sacrifice for us. We thank you for your forgiving nature and unconditional love. It is in Christ's name and in the presence of the Holy Spirit that we pray. Amen.

Monday, March 24

Heidi Muller

"Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and all that fills it resound. Let the fields and everything in them exult."

Psalm 92:11-12

Every summer, my family takes a 16-hour road trip up to Bailey Island, Maine, to visit my daddy's side of the family. This vacation is always the highlight of my summer, not only because I get to visit my family, but also because I love life on the island. Flowers are blooming and beautiful, the sun shines brightly, the ocean crashes upon the shore, and the fish jump and swim with exuberance. How wonderful it is to enjoy such a naturally beautiful place with my family! God has blessed all His children with a magnificent place to live, and it is good! "Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice" as we praise our mighty Lord and thank Him for the gorgeous masterpiece He has blessed us to live in (Psalm 96:11). "Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to Yahweh, praise His name" each and every time you stop to enjoy all He has blessed us with—in nature and in our families (Psalm 96:1-2).

Dear Lord of the earth, we are thanking you today for the blessing of this masterpiece that we live in. May we--like the earth You created--rejoice in Your holy, holy name, for it IS good! Amen, and amen!

Tuesday, March 25

Maggie Clark

I'm Hearing the Ring but Missing the Call

1 Peter 1:18 *".... You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors."*

1 Peter 1:20 *"He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."*

(1 Peter 1:13-25)

My cell phone rang. The sound came from the desk, but I couldn't find the phone there. It stopped. I dialed it from my land line. The sound still came from that desk. I searched the cabinets and even inside my address book. Hmmm. Could it possibly fit in the pencil holder? Nope. I searched the desk and cabinets again. (Isn't there a quote about trying the same thing the same way and getting the same wrong result?)

Staring like a deer in the headlights, I thought, "This just can't be." But there was nothing else on the desk! Nothing except the monitor gadget I had plugged in to charge. *The monitor!* The baby monitor! The phone was in the bedroom!

Sometimes God tries to give me a call, too. He wants to tell me something, and I want to hear what He has to say, but I'm missing it because I'm staying in the same place where I've always been. I'm hanging on to my anger or resentment or whatever, and making the same mistakes over and over again.

I have within me the ability to find the phone. In the Bible, Peter says that God has revealed himself for my sake. I have been redeemed from the empty way of life I have nourished for so long. It's time for me to think outside the box and open up that phone line and allow God to pour his living and enduring word into me.

Dear Father, forgive me for allowing my shortcomings to hurt myself and others. Whenever you try to speak to me, Father, help me to stop my "empty way of life" and to search and to find your words meant especially for me. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26

Tim Sawinska

Mission

¹² *So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.* (NRSV)

Read Mark 6:1-13

I recently watched an interview with Lee Ellis on CSPAN. Lee served in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War. At one point, his plane was shot down over North Vietnam and he was captured. He spent almost five and a half years as a prisoner of war, about the same length of time as U.S. Senator John McCain.

It was interesting to find out that the POWs had a simple three-word mission statement while being held. It was to "return with honor". It guided how they conducted themselves on a day-to-day basis.

In Mark 6:12, we see a three-word message that the disciples preached as they went out. "All should repent" could be thought of as a mission statement as well—to turn away from one's old ways, and to turn instead toward the ways of Christ.

After listening to Lee's interview, I thought about what my personal, three or four word, mission statement might be. I would encourage you to reflect on one for yourself.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all the faithful disciples that came before us. Help each of us to live out your mission of sharing your love with others. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 27

Pat Moore

Psalm 86

I have a head start on those of you who will be "Praying the Psalms" with Will on Wednesday nights at 1712 E Millbrook! Since receiving my Scripture options for the devotional, I have prayed Psalm 86 several times.

"Bend an ear, God; answer me. Keep me safe...Help your servant...I'm depending on you."

Where else could I turn for the help I've needed in learning to live my new normal? Securing my home so that I felt safe there was a big issue. After several discussions about what to do, my son-in-law installed special hinges and deadbolts for me. My physical self felt safe. I needed my spirit to be calm so that I could sleep. I have learned that there is peace and rest at the end of the day after thanking God for his blessings throughout that day.

"There's no one quite like you among the gods and nothing to compare with your works...God, you're the one, there's no other one but you."

