here and there: … join brandon for the 10:00 AM sunday morning adult class. these classes are excellent textual and contextual introductions for the morning’s sermon each sunday. … our wednesday evening jesus class continues its great study of acts with kathy leading a discussion of acts 22 this wednesday evening, February 13th, 7:00-8:00 PM in the library. … also give thought in 2019 to joining in our readings in current affairs program. it’s a remarkable gathering of people who engage contemporary issues at a high level of discussion. the next session meets thursday evening, February 28th, 7:00-8:30 in community room I. for that evening’s topic see our “calendar of events.” for the whole program, see dale. … debbie pauls will be one of the panelists for UConn’s center for judaic studies and contemporary Jewish life’s panel on “traditional religion, progressive politics,” thursday, March 7th, 12:30-2:00 PM in room 129 at UConn in downtown Stamford. … please be looking for tax donation letters by email. if you need a hard copy, see sandy. … needed: two female and two male mentors for buddy/mentor. for more information, see Judy Hendrickson or Scott Johnson. … brandon and dale blog regularly at: www.apreadersbookshelf.com where they summarize some books they read in an accessible, interesting way. … if immigration matters are or become an issue for you see gay bociaut who may be able to direct you to appropriate resources. brandon also volunteers at building one community, a community outreach to immigrants, and so also may be able to help. … easy automated giving: it is now possible to give to the church through online automated giving. it is an easy and safe process. if you would like to sign up, please talk to John Williams or Sandy Hogan. … the most recent directory can be found on the church website under Contact Us. Contact Sandy or Dale for the password to access it.

(continued from page 3) gling with Alzheimer’ss; also his wife, gall, struggling with MS and diverticulitis … also continue to pray for communities struggling with violence in America, the plight of refugees worldwide, the people of Puerto Rico still devastated by Hurricane Maria and wise, compassionate resolution of matters related to DACA and temporary protected status for Haitians.

As for Sunday morning prayer requests, please e-mail those on to dale at dalepauls@att.net if you wish them included in the newsletter.

In the quest to encounter God, know God, experience God, we come to a text in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:9-10, which tells of the living God, who is the Savior of all [people], a passage which struck me with all the force of a thunderbolt when I first noticed it. Raised as I had been by “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14), I wasn’t quite prepared for what Paul is saying in 1 Timothy 4:10.

I will begin our reflections with a little work with this text. It’s part of a letter, we believe, that Paul wrote to his younger colleague Timothy late in Paul’s life. Paul has left Timothy in the great city of Ephesus responsible for the church there. But now in 1 Timothy 4, in the verses leading up to our text, Paul warns Timothy about a way of thinking that doesn’t work, specifically a way of thinking that limits and restricts life. He says (in verse 1) that a time is coming when “some will abandon the faith,” and he’s very disturbed by this. He calls it demonic! He calls those who think this way “hypocritical liars.” They will “forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving.”

Paul is specifically contrasting here a deep skepticism about the physical and the natural. And the church was quickly plagued by this until by 400 AD Church Fathers like Jerome and Augustine settled for a grimly joyless view of the world and foisted this dark vision on their world. In counterpart, Paul writes in verse 4, “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving,” that is, with mindful consciousness of the goodness of God. Then in verse 9, he writes in this same spirit of expansiveness, “This [what I am about to write] is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive) that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all [people], and especially of those who believe.”

The living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe— it’s an astonishing statement. And it goes very much against my first understandings of salvation. When I was young, I thought that salvation was something that only happened within the walls of the little white church building where my family worshipped. Only we were Christian. And I understood salvation in largely other worldly terms. It meant essentially that we got to Heaven when all the rest of the world burned forever and ever in the fires of Hell. My understanding of salvation was primarily that I would escape Hell – by the thinnest of margins perhaps, but I would escape with those few people who thought and acted exactly like me. I came to understand eventually that there were a few more saved people…
As a result, by the grace of God, my understanding of salvation grew and has continued to grow my entire life. I have learned that it’s meant for so many more than just those people within the walls of the little white churches of my childhood. I have learned from Scripture, contrary to that one proof text, Matthew 7:13-14, which was wrought out of its context in the Sermon on the Mount with no regard for its historical moment: that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47); that God did not send his Son into the world for ours but also for the sins of the whole world, but to save it (John 3:17); that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47).