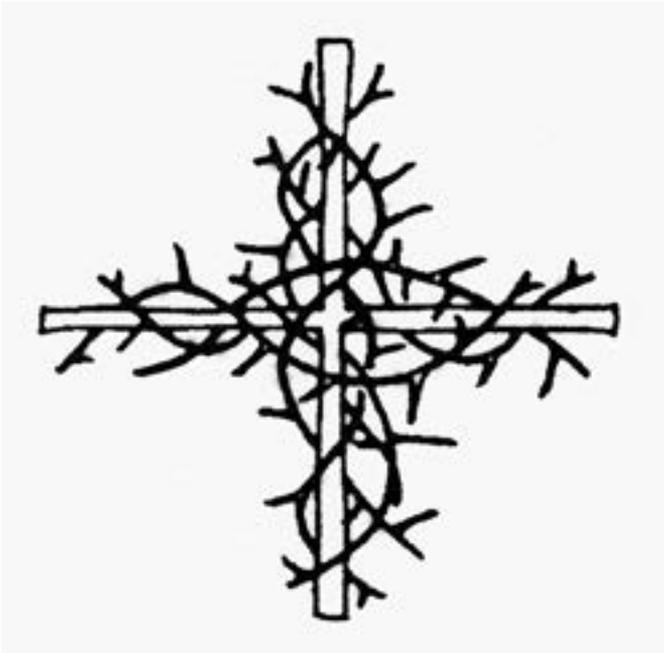


Lord,

teach us to pray



2018 Lenten Devotional

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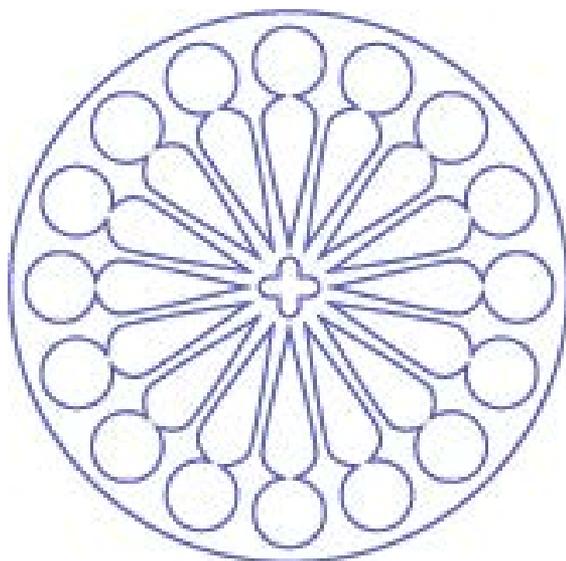
Guide to the Reader:

The Bible readings for each Sunday's Sermon are listed at the beginning of each week on Monday (except for the Introductory Week of Ash Wednesday, February 14.) All writers for a given week have been asked to reflect upon on the same Bible readings. Weekly small group discussions will highlight those scriptures noted in boxes.

Keep this booklet handy and mark it up! Underline meaningful statements and put a "?" by things you want to ask about. Find some colored pencils or pens to practice "praying in color" filling out some of the included drawings. This is YOUR Lenten journey and journal. Use it daily to record your thoughts and prayers. Consider keeping a gratitude journal on the last page.

At the top of my personal gratitude list are the wonderful members, staff, and friends of South Highland who stepped up to help create this booklet. With love and prayers for a meaningful Lenten journey as we approach the celebration of Easter,

Gayle Dunn Hurley



This devotional is published by South Highland Presbyterian Church, 2035 Highland Ave. South, Birmingham, AL 35205. Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), ©1989, the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Ed Hurley

Introduction to “Lord, teach us to pray”

“**To be a Christian and to pray** are one and the same thing,” says Karl Barth. Most every follower of Jesus Christ over the past 2000 plus years would agree. Virtually all people throughout history have prayed. Pagans to their gods and goddesses, Buddhists to something or nothing, Muslims to Allah (which is simply the Aramaic word for “God” and also used by Arabic Christians and Jews). The people of Israel and Jesus himself prayed to the One God, our Father and King. Yet Jesus took this basic human expression and brought it to a new and intimate level by his practice of prayer and by his teaching on prayer. When the disciples observed Jesus rise early in the morning and pull away to pray and when they saw him spend whole nights up in the hills praying, they knew they needed what he had and they asked him, “Lord teach us to pray.”

Jesus responded with what we call the Lord’s Prayer. It is found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. It is short yet comprehensive. There are many prayers throughout the Bible, many of them quite long. Moses prayed and even conversed directly face to face with God. (Exodus 3, 15, 19, 20) David prayed, especially at the end of his life. (1 Chronicles 29) Solomon prayed a great long prayer at the dedication of the Jerusalem Temple. (2 Chronicles 6) The Psalms are prayers lifted to God and often used in the corporate Temple Worship. There is no shortage of prayer in the Bible. Yet the disciples see something different in Jesus. They particularly want to learn prayer from the school of Jesus. He gives them and us his as our model. “When you pray, say” We are invited to pray this prayer not on our own but with Jesus. He prays with us and brings all our praises and petitions before our Heavenly Father.

This Lent we will walk with Jesus through this model prayer, lifting up each Sunday a successive phrase as we gather in small groups at Sunday School, in Bible Studies and in newly formed Small Groups for discussion. On Wed. nights we will hold Prayer Meeting in the Chapel hearing from our own, praying, drawing on SHPC’s long-standing Wednesday evening pattern of Elders and Deacons leading us in prayer. We will also share weekly in the Lord’s Supper. Members of South Highland have written most of the reflections for this Daily Lenten Devotional. Use it to listen to and learn from one another. Find a small group or meet with a friend to share the journey. William Barclay’s book The Lord’s Prayer will be available as well for those who want to go deeper. Then each Sunday come to worship ready to receive from Jesus.