In many ways throughout this year I have felt His presence—through the care of my family, a visit from a friend, from a much-needed hug. I will continue to pray with David:

Prayer: "Make a show of how much you love me...As you, God, gently and powerfully put me back on my feet." Amen.

Friday, March 28

Chris Story

^{22b} *I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.*

²³ *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.*

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

How difficult the task, Christianity. I quietly asked God to allow me to hear and see, and then I read, "For if I preach the gospel, I have no need for boasting because I am compelled to do this." Compelled, that is a strong word! That is a word that keeps people from their responsibility to teach the gospel, to follow humbly and completely in Christ. This reflection is such an undertaking. How does one make himself one with the Jew, one with those who are free from the law and, more to the point, one with their Christian family?

Preaching the Gospel is the scariest thing I can think of doing, because who am I to preach to anyone? Yet here in 1 Corinthians I see just who I (we) are. We have an obligation as Christians to make ourselves one with everyone else in order to share the gospel with them. It is our mission, Christ's mission for us. The reward—we get to participate forever.

Step One: "Good morning! I am glad you're here today."

Prayer: Father, quiet our minds, embolden our hearts so that your compulsion becomes ours as well. Amen.

Saturday, March 29

Ann Petty

^{7b} *"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (NIV)*

1 Samuel 16:1-13

When I was asked to write a message for the Lenten devotional, I knew that this was something that was not in my comfort zone. I felt very humbled to be asked but was also not very sure about doing this. I prayed and thought and prayed and thought and decided it was time to come out of my safe comfortable zone and do this.

This passage is about Samuel who also had to come out of his comfort zone. He was asked (or rather told) by God to go to Jesse of Bethlehem to choose one of his sons to be the new king.

He had been directed by the Lord to fill his horn with oil and go. Samuel was afraid that Saul would kill him. Yet God was with Samuel every step of the way and told him which son to choose. David was chosen and then anointed by Samuel. He now had the Spirit of the Lord within him. God knew David's heart.

God does not look at the outward appearance—he looks inside us—at our hearts. He knows us and the kind of people that we are. What a blessing to have the reassurance that God does know our heart. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all looked inward and not outward, and did not judge people so quickly based upon first impressions? We spend too much time on the outward appearance and not enough on what is really important—our real character and having a heart like CHRIST.

Let us all spend more time studying God's word and learning more about him and being more Christ-like.

Father God, please help us to have clean hearts like Christ. Help us not to be so quick to judge others by their outward appearance, but to get to know them and what is in their hearts. Our world would be a much better place. In your Son's holy name, Amen.

Monday, March 31

Jill Gooding

Our Treasure

²¹“Jesus looked at him and loved him.

“One thing you lack,” he said.

“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²At this time the man’s face fell.

He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

(Mark 10:17-31)

While shopping around one weekend in the home goods section of a local store, I came across some Wall Art designed simply with WORDS. There were words of inspiration in all types of fonts and colors—art designed to hang on the wall and boldly reflect family values, or to display family rules or favorite activities. I photographed one that I particularly liked and used it as my iPhone wallpaper. A few weeks later, my daughter-in-law mentioned having seen the exact same Word Picture and told me how much she liked it. Aha! The perfect birthday gift! So, I bought her the red and white picture that simply said:

LIFE IS NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE, IT IS ABOUT WHO YOU ARE.

In wanting to provide a good life for ourselves and our families, how easy it is to work for and become attached to our possessions, just as the rich man! How easy it is for us to hold onto our things: our money, our gifts and our talents. How easy it is to be distracted by all that we have worked so hard to possess. How difficult it is to let go, set aside, sell, share and give. How easy it is to turn away from fully committing and giving it all to God’s Glory, with nothing more important than Him.

That simple little wall art phrase speaks to me louder than before. Who am I? Am I willing to give away my earthly treasure and follow Jesus, or will I turn away?

Dear Lord, help me to recognize the wealth with which I have been blessed. Help me to give it away so that it brings me closer to You and does not stand as a barrier between us. Amen.

Tuesday, April 1

Nelle Schantz

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!

1 Chronicles 16:11

My father had suffered from dementia for several years. It began with a forgetful thought here and there and culminated, after two very difficult years, in Dad sitting quietly in bed with his eyes closed, speaking to no one and occasionally taking a sip of water. It was in those last few weeks that my Bible study group decided to read C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. I bought the book on my way to see Dad one night. He hadn’t opened his eyes or spoken to anyone in several days—I thought reading to him would be a good way to spend my time with him.

As I finished Chapter 2, I said to Dad, “Do you want me to keep reading?” He mumbled something I couldn’t understand...the first thing I had heard from him since he had taken a downward turn. I responded, “What did you say?” And very loudly, very clearly, he said “Keep reading.” So I did. It was the last thing he said to me before he died.

A few days later while preparing for Dad’s funeral, someone asked my brother which people influenced Dad throughout his life. My brother relayed a story I had never heard. He said Dad had shared with him that while in college a professor had introduced him to the writings of C. S. Lewis and given him a book that had really influenced his perspective on life and on being a Christian. That book? *Mere Christianity*.

What a wonderful gift to me from both of my fathers—an example of someone who sought God continually, someone who sought God his whole life—even at the end when all else was unrecognizable and unclear. It inspires me now to challenge myself with the question: What can I do today to seek God’s strength?

Prayer: Dear Father, I am thankful for the strength and comfort of knowing you are always there. Please give me the direction and the guidance to seek you continually. Help me make decisions and choices in your name. Help me be the Christian I am supposed to be. Amen.

Wednesday, April 2

Janice Lautier

Remembering the Past and Hoping for the Present

Read Psalm 126

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy"

Psalm 126:3

The story of the Israelites is a repetitive one. It's a story of turning away from God and turning back to God, of suffering and of rejoicing. We find both themes in today's psalm. In the first half, the Israelites remember what it was like to return from captivity, full of joy. In the second half, they pray for restoration of past fortunes.

"Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev." These desert streams are dry much of the year, but are rushing with water when the rains come. I grew up in a part of the country that is much drier than here, so I am well acquainted with these seasonal creeks and arroyos. In fact, in one area I know of, there is a "Dry Creek" and an "Arroyo Seco" within a half mile of each other, two dry streambeds in two languages. When the rains come, the banks cannot contain the water which brings new life to the parched region. Lent has always been a desiccated and difficult time of the year for me. I feel that life is somehow sucked out of my soul. We all go through times of trial, suffering, or captivity in our lives. It is good to remember the times of rejoicing and release we've felt when they are over. Likewise, I look forward to Easter. It is a joyful day full of hope as we celebrate Christ's victory over death, and freedom over captivity to sin.

Thought for the day: What holds you captive? Where do you find hope?

Prayer: Father, when the struggles of life pull me down, help me to remember what You have done in the past in my life and what I have witnessed in others. Amen.

Prayer Focus: Someone needing hope.

Thursday, April 3

Raynor Dail

You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body": apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, uni-dimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (The Message)

Like the verse says, God's church is one body. We are one person. We work together, support each other, love each other, and more. This is what God wants us to be like. He wants us to have people we can share our faith with. People have different gifts. Like the verse says, there are apostles, prophets, teachers, and more. People in the church don't all have the same gifts. Each person has a job that God has intended for them. God did not plan for people to try and fight over these jobs. God wants His children to feel like they have a place in the church. One might have to try many different positions until he finds the one he was meant to have, but this may be what God intends for us. He wants the church to have different limbs. He depends on the different jobs to point out things that others might have missed. God depends on us to point Him out to those who have not found Him yet. There is a purpose for all the parts in the church, and he does not want us to rival each other. God needs us to work together, not apart.

Dear God, thank you for the church and everyone in it. Thank you for sending others to help us spread the word about you. We pray that we will not argue, fight, or compete with each other but instead work together. We ask you to help us find our gift in the church so that we can use it to help share your love. We thank you for everything you give us, and ask you to help us grow in our faith. We love you, God. Amen.

Friday, April 4

Mark Edmondson

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

When she recently passed away, not too many of us personally knew Mrs. Dorothy “Dot” Stanley. Some of us were privileged to know the daughter and three sons that she raised. Many of us know the fine and godly son named Bruce (who was bound to be her favorite). One thing known for sure is that the verse above was a favorite of hers. When Dot died, that verse was in her pocket. Based on what we know about her life and her children’s lives, we can tell that verse was also in her heart.