Continued on next page

I first learned to pray from my parents at bedtime, then from Sunday School teachers, then from Worship itself, and then from youth leaders and peers. Throughout our lives we learn to pray. We must pray. This year, with the disciples we ask of Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Barth again, “Prayer means going toward God, asking him to give us what we lack- strength, courage, serenity, prudence- asking him to teach us how to obey the law and accomplish the commandments, and then that God may instruct us how to continue in believing and believing yet more, and that he may renew our faith.”



**Bible reading for the Introductory Week
(February 14 – 18:
“Our Father Who Art In Heaven”**

Matthew 5:43-45 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Matthew 6:7-15 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Melinda Harden

Matthew 5:44-45

Love your enemies...

We seek the Lord and His peace; yet, we stay focused on the chatter and ill mood of the moment. What would change or be different if we truly followed this verse and prayed?

I had the privilege of being in a small group Bible study with several ladies from South Highland. The faith and witness of these women truly blessed me and helped me to grow in faith over our time together. For a short time, we pledged to pray for one another and we set our phone alarms to go off at 1:00 pm every day. Then we would pray for one another. Each person in the group testified to blessings from knowing that prayers were coming her way, but even more from the act of pausing in her busy day to turn to the Lord in prayer.

Imagine the entire Christian voice in the United States being lifted in prayer and intercession for our "enemies" (political, personal, and/or perceived). Would God bless us as we obey His command? Would God change our enemies? Would He change us? What if we, as a congregation, set aside a small window of time to pray for anyone whom we perceive as our enemy or persecutor?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the words of Christ Jesus teaching us how to love one another. Help us follow your command to pray for our enemies.

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 debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us
not into
temptation,
But deliver
us from evil.
For Thine is
the Kingdom
and the Power
and the Glory,
Forever. Amen

Friday, February 16, 2018
Garland Stansell

Easter is the celebration of the unmerited forgiveness of God, the manifestation of His love for us, and the humble obedience of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness, love, and obedience are central to Christianity.

In Matthew 5:43-45 Jesus tells his disciples to love our enemies and to pray for those who may intend us harm. In chapter six, Jesus instructs his followers how to pray including how to pray for our enemies or those who “trespass” against us. The verse that stands out to me as important for a loving and forgiving heart is verse 12: “...and forgive us our debts (trespasses), as we forgive our debtors (those who trespass against us).”

Saint Augustine called this “the terrible petition,” meaning that we are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we have forgiven others. The trouble is, at least for me, I’m not very good at forgiving others, especially those that might be considered my enemies, and especially when sometimes my worst enemy is myself. To the Christian, forgiveness is both essential for salvation and for our obedient service to God.

The debt of an unforgiving spirit was paid through Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. Since the debt has been paid, we can and must pray to be forgiven, and to forgive ourselves and others. Grace enables forgiveness. Galatians 5:22 tells us that these fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) are the fruits of a forgiving and loving heart – a heart made pure by the perfect love and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father.

In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14, we are instructed to “strive for peace with everyone.” This Lenten season, may we seek to claim God’s forgiveness, to extend God’s love and forgiveness to everyone, and to live obediently at peace with God and others.

Saturday, February 17, 2018
Lesley Lloyd

Forgiveness. Jesus has some sobering words about it; if we do not forgive, then we are not forgiven. I know of no warning more frightening than this one.

As a new counselor, I worked with sexually abused children and their mothers who were often victims of abuse themselves. To broach the subject of forgiveness with these fragile survivors seemed arrogant. Who was I to encourage them to forgive those who had subjected them to unspeakable horror? And yet, I knew that all the therapy in the world could not give the healing that forgiveness offers.

It was so helpful for me to remember that forgiveness does not depend on feelings. I have never had to forgive anything so painful, but I know that even in small things, it can be hard to feel forgiving. And yet, all that God requires of me is to will to release the hurt and anger, not to make myself feel forgiving. And sometimes, that requires enormous spiritual discipline as hurtful memories can return with astonishing regularity. Blessedly, however, the Holy Spirit who asks us to forgive also provides the power to forgive and in so doing, gives us ultimate freedom.

*The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.
(Psalm 103:19)*



Sunday, February 18, 2018
Terry Slaughter

And so my Lord, who is my enemy? Are they the ones who try and hurt me with malice? Is my enemy the terrorist, or the abuser, or the thief? Are my enemies the persons who have tried to take advantage of me or discredit me? The ones who have slandered me? It is strange, Lord, why it is easier at times to forgive these than it is to forgive someone I love. Why has it been so hard to forgive a brother, a person I love? Indeed he created havoc in our lives. Indeed he stole from my parents and from my family. Indeed he lied again and again and again. I have said to him (and even to myself) that he is forgiven, but you know the truth Lord. You know the feelings I still hold onto. Help me, Lord, to look at my own flaws. They are profound. Forgive me, Lord, for holding onto my brother's transgressions, while at the same time releasing my own. I know you have already forgiven my stubbornness and pride. Soften my hard heart, Lord, and let your kingdom come and abide within me. Help me love as You love. Amen.



Bible reading for Week 1 (February 19 – 25):
“Hallowed Be Thy Name”

Matthew 11:25-29 25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

First Monday in Lent, February 19, 2018

Ed Hurley

“Hallowed Be Thy Name”

“**Hallow**” means “**to make holy**; to consecrate.” It means to recognize the great, awesome worth of the one addressed. We do not create God’s holiness by hallowing God’s name. We recognize, we acknowledge, who God already is and what God already has done.

Gayle and I have been watching the Netflix series “The Crown”, a vivid dramatization of the British Royal Family.

Elizabeth Windsor was 25 years when she became Her Majesty upon the death of her father King George. From then on no one has dared to call her Lizzy (although they called her Shirley Temple behind her back!) In Great Britain, as Queen she had suddenly been elevated beyond ordinary human status. At her coronation she was crowned not in a civil ceremony at a government building, as we in this country inaugurate our Presidents, though certainly with much prayer and religious symbolism, but in Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of Canterbury in a religious ceremony virtually unchanged for 1000 years. As the Archbishop placed anointing oil on her body, it was seen as if God had set her apart and made her... well, in a sense... holy.

In the Old Testament God is presented to us as an Ineffable Mystery, the Holy One of Israel. The name of God was, and still is to this day by Orthodox Jews, too holy to be spoken. This is the God who thunders on Sinai, who leads Israel forth from Egypt in a cloud by day and in flaming fire by night. Now through Jesus all fear is gone. But that does not mean flippancy is come. Rather, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews,

“You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, ... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.” (Heb.12:18-24)

And as Isaiah saw beyond faithlessness a hoped-for return,

“No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale. When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy.” (Is. 29:22-23)

Continued on next page

Therefore in our prayers, let us as Jesus teaches, lift up, revere, exalt, praise, celebrate, indeed hallow the name of him who is Lord of heaven and earth and our Father, discovering things hidden to the worldly wise yet revealed to infants. So, like newborns let us come to him with all our burdens, confident of the rest we will find.

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

Kirsten Heiser

Matthew 11:25-29

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Never in my life did I so fully witness the numerous truths of the Gospel as in the years I was a young mother. Before those baby eyes could truly focus on me, I believe they could still see the face of God. The infant babble that I could not decipher must have been prayers to the Maker. Once I could converse with my children, many truths were revealed to me! One such lesson went like this:

K: Mommy, will you come sit down and watch Lady and the Tramp with me so I don't get frightened?

Me: (pulling him onto my lap) What makes you frightened?

K: The part with the dog and the rat fighting.

Me: Well, we could turn it off for that part. I don't want you to be frightened.

K: (thinking a while) No, don't turn it off until it's over.

Me: But I don't want you to be frightened.

K: It's okay. You can just hold me real tight.

If you are blessed to have a young person in your life, strike up a conversation and listen for God's wisdom.

Wednesday, February 21, 2018
Jan Bell

In New York Harbor there stands a famous statue, the Statue of Liberty - a powerful symbol of hope and promise - that holds a torch symbolizing liberty lighting the world. The plaque at its base reads in part:



“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I
lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Another statue stands outside another city, promising even greater blessings. It's the statue of Cristo Redentor, Christ the Redeemer, which stands atop a mountain overlooking the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Standing over 100 feet high, Christ is seen looking down in blessing, his arms outstretched as if to say, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Both statues embody and evoke welcome, refuge, rest, renewal, comfort, hope, and light to all. One stands holding a torch facing the sea, beckoning and offering harbor and hope in this world to the rejected, the dejected, the wretched buffeted by injustice, bent by burdens. The other, the Christ, stands with arms outstretched, beckoning and offering harbor, hope, fullness of spirit, and rest for our souls, both in this world and for eternity.

Prayer: Lord, reveal to me the things hidden due to my self-importance and perceived wisdom. I want to learn from you. Give me a gentle and humble heart, that I may be one who takes your yoke and follows Christ with the trust of an infant by doing what he did....providing rest, shalom, for the least, the last, and the lost.

Thursday, February 22, 2018
Sara Miller

A yoke is made for two, never for one. Jesus said in Matt.11:27, “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” Not an arbitrary statement as might be interpreted when one reads in verse 28: “Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Stagg in his commentary, uses the word refreshment.) If you are filled with apprehension, worry, guilt about the past, present and future, accept Jesus’ invitation to LEARN from Him, to BE-LIEVE that He is indeed gentle – that His yoke is for two. Years ago, as a then “youngish” mother and wife (some 40 years old) while I was in prayer, He (the Holy Spirit) figuratively wrapped me in a warm embrace... briefly but oh so REAL an experience!

Prayer: Lord, today lighten my burden. I take your yoke. You promise it is light and easy. Help my unbelief. Help me to trust. With eternal gratitude that while I was still a sinner, You died for me. May I demonstrate Your unconditional love in some way this very day. Amen.

“God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8



Friday, February 23, 2018

Charles Fowler

Matthew 6:10b “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

What is God’s will to be done in heaven? No one can really claim to know the answer to such a question, but scriptures give us a few hints. In Luke 15 Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (verses 3-10) ending with the sheep owner calling his friends and neighbors together and saying, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep”, and the woman saying, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.” Jesus says in verse 7, “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” He says in verse 10, “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

It appears that part of God’s will to be done in heaven is great rejoicing over one who is lost coming back to know Him. Doesn’t it seem that part of God’s will on earth would also be for us to do all we can to bring ourselves and all of creation back into fellowship with Him? I had the profound joy to lead an acquaintance to Christ when I was in graduate school. We joyfully met about weekly for the rest of that year before I completed my program and moved. Then we corresponded by letters and phone calls for the next few years. He grew to be a mighty man of God, leading others to the faith and influencing many lives. The joy of seeing what God has done in his life is beyond description.



Saturday, February 24, 2018
Bill Stribling

Remember innocence? Before life's experiences taught us tough lessons? Our wisdom is the sum total of everything that has ever happened to us, both good and bad. We value wisdom, but in Matthew 11:25, Jesus plainly states that the wise will not "get it" - only the innocent will. It is a reminder to us that the wisdom of experience is not to make us closed-minded. We should approach Christ with the same innocence today as the first time we were saved, like an infant.

The phrase "the wise and the intelligent" is a reference to the scribes and Pharisees who, before Jesus, were the only path to God. Those in the audience would have felt oppressed, rather than freed, by religious leaders and would most surely "get it."

In vs 26 & 27 Jesus makes a rare claim of divinity. Often he asks the disciples not to tell others what he has done, but in these verses he makes three theological claims: all things were handed to him by God; the path to God is through Jesus; and God is to be revealed in Jesus. These are still tenets of our faith.