Reading the passage in context, we learn that the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the church in Corinth to address disturbing things his fellow apostles told him. Divisions were reported to be growing in the church and some members were returning to the pagan ways they practiced before becoming disciples of Christ. Sound familiar?

Paul spent most of the letter admonishing the church in Corinth for tolerating conditions not conducive to Christian living. He was on them pretty hard. In today’s don’t-dare-offend-anyone-for-any-reason society, the letter probably would not have played well. But if we take time to read the letter all the way through and let it sink in, we get the real message. Paul wants the church to remember and practice Jesus’ teaching – to understand the nature of his love.

In Romans Chapter 3, Paul says that we all fall short of the glory of God and that we all need Christ. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul gives us God’s instruction on how to treat one another given these shared shortcomings. By loving our fellow sinners as Christ did—and teaching this to our children like Mrs. Dot did—we can become the Church He wants us to be. So let us all be patient, kind, humble and not envious. And when we are not, help us to remember why Jesus died—to give us a chance for a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Thanks and praise to you, oh God, for the redemption opportunity your Son’s death and resurrection gave us after the sin and indignities committed against You. Be with us during Lent as we seek to understand more deeply what it means to follow Christ. Amen.

Saturday, April 5

Lynn Carey

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,
More than watchmen wait for the morning.*

*O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for the Lord is unfailing love
And with Him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

Psalm 130:5-8

To the depths of his soul, the psalmist waits for the Lord and puts his hope in Him—not in others or in possessions or other worldly things. He knows that only God is worthy of his hope because He is ever-faithful and ever-loving, the only one who can redeem him. He compares his faith in the Lord to watchmen waiting for the morning.

Imagine you are guarding the gates of a city. You must be vigilant during your watch, never letting your attention waver. Only when the sun comes up can you cease your labors. The psalmist says he waits with even more attention. He invites Israel to follow his example, putting their hope in the Lord, too.

As I read and meditated on this psalm, I tried to examine my own life. How vigilant am I? How strong is my hope in His redemption? To me, Lent is an opportunity to reflect on the times I have fallen short of the mark. The aim is not to punish myself for these transgressions. God knows I am not perfect; He wants me to aim toward that goal. I confess to Him, ask for His forgiveness, and renew my efforts to live more faithfully to His desires for me. Are there more productive ways to use my time in His service? Thankfully, at Millbrook we have an abundance of opportunities to be of service—MUMs Kitchen, MERC, using our musical talents, visiting the sick and homebound, youth ministries, etc. We can continue to reach out to the community at large, engage in Bible study, fast, renounce old behaviors. In these 40 days of self-examination, prayer and re-commitment, we can renew our hope in the Lord.

Lord, please guide me to see where I have sinned and how I may better serve You. Help me continue to hope in Your salvation and to wait for Your coming with patience and perseverance. Amen.

Monday, April 7

Josh Orndorff

⁵ ...“so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,
and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

Exodus 3:16 - 4:12

“Trust and obey for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.” This is one of my favorite hymns, but it’s difficult to always trust and obey when we don’t know the way. I think God sometimes gives us directions to obey just like the directions we receive from our GPS. When you use a GPS, it only gives you one step of the directions at a time. We could not handle receiving every turn at once. We are given the next step when we obey.

Moses doubted that God could use him so God simply directs him to be obedient, one step at a time. “Throw that staff on the ground.” God turns it into a snake. “Pick it up by the tail.” It becomes a staff again in Moses’ hand. “This is so they may believe the Lord has appeared to you.” We see God giving Moses simple directions that he continues to obey. His obedience eventually leads him to God’s full plan to free the Israelites from slavery. Each act of obedience allows God to use Moses to fulfill God’s greater purposes.

God is calling us to be obedient in the simple things because God sees the bigger picture for your life and for Millbrook UMC. What is the next step that God is directing you and our church to obey? Each act of obedience shows our trust, and God will continue to lead us as we “trust and obey.”

Prayer: Holy God, please help us to trust in you. You have a vision for us, your people, and we desire to be obedient so we can see your kingdom come. Guide us and direct us through your Spirit. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, April 8

Janny Flynt

³⁷ Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

(Mark 9:30-41)

I often reflect on these words when I hear the pitter patter of little feet, the rustling of paper and the whispers of children during worship. Over the years this has often been the sounds of my own daughters. Now I breathe a sigh of relief, smile and enjoy the moment because it is NOT my child.