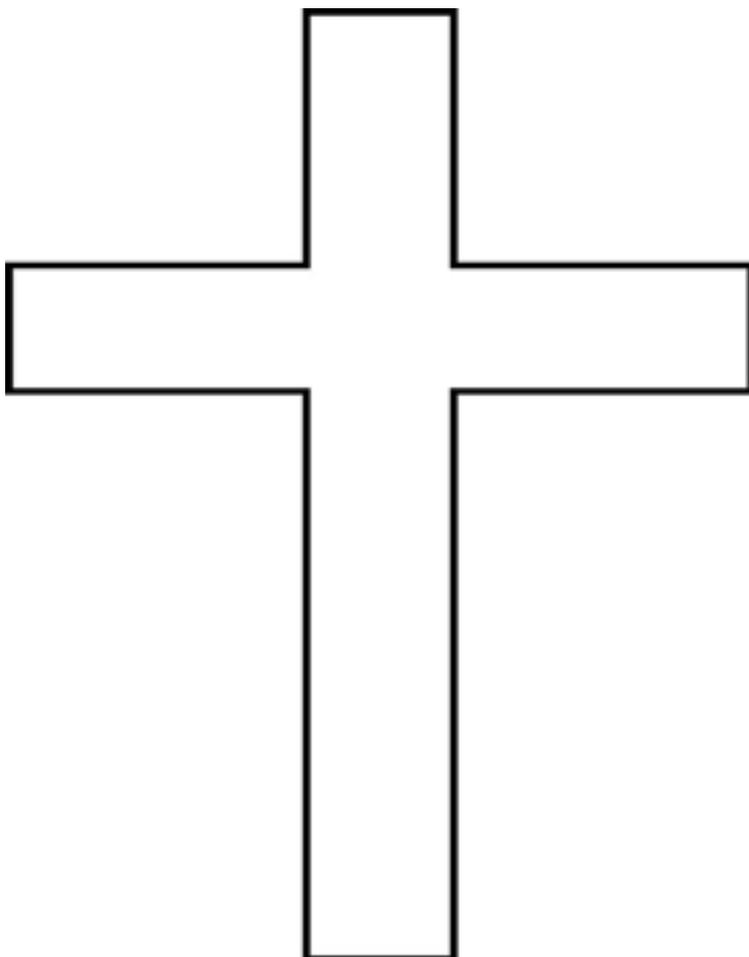
William Barclay, with his usual flair for the dramatic, tells the unsubstantiated tale that Jesus may have been a carpenter of yokes, and since he was perfect, his yokes fit perfectly. A good-fitting yoke doesn't reduce the amount of work, but makes doing it more comfortable. Christianity does not make living easier, but our faith helps us deal with what life slings our way.



Sunday, February 25, 2018

Spiritual discipline: Meditative Mark Making

Just as every stroke of the Creator's "brush" gives meaning to our lives, so can your mark of a pen or pencil be filled with intention and prayer. Try this: divide the cross below into smaller sections however you wish. Then, slowly and deliberately begin a "doodle" pattern in each section and as you do, lift up a phrase or a name to God in prayer. When ready, move on to a different section with a different phrase or name.





Bible reading for Week 2 (February 26 – March 4): “Thy Kingdom Come”

Matthew 12:9-26 9 He left that place and entered their synagogue; 10 a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, “Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?” so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, “Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” 13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

15 When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, 16 and he ordered them not to make him known. 17 This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 18 “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. 19 He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. 20 He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. 21 And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

22 Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. 23 All the crowds were amazed and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons.” 25 He knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”

Second Monday in Lent, February 26, 2018
Ed Hurley

“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, On Earth as it is in Heaven”

This week, we come out of heaven and down to earth, full of hard things and hard breaks. Pain and suffering are real. Injustices happen too frequently. Systems of government rise and fall, test and tumble. Humankind has yet to get it just right. It was Churchill who said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except all others.” A few years ago I had lunch with a journalist in Bosnia who said, “My grandmother lived in seven different countries and she never left the house she was born in.” Point being, no earthly system is without flaws, because it is made up of flawed people.

Yet, Jesus teaches us flawed people to pray for, work for and expect the coming of God’s Kingdom right here on earth. Jesus’ prayer leads us to pray for justice and mercy in this present world, even as it exists in God’s eternal Kingdom. Our text this week tells about Jesus extending such justice and mercy upon a man with a withered hand, thus demonstrating the worth of a single human being while defying the conventional rules set by the Pharisees who conspired against him. Jesus commands the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man does and was restored. Jesus offered the same sort of healing to a blind and mute man. Suddenly this man could hear and speak. The Kingdom was indeed coming in Jesus.

Think of how Jesus began with a few needy individuals... leading ultimately to victory over death. We are moving steadily over these days to a Cross filled with Suffering... only to end three days later in a Victory unlike anything ever seen before or since. Because of Jesus, a new way of living is ours. No longer is he only for one small group called Jews. His Kingdom extends to all people everywhere. “In him the Gentiles will hope.”

But remember, he wants your all. He wants the all of all his people. “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.” (Matt. 12:25) How is Jesus calling you this week to be part of bringing in his Kingdom?

Tuesday, February 27, 2018
Polly Edwards
Who, Me? A Pharisee?

When I read or listen to a story, I often find myself readily identifying with one of the characters. The Bible is filled with stories. I so want to identify with Jesus, but more often I find myself identifying with the impulsive questions and comments of Peter! Yet Peter so clearly had a heart for Jesus. Not so with the Pharisees in this passage.

So, imagine my discomfort in recognizing a bit of myself in the Pharisees' response to Jesus healing on the Sabbath. You see, I'm a rule-follower by nature. The structure of rules has often been a comfort to me, and organized religion is full of rules. I grew up in "the church" with all its rules, written and unwritten. Call them traditions if you will. But as I'm maturing in my faith, I'm coming to realize that some church traditions can stray far from the words of Scripture.