In our Faith Finders Sunday School class, we are doing a study called *Give Up Something Bad for Lent* by James W. Moore. This past week the study included reflection on how Jesus fed the 5000. The focus was that “Jesus NEVER looked on needy human beings as a nuisance. Instead, out of deep compassion, he rearranged his plans and worked with these interruptions constantly and meaningfully.... He chose to cope rather than run; He used available resources; He turned the problem into an opportunity.”

To me, it began to harmonize that we are ALL children of God—that our little ones, our tweens, teens, young adults, the middle-aged and elderly are ALL included in this verse. We are and forever will be children of God. No matter our circumstance, we are called by Jesus to live into love and compassion for everyone.

Jesus has modeled how we should manage the challenges we face. Pastor Heather preached recently that change can be uncomfortable. As we continue to reach out to the community, we continue to face ongoing challenges. These challenges should be looked upon as OPPORTUNITIES to live into the love that Jesus taught us.

Work groups go through cycles (Bruce W. Tuckman calls them forming, storming, norming and performing) when the group dynamics shift with new additions or challenges. I think this is also true in our Church. Forming occurs with additions and demographic shifts. Storming represents the challenges that come with the changes as we grow (such as overflowing nursery and children’s programs) and develop a new normal to perform in service and mission.

This is not about holding onto the old normal, it is about sharing God’s love and embracing the new normal as the way to spread the word and to grow disciples. Let’s join together to take a bold step to accept the challenge and reach out to share God’s love.

Dear Lord, I ask you to guide and lead me to live into your will. I want to serve you and be led by you. Teach me how to love as you have commanded. Give me the capacity to step beyond my comfort zone and into the community. Amen

Wednesday, April 9

Judy White

My Help Comes from the Lord

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil: he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121)

North Carolina has many wonderful and beautiful places to visit. One of my favorite places is Lake Junaluska, owned and operated by the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church. Lake Junaluska is located near Waynesville in the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The last time I was there was last June while attending the annual conference of the Western N.C. Conference, and I did the same thing on that visit to

Junaluska as I've always done; I made my way to the cross that sits on a knoll overlooking the lake.

Sitting at the foot of the Junaluska cross, I invariably find myself in awe of my surroundings. As I sit there I am reminded of God's grace and that God's love for me never wavers, no matter how many times I disappoint God by my thoughts, words, and deeds. Looking out across the lake my eyes drift upward to gaze at the mountains in the distance and the first words of Psalm 121 ring through my head – "*I lift my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?*"

It's not definitive as to who wrote this psalm but one thing is certain - the psalmist had assurance and hope that God would be with him no matter where his life took him. Each of us is on a journey, and this journey will lead us through times of joy and happiness as well as times of uncertainty and distress, but the good news is that God is always with us. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us of this truth – "*I will never leave you or forsake you.*" On many of those occasions while sitting at the foot of the Lake Junaluska cross, I have found myself remembering those situations in my life that were good and those that weren't so good. But in doing so, I have found myself rejoicing for regardless where life has led me, I can look to God with the same assurance and hope as the psalmist, knowing that "*My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*"

Prayer: Most gracious and loving God, thank you for your continuous love for us and for your promise of always being with us no matter where our journey in life takes us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Thursday, April 10

Ebbie Hoffman

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

¹⁴ "But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume."

(New Living Translation)

Each year, a week before Easter, I sit in a congregation of smiling faces as we watch the children march down the aisle in a happy procession, waving palms and singing. It is Palm Sunday, and we sing "Hosanna!" Next week, we will sing even louder... "Up from the grave he arose!" We are the followers of Jesus, and we are part of a triumphal gathering, a triumphal procession.

But wait...it's not that simple, is it? Looking back on the first "Palm Sunday," the people were much like us. They celebrated Jesus. They believed that he could be their superhero. They waved palms and lined the streets in a triumphal procession. And then, they abandoned him.

We are the same. We celebrate, we praise, and then we often go out into the world and pretend like we don't know him at all. We are called to "spread the knowledge of Christ like sweet perfume," but we fail to apply the fragrance before leaving the house. After all...not everyone likes perfume, right?