Jesus nailed it in his response to the Pharisees who challenged him about healing on the Sabbath. Was it more important to follow the letter of the religious law, that is, helping people on the Sabbath only if their lives were in danger? Or was it more important to reach out to persons in their time of need? This is a glaring example to which we can easily respond, "I'm no Pharisee!" Other examples are more subtle and not easily recognized but can still hinder our ministry. Church rules or traditions must be grounded in a heart attitude that reflects the core Biblical message of God reaching out to us in love and mercy and calling us to do the same for others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, free me from any church rules or traditions that are a stumbling block to helping others in their time of need.

*The one who testifies to these things says,
"Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus!
(Revelation 22:20)*

*We know that the whole creation has been
groaning in labor pains until now.
(Romans 8:22)*

Wednesday, February 28, 2018
Mary Price
Holy Listening

When we pray we have a direct connection with God. When Jesus was asked how we should pray, He gave us a model - the Lord's prayer. Scripture tells us that Jesus regularly prayed to His Father. When we pray and ask for guidance in our lives, we sometimes forget that we not only need to ask, but we need to actively listen for God's answers.

Listening for answers to our prayers takes practice. It has been said by those who practice "Holy Listening" that it takes about six weeks to learn this discipline. Holy Listening is something that should be done on a daily basis to accompany one's prayers. When we are present for God and listen, we often learn what God may be asking of us. Sometimes the answer is silence, because the timing is not right for God to answer. This doesn't mean that God hasn't heard your prayers. Keep on being present for God, continue to pray every day, and practice Holy Listening.

Ephesians 1: 17 -18

" I (Paul) keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you....."

Thursday, March 1, 2018
Katya O’Leary

I love Christmas. I really love it. Or maybe what I love is the concept of Christmas—family all gathered together with happy smiles on their faces as everyone sits at the beautifully decorated table eating the marvelous meal that has been cooked. No one stressed out or yelling, “I’m the one who did all the decorating, cleaning, buying, making, and addressing! What have you done??”

I have “rules” in my mind about what this holiday season should look like and be like. This Matthew 12 passage made me think of how traditions can sometimes make us lose our spiritual focus. Sometimes our traditions become as “written in stone” as the laws of the Pharisees who delighted in seeing Jesus “break” the Sabbath laws so they could condemn him. Picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, healing someone on the Sabbath, these were the “rules” that Jesus broke.

The rule-keeping of the Pharisees seems so far from doing as Jesus would have us do. We wonder how they could have become so caught up in minutia and legalism? They failed to see that finding the lost sheep or healing the man with the withered hand were the very things that God calls us to do.

We, as well, often find wrong in another while not paying attention to what we ourselves are doing. For me, Christmas 2017 was a time when I wondered how we had come so far from that tiny, little Baby and his magnificent birth, and instead over-focused on “rules.” Then my heart was filled to overflowing in serving Communion to members of the Adult Day Care Center, seeing their eyes fill with tears as they tasted His body and blood. I will pray for more times when I can forget the small crazy details, rules and traditions to remember how my heart caught on Christmas Eve. Caroline Garza as Mary reached out to take the tiny hand of Charlie Vick as baby Jesus. His little fingers curled around hers and she looked on him, smiling. This was what it is all about.

Friday, March 2, 2018
John Heiser

When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” what are we praying for? We might be asking God to intercede, as only God can, in our world gone seemingly amok. Or, we might be looking forward to Christ’s victory in the last days when the old will pass and God’s new heavenly kingdom will become one with the new earth. We might even be yearning for those glorious days to come soon.

But we don’t have to wait. God’s kingdom is already come, right here, right now, in our hearts and in our lives.

In our passage from Matthew (an episode also told by Mark and Luke), the Pharisees are scheming to trap Jesus. If he answers, “Yes, it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath,” they will accuse him of violating the law; if he says, “No,” they will accuse him of having a cold heart without compassion. Rather than debating the law, Jesus flips the script and asks them pointed questions that also contain the answers concluding, “It is lawful to do good.” Then he boldly heals the man with the withered hand, and goes on to heal many others. And people recognize that he is “the son of David.”

We all are equipped to do the work of God’s kingdom come to earth. Sometimes, our sharply divided culture schemes to trap us behind ideas which can blind us to what God wants us to do, leaving those things for others to take care of. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can boldly act with compassion and love.

The amazing work of God’s salvation of mankind has already been fully accomplished in Jesus Christ. All we have to do is live as He has called us, and do so with courage.

Saturday, March 3, 2018

Lynn Smith

Matthew 12:21 “And in His name the Gentiles will hope.”

Hope can be defined as a desire, a wish for a particular outcome, an aspiration. Tying together “Thy Kingdom Come” with the word hope is something we feel in our hearts and deeply want. Matthew is written primarily for a Jewish audience. So why would he include a verse that Jesus is not only the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament, but will also be a beacon of hope for the Gentiles?

My understanding of this period in history is the Gentiles worshiped a myriad of idols and gods. The Jewish people, worshipping the one true God, looked down on the Gentiles as heretics - unclean, and unworthy. For Matthew to include the Gentiles in this message written primarily for a Jewish audience is to say that all people will come to worship the one true God and Jesus as his Son. And, as written in Matthew, Jesus did exhort his followers to “go into all the nations making disciples...”. The Gentiles came to have hope in Jesus, too. I assume that every generation could say, “Today, more than ever, we need this hope.” And, with the state of multiple wars, famines, floods, and hurricanes today, I believe we must hold on to that hope in Jesus and continue to pray, “Thy Kingdom Come.”

Have hope that we can understand God’s purpose for us, our families, our communities, and our nation. It seems that we are being bombarded at times with horrible news that threatens our very existence. And then we are told not to worry. Where else can we place our hope but in Jesus Christ?



HOPE



Sunday March 4, 2018
Genie Deason
Matthew 6:9-13, 12:6-26

“Your Kingdom Come” is only part of the prayer Jesus was teaching us, his followers. He began by saying the pagans prayed with many words and that is why they thought they would be heard. Then Jesus warns we are not to be like them. Why? Because our Father knows what we need before we ask him. So, he offers us this example – a short, to the point prayer, not wordy, but stating what we should acknowledge in our conversation.

In today’s scripture reading we find the Pharisees challenging Jesus and his healing on the Sabbath. I thought, “Who am I most like in this story?” Would I be like these strict observers of the law? Do I identify with them, or rather with those who were healed? I don’t want to be like the Pharisees, but truth is, I am like them when I tell Jesus I know what to do, how to follow the law, and am more concerned about my agenda than his. I am not praying for his kingdom to come and certainly, at times, I am blindly giving the God of the universe my advice.

Sometimes my prayers are advisory notices or a laundry list addressed to God. I forget Jesus’ exemplary prayer that begins simply with “Our Father” who is gracious and who listens. How do I know? Jesus said that God knows “what I need” before I ask. Asking is good because Jesus teaches that God desires we come to him with our simple requests, not many words and not riddled with our advice. He also desires that we pray for his kingdom to come and his will to be done. I want to pray that way and mean it. May His will be done because He is the one who knows infinitely more than this modern day Pharisee does. His kingdom ways are different from this world’s ways. May we all, during this Lenten season pray, “Your Kingdom Come” and when praying, realize it doesn’t take a lot of words.



**Bible reading for Week 3 (March 5 – 11):
“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread”**

Matthew 6:25-34 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Matthew 14:13-21 13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16 Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” 17 They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” 18 And he said, “Bring them here to me.” 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Third Monday in Lent, March 5, 2018

Ed Hurley

“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”

With this plea about daily bread, Jesus leads us to pray for our personal needs after having focused first on the large matters of heaven unfolding on earth. We now move to our own need for food, forgiveness, and deliverance. As we have noted, the Lord’s Prayer is brief but comprehensive. Here is how Martin Luther taught about the question:

“What is meant by daily bread? Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

In other words, Jesus teaches us to bring our basic needs before the Father and trust him to provide. Jesus’ feeding of the 5000 shows us how amazingly God works through those who are trusting him and looking to him and praying to him. Notice that prayer is central in this miracle. “He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples. Whereupon the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled.” (Matt. 34:19)

Earlier in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells those who follow him to live trusting the Father and not to worry about our lives - what we will eat and drink. We are to keep our focus on God’s Kingdom and then watch how God provides.

At the time Gayle and I had our twin sons, I was a Youth & Young Adults Pastor in Tulsa, Oklahoma and she was teaching middle school French. Her plans to return to teaching flew out the window with the arrival of two babies! But absent her income, how would we make ends meet? Those first six months we dipped deeply into savings for such “luxuries” as diapers and formula. Then amazingly, seemingly out of the blue, the call came to me to become Senior Pastor of a church in Louisiana. God provided for us then and has provided for us ever since.

Tuesday, March 6, 2018
Elaine Whitaker
Matthew 6:25-34, 14:13-21

In the two passages from Matthew, Jesus seems to be declaring that there is enough so long as nobody hoards. The half-verse that made me think the most was 6:28a: "And why do you worry about clothing?" I worry about clothing because I want to fit in. Yet the entire passage is telling me to let my wardrobe worries go and, in words credited to the apostle Paul, "Put on the whole armor of God" instead. Concerning clothes, there's too much "me" and too little "Thee."

Here's a summary of what I have learned about clothes: 1) I have learned that when you buy one of those coats on sale at the Brookwood Belks, you will feel much better if you give away the two coats you already own. You might feel more like a disciple if you actually gave them rather than taking them to the Goodwill for a tax receipt. I don't know.

2) In 2006 when I moved to Birmingham, the movers had most of my clothes in their van. Forgetting that I knew almost nobody in my new home, I brought in my car an outfit suitable for funerals. I wasn't worrying about clothes, but I wasn't thinking either.

And 3) Years earlier, I had hurt someone by being unmindful of appropriate clothes. Specifically, I had misplaced an invitation with the words "black tie" on it and was later told to "find my own ride home." I realized that I had expended too much energy on popularity and appropriate attire. At the time it seemed much more important than wearing my cross.

Prayer: Dear God, You have offered to take our worries. May we accept Your offer in order to be undistracted and have only concerns for Your kingdom.

*Jesus answered him, "It is written,
'One does not live by bread alone.'
(Luke 4:4)*

*Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
(Psalm 37:4)*

Wednesday, March 7, 2018
Larry J. Michael
Worry Warts Galore!

Why worry? You tell me! Most people I know, even Christians, worry. They worry about their families, they worry about finances, they worry about health, they worry about many little things. And yet, Jesus tells us not to worry!

Who can add a minute to his/her life by worrying? No one. So, what do we do? We keep on trusting God to see us through. We keep on believing God has our best interests at heart. We keep believing that Jesus is with us every step of the way and will not desert us. We keep on pursuing a life of faith because of what we know, NOT because of what we feel.

One of the big mistakes we make as believers is basing our belief on feelings rather than fact. The facts are clear—Jesus died for our sins, we are forgiven, we have eternal life. Indeed, God loves us, has a wonderful plan for our lives, will enable us to accomplish all things He desires for our lives, and will carry us through our darkest days to brighter days of joy and gladness!

Usually, 99% of the things we worry will happen don't happen! So, why not do what I always told my kids to do? Relax, release, rejoice! Each day has enough troubles of its own like Jesus says. We are prone to fret and worry about tomorrow. But, tomorrow will take care of itself. Let's resolve to rejoice in the day we have. That is today. That is why we call it the present. Worry warts... NOT! Confident believers... YES!

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the confidence that you give me through your Word. Increase my faith, eradicate my fears, enable me to live in the power of your Spirit, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Thursday, March 8, 2018

Laura Chapman

Matthew 6:33

Jesus says don't worry about what you'll eat and wear, but I don't tend to worry about those things. I've never had those needs - never been food insecure, naked in the street or homeless. In light of that security, does this scripture have a different message for me? What is the central truth? I've heard others say it means to stop worrying about anything (relationships, children, jobs, health, etc.). That's a good and important message. Somehow I think there must be more to understand.