Here is the good news. Like Peter, who denied Jesus three times after He was arrested, we always have another chance to jump back into the procession. God doesn't play by a one, two, or even "three strikes and you're out" rulebook. In fact, 2 Corinthians 3:6 says that "the old covenant ends in death, but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life." That means that I might stumble; I might fall; but I can still breathe in the life-giving Spirit that puts me right back into the procession to spread the good news of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be part of the procession to spread the good news of Jesus well beyond Easter. And when I fail, help me to respond...not with a spirit of defeat, but with your life-giving Spirit that puts me right back in the triumphal procession. Show me who needs to hear your good news today and help me to share it, like sweet perfume. Amen.

Friday, April 11
Karen Wallace

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian...
(Exodus 2:23 – 3:15)

The infant Moses was plucked from the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her son in the palaces of Egypt. He lived a privileged life, lacking nothing. Yet years later we find him—in this familiar story of the burning bush—living in the Sinai and tending his father-in-law's sheep, a fugitive from the Egyptian authorities. What a comedown!

I wonder if Moses ever regretted his loss in status, or used those solitary days and nights with the sheep to contemplate his existence. Was this to be "it" from now on? Have you had similar thoughts? I know I sometimes question whether I am living the life that God intended for me.

A friend once pointed out to me that when God needed someone to lead his people out of Egypt, through the Sinai peninsula and on into the Promised Land, who was better qualified than Moses? He knew the location of every watering hole and of every blade of grass fit for grazing sheep—because of the time he spent "keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro". Those apparently aimless years provided crucial training for what God intended next.

So now whenever I review my life and question whether I am aligned with God's plan for me, I also consider whether this might be MY time to "tend sheep in the Sinai". Could this be a time of preparation for what is to come next? If so, I must try to make the most of it, honing my skills and learning whatever I can. I want to be ready and well prepared when God calls. I know you do, too.

And while I tend sheep, I try to remain vigilant, just as Moses did—I don't want to miss that glimpse of a burning bush!

Heavenly Father, I know you have a plan for me and for my life. I confess, though, that I grow anxious during the times when I seem to be tending sheep rather than doing meaningful work on your behalf. Strengthen and encourage me during those times, Lord, I pray, so that I am ready when you call. Amen.

Saturday, April 12
Andy Reagan

⁴⁵ "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many."

Read Mark 10:32-52

I have seen with my own eyes the power of God to heal the sick and comfort those in need. As a nurse I have had the privilege to be allowed into the lives of my patients in hard times and to provide care not only to them but to their families—a warm blanket, a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on—giving them whatever they need to get through their darkness.

I looked at it for a long time as just doing my job but realized it's not my job. It's my duty as a follower of Christ to be a servant and helper. I realized that I have a special opportunity to let my faith lead the way to provide to a large number of people. I just have to let Christ open my eyes and heart.

Jesus came to serve and then gave his life for us so that we might live eternally. He has given us, as Christians, what we need to get through the darkness. We just have to have the faith to allow it and the drive to show it. As Jesus told the blind man, "Your faith has saved and healed you."

Dear Lord, allow us to serve each other with open hearts so we may feel closer to you. Let our faith heal and guide us through those difficult times knowing your love is all around, leading to better days. Amen.

Monday, April 14
Jonathan Dick

*For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. **Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong. Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.***

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:2-9

By many accounts, I am a successful teacher and coach – a really useful engine in our society, as Thomas would say. Much of this is due to me having a very narrow focus on the task at hand – I think back to advice I was given as a teenager that I have taken to heart – “Be Where You Are!” When I get into a box, I am all in – don’t bother asking me to remember or focus on anything non-track-related while at practice; during second period, don’t ask me to think about anything for third period, and Heaven Forbid anything not work-related occurring during work hours. And slowly but surely, this phrase of Being Where I Am morphs into “It is All About Where You Are!” Until one morning you read, “*even on his bed he plots evil*” in the morning and you know that when you awoke and lay there earlier that morning, your thoughts were so self-centered. My day, me, me, me.

But your Love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. If I can take a step outside of myself, I start to see your big and beautiful vision for the world. In the December 2012 edition, *National Geographic* had a picture of climbers on the Giant Sequoia “The President” – the largest by volume (and one of the oldest) trees in the world. This picture now hangs in front of my desk at work in the hope that I am able to re-calibrate my stress with the reminder of my smallness and my low position. You are nothing, O Sinner, get your head up, look around, understand once again that only when you are tethered to Him does your worth have meaning, for our usefulness and success is a function defined solely with respect to You. And only with Your Light, can we See Light, but also only with Your light, can we be light.



Dear Father of the Heavenly Lights: Thank you for your enduring and limitless faithfulness. You pay us attention and shower us with your love even though we couple our insignificance with constant self-centeredness. Give us your eyes so that your vision will be our thoughts as soon as we awake; give us your mouth so that only your drink tastes sweet; and give us your stomach so that what you provide is the feast of abundance. In your name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, April 15
Pam Kallam

¹⁰ *This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.”* ¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* ¹² *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.* ¹³ *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* ¹⁴ *I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”*
(Jeremiah 29:10-14)

In Adam Hamilton's book "Why", he tells us that it is not the nature of a loving God to bring harm to innocent people. Yet, as humans, we may suffer as a result of our own choices or as the result of the choices or actions of others. The plans and dreams we held are stripped away. We feel God has forsaken us. Where is our hope?

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed "My Father, if it is possible, may the cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Later, Jesus cried out on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As we strive to understand the depth of Jesus' love and suffering for us, in Him, we have our Savior, the Son of God, who can identify with our pain and suffering.

Sometimes we cry out to God, feeling forsaken by Him. We wonder where He is in the midst of our trials and suffering. It seems to be the human condition that at some point in our lives we will suffer. Yet Jeremiah declares our Lord has plans to prosper, not harm, us. Even as many found themselves in Babylon because of their sins of idolatry and rebellion against God, He loved them too much to want to leave them there. His desire is to give us a hope and a future! However, action is required on our part. Verses 12-13 tell us to call upon the Lord. When we seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him. He will bring us back from captivity.

Prayer:

Father, God, in times of trial, help us trust in the gracious promise You brought to us through your prophet Jeremiah: when we earnestly call upon You, we will find You. In You we find freedom from whatever binds us or holds us captive. In You, we have hope and a future. Amen.

Wednesday, April 16
Fred Gossert

¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*
² *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
³ *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

I have never been very good at running. I can remember my Little League coach taking me to the side during a Saturday morning practice and teaching me how to run faster to first base. I just couldn't run very fast. I marvel as I watch the sprinters during the Olympics. I can't help but notice that they are not "weighed down" as they run the race before them. They wear no socks, no long pants, no long-sleeved shirts. They get rid of everything that could weigh them down.

We need to do the same with the race that God has placed before us. We need to get rid of the things that weigh us down. Can you think of some things that weigh you down? What are they? I am sure some of these things are sins, but some of the things that weigh us down are not necessarily bad things but could be good things that keep us from running as we should.

I have a suggestion during this Lenten season to help us get rid of our baggage. We have to focus on Jesus. He is our great example. In the verses above, it speaks of the joy that was set before him as he endured the cross. He experienced the shame and suffering, and is seated at the right hand of God. How do you think Jesus did it? He was focused on the finish line—the joy of being at the right hand of God!

Anybody up for a race?

Heavenly Father, as we run this race that you have set before us, help us to get rid of those things that weigh us down and teach us to focus on the example you sent for us to follow. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, April 17
Will McLeane

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel on his waist."
John 13:3-4a

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
John 13:6

Peter's urgent question to Jesus powerfully brings a memory to my mind. When I was a junior in my youth group, I had the opportunity to go on a mission trip to Mexico. The leader of the trip was a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ whom I greatly looked up to and admired. On the last night, we all gathered together in a circle on the grass and prayed for all the people we worked with throughout our two weeks. After praying, Joe left the group and returned with a basin of water and a towel. He proceeded to wash the grass-stained and stinky feet of all fifty-five of the youth missionaries. When he came to me, I was horrified. You, wash my feet? No! I should be washing your feet! Just as Jesus told Peter, there was something I needed to learn that night.

When we read this passage, we have an intimate encounter with God. The Creator who made the sun and the stars, the mountains and seas, and you and me, fully reveals the purpose of his power. Standing with all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus grabs a towel and washes the feet of his disciples. Peter is rightly startled. Jesus is their "teacher" and "Lord." He should be washing Jesus' feet! However, Jesus redefines what it means to be "Lord," exercising his lordship through taking on the role of a servant and washing the dirt off his disciples' feet.