When I read the Matthew 14 passage about the feeding of the 5000, I think I see a clue. Some years ago, I read a description of how this miracle may have occurred. When the people in the crowd saw Jesus breaking 5 loaves and 2 fish and then sharing, they were motivated to bring out the food they had brought for themselves and share with others. There was an abundance of food with baskets left over. This generosity of giving would be as much a miracle as if the food had come from thin air (which may have been the case.) These ordinary people shared what they had with strangers. They were compelled to help meet needs. They followed Jesus' example of giving freely and all were filled. That kind of love, modeled after the love of God made manifest in Jesus, is miraculous.

So, in Matthew 6:25-34 there is not a different message to me. The key in verse 33 to all Jesus' followers is "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." Different resources, geographic locations, or seasons of life may change how we seek God's kingdom. We approach the kingdom from different angles. But when we seek God's kingdom by striving to love others as God loves us, to share with others as God shares with us, and to forgive others as God forgives us, our needs will be met. Whether we personally need sufficient food and clothing or whether we serve as Jesus' hands and feet to provide for others, we are experiencing wondrous, miraculous love.

Friday, March 9, 2018

Henry Gilchrist and Jody Gilchrist

Matthew 6:25-34

Henry: I think this means don't worry about what you have to wear or eat because there are other people on earth that don't have anything.

Jody: This reminds me of a sign at camp that said, "I am third." It was a constant reminder during the day to put God first (and others second) and that God would take care of the rest.

Matthew 14:13-21

Henry: I think this means just a little bit can help a lot of people.

Jody: Sometimes we withhold help because we think our house isn't large enough or we don't have enough time, etc. But if God calls us to help, then he will take care of the rest.

Prayer adapted from redemptiondiary.com:

Dear father, please give us the confidence and patience to work through challenges at school, at work, at church and at home. Ease the anxiety we feel. Give us wisdom in how to serve others best. When we doubt ourselves or doubt you, be there to comfort and guide. And help us to know we can accomplish any task with you by our side. Amen.



Saturday, March 10, 2018

Brian Hurst

Faith

Do we truly believe that God will provide for our needs? Do we truly believe that God's provision is sufficient? In a broader sense, do we truly believe that Jesus' death and resurrection is enough for our salvation? That God's love for us is all that we need to fulfill us?

Greed is certainly a sin that causes people and nations to hoard God's resources and to not share them with others. Fear and a lack of faith are other causes for such hoarding. We who have plenty are blessed to be His agents of provision. In feeding the five thousand, Jesus shows that God is a God of abundance and that we, as His agents, can do great things with His resources by and through His power!

I challenge each of us at the end of the day today to reflect on the times we maintained faith in God's provision and the times when our faith wavered.

Prayer of St Ignatius Loyola:

*Teach me, Lord Jesus, to be generous:
to serve You as You deserve;
to give, not counting the cost;
to fight, not heeding the wounds;
to toil, not asking for rest;
to labor, not seeking any reward,
save that of knowing that we do Your will.
Amen.*



Sunday, March 11, 2018
Jimmy Brown
The Empty Basket

After a full day of Jesus' teaching and healing, the disciples came to him worried about how that big crowd was going to be fed. They had no baskets of food to feed the hungry throng, and so they suggested Jesus send them on their way. I know what it feels like to have an empty basket. Months ago I was sleeping outside on the porch of a nearby church in exchange for doing some yard work. One afternoon I was invited to come to South Highland to visit the Sunday Club fellowship. They offered me a good hot meal and some warm handshakes. I thought to myself, "This seems like a nice church and maybe I'll come back on a Sunday morning." And that's what I did. God would wake me up off that porch and say it's time to go to church. I started coming faithfully each Sunday and found my way to a Bible study with some folks who welcomed me and made me feel at home. Next thing I knew they put me in touch with some more Christian friends who helped me sort out my living situation.

As a result of my coming to South Highland my empty basket became full to overflowing, not only with food and a safe, dry place to live but with good new friends who genuinely care about me. I just kept believing that something was going to turn around and it did. God kept telling me to stay focused. Go to church. Go down there (to South Highland) and I did that. You people met me with so much warmth every time I showed up.

My basket was empty and God provided.

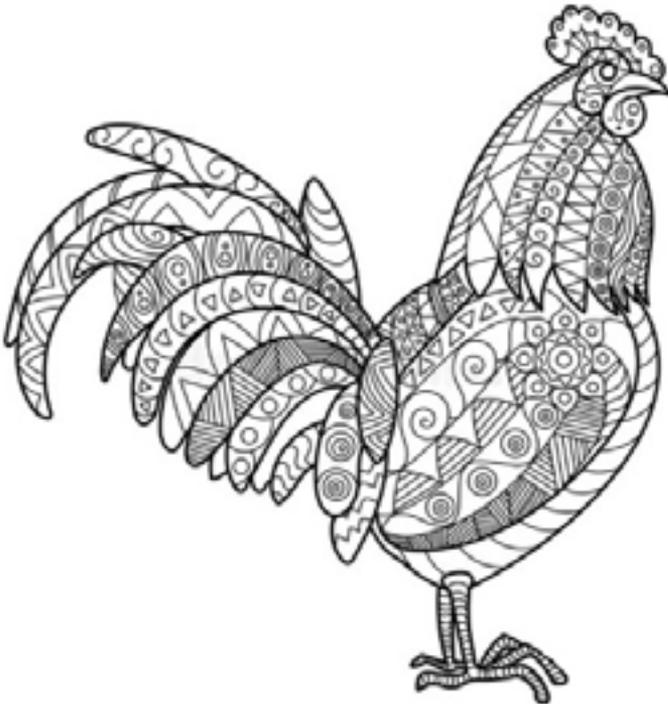




**Bible reading for Week 4 (March 12-18):
“Forgive Us As We Forgive”**

Matthew 18:21-22 21 Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

Matthew 26:69-75 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” 71 When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” 74 Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment the cock crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.



Fourth Monday in Lent, March 12, 2018

Ed Hurley

“Forgive Us As We Forgive”

Is there anything more wonderful than believing with trust and conviction each Sunday, “In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!” Jesus wasn’t the first to teach about God forgiving sins. Ancient religions had their rites, many of them primitive and brutal - like those requiring human sacrifice. The Jews turned away from all that, yet Abraham had been so serious about obeying God that he was about to sacrifice his own son up on the mountain as God had commanded. But God provided another sacrifice in Issac’s place - a lamb. And the use of the sacrificial lamb became part of the great Temple ritual.

The fact is, obviously we sin and we are in need of forgiveness. Jesus brings forgiveness to a new level through the depth of his love for us. Peter was looking for clarity and limits. “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me how often should I forgive?” Note this forgiveness is directed toward the family, the faith community... often the hardest place. Jesus replies enigmatically, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” His answer moves beyond the standard Jewish answer and beyond any mathematical approach. This is not a matter of tallying up just how many times you have forgiven someone, but reflects the infinite forgiveness of God and the call upon us to keep on forgiving - infinitely.

The point of this part of the prayer is that we are to receive forgiveness and likewise lavishly extend forgiveness. Again, not up to a certain limit. God does not have a checklist and tick off “a forgiveness” to us just after we extend “a forgiveness” to someone else. God forgives. God’s grace always goes before us.

The power of forgiveness is at the heart of our faith. Moving toward Jerusalem and the Cross this week, we long to grow in our reception of and practice of forgiveness.

“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin, and alive to all that is good. I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.” Amen. So be it!

Tuesday, March 13, 2018
Sue Keith
Forgive Us as We Forgive

“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” We say these words every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, yet sometimes we say these words automatically. Think about it. Jesus is saying that he forgives us AS we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

When have others sinned against you? Perhaps the email you received from your brother or sister, who sent it in anger? Or the post on Facebook by a fellow Christian that reflects disrespect toward and/or a lack of understanding about a public servant? We are called to pray for our brothers and sisters and to forgive them. Christ said, “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”

Peter’s situation in the courtyard of the Jewish High Priest’s house was especially difficult because he had to try to forgive himself. You will recall that Peter had promised Jesus earlier that he would never desert him; but while Jesus was being tried by the Sanhedrin, Peter denied him three times. Peter wept bitterly.

Have you ever had anguish in the pit of your stomach when you realized that you did not do something that you ought to have done or that you did something you ought not to have done? I have. What Christ revealed to Peter he also reveals to us; His grace is sufficient to cleanse our sins.

My favorite sweatshirt has a teddy bear on the front with only one eye; Teddy is bandaged all over. The caption: “Jesus loves me just the way that I am.”

Prayer: Jesus, help me to forgive my brothers and sisters in Christ. Also, in your mercy, cleanse my sins, forgive my shortcomings, and help me to grow so that I may become more like you. WWJD

*Whenever you stand praying, forgive,
if you have anything against anyone;
so that your Father in heaven
may also forgive you your trespasses.
(Mark 11:25)*

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Laura Ray

Peter's question of "how often should I forgive?" almost comes with a child-like tone in which he wants a definitive answer. Tell me the number and I'll comply. However at a deeper level it comes with a tone of reconciliation. A concept that is difficult and requires patience and faith. He is truly concerned with how to obtain this. The answer Peter gets of "seventy seven times" probably is not what he is looking for, and honestly it is not an answer I would be looking for. Jesus indicates seventy-seven times, but I think his message was more like forgive forever, never stop the reconciliation among you. This is difficult. It tests us and reminds us that faith is not easy. However, if we act together with others, this reconciliation suddenly becomes a journey in which we find joy. It becomes the joy of ministry to all in the reconciling love of Christ.

Peter comes to experience this need for reconciliation and forgiveness first hand, as we all eventually do, and even perhaps frequently. He has followed Jesus at a distance as Jesus was arrested and taken to the chief priest. Curious, Peter sat with the guards to hear the council looking for a reason to put Jesus to death. As he was in the courtyard, here came his chance. "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." asked the servant girl. This is it... a God-provided opportunity to live out his faith. Peter failed in his answer: "I do not know this man." Then comes the dreaded crow of the cock, and sadness engulfs Peter. Imagine the gut-wrenching, nauseating wave that overcame Peter. Peter felt it because he knew what Jesus had told him. He knew that he had failed. I pray that my faith is one where I can recognize my own failure to build the Kingdom of God, and that I may experience the gut-wrenching feeling Peter experienced. He experienced it because he believed, it was personal to him. I pray that my faith is strong enough and honest enough to recognize when I miss an opportunity put before me from God. Like Peter, I recall the promised forgiveness of "seventy seven times" and the joy of the reconciling love of Christ.

Thursday, March 15, 2018
Jack Smith
Matthew 18: 21-22

Forgiving others can sometimes be a difficult thing to do, especially if it was something done to you that you believe was very bad or unnecessary. Jesus said to forgive people not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. So even if it is something small or something large that someone has done against you, you should forgive them. There may be a situation where you have forgiven someone for something, but deep down you still hold a grudge because of what happened. If that grudge surfaces from time to time, forgive that person again. We need to let go of bad feelings and move on with our lives towards something more meaningful.

Not only do we need to forgive others, we need to ask God for forgiveness of our sins.

Prayer: Our dear heavenly Father, we ask you to help us forgive others. We also ask for forgiveness of our sins. Amen.



Friday, March 16, 2018

Pam Buck

Psalm 139, Romans 12:3, Ephesians 1:17-18

Words matter to each of us. Jesus knows it and Peter learned it. Before the events in Matthew 26 happened, Jesus had told his followers that the words He spoke to them are spirit and life. Some didn't believe him and left. He asked the disciples if they wanted to go away as well. Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69)

Now