Jesus also invites us into the ministry of foot washing. He calls us to do as he has done, and to step down from the high and lofty places so that we might become foot washers. In doing so, he promises us that "all the world" will know that we are his. He promises us that our love for one another will be the defining mark of our discipleship.

Gracious God, as we journey with you to the Cross this week, let us never forget that we worship the Lord who washes feet. By the power of your Spirit, give us the courageous humility to wash one another's feet so that the world might witness your great love for it. Amen.

Good Friday, April 18
Sandra Hux

Saturday, April 19
Leigh Ballance

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

John 18:1 – John 19:42

I've read the scriptures of the Passion Story many times and have often wondered what became of the servant whose ear was severed by Peter when Judas and the temple guards came for Jesus in the garden. Historical writings say that Malchus was a servant and possibly even a relative to Caiaphas, and that the high priest had sent him with the Roman soldiers to capture Jesus. As a servant, Malchus was just an ordinary man doing his job when he came face-to-face with God.

A stunned Malchus surely felt the blow of Peter's sword, felt the moist warmth of his own blood spill down his neck, and felt the immediate pain and fear of losing his ear. But in that same instance, he would have also experienced the healing touch of Jesus—an act that would have caused Malchus to meet Jesus face-to-face and look into the compassionate, loving eyes of the Great Physician. After such an encounter, could Malchus ever have been the same? Could we?

So often we move through our daily routines and experience a loss or a cutting off of a part of ourselves. We suffer the hurt and the fear of living in "the world" but, like Malchus, we too can be touched by the healing hand of Christ. All we need do is meet our Savior face-to-face, look into his eyes, and ask for his healing touch.

The Bible does not tell us what became of Malchus but historians surmise that he became a believer, that he followed Christ from the garden to the cross and that he was a witness to the trial and crucifixion. Did Malchus look up at Jesus as he hung on the cross, touch his healed ear, hear again the words of the Great Physician, and Believe? Do we?

When I entered the garden, I could not hear
The voice of God anywhere
But a loving touch healed my fear
Then His voice was everywhere
And from the cross, sounds loud and clear
"I want your all - but first your ear"

Prayer: Holy Jesus, please meet me in your garden. I will be listening for your voice in the rustling of the leaves and the whistling of the breeze. Amen.

¹ *In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.*

² *Turn your ear to me; come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.*

³ *Since you are my rock and my fortress, For the sake of your name lead and guide me.*

⁴ *Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.*

¹⁵ *My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.*

¹⁶ *Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.*

(Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16)

The writer of Psalm 31 seems to be really stressed, and he wants God to come to his rescue. He's desperate (aren't we all in times of trouble?) You'll notice he uses words like deliver, rescue, and save to get God's attention, and all his requests for help are centered on him. He uses the words "me" or "my" twelve times in the first four verses and five times in verses 15 and 16. We all want God's help when we want it—and we want it now. Hey, I'm right there with the writer. I want a quick miracle. When I wake up in the middle of the night and I'm stressed over something or things aren't going my way in my businesses, my immediate thoughts are, "Help me, Lord Jesus, help me." Notice I used "me" twice in that short sentence. In times of trouble I'm very self-centered; I want the Lord to do something for me...now. It's all about me.

But a few weeks ago I discovered there's more to it than just crying out to Jesus for help. In Mark's stories of the feeding of the 4,000 and the 5,000, the disciples looked to Jesus to feed the large crowd that had gathered to listen to Him. The disciples thought feeding that large a crowd was too great a problem for them to solve, so they turned to Jesus. Are we any different today when we see a problem we believe is just too big for us to solve? We do what the disciples did: "Jesus, fix it." But Jesus turned it on them when he asked, "How many loaves do *you* have? *You* feed them." Whoa, you mean I have to get involved and get my hands dirty; I'm required to do something no matter how seemingly impossible the problem is confronting me?

I'm sure I'll continue to call out to Jesus when I get into trouble and need Him. But I'm finding there is more to it than just calling on Jesus to "fix it". While I know He's there with me, He will surely turn to me just as He did with his disciples and ask, "Ok, but what are *you* going to do about it?"

Prayer: Lord, thank you for allowing me to cry out to you at any time for anything. It is a comfort to know that you know my name and I know yours. Help me to be receptive when you turn to me and ask, "What are you going to do about it?" Amen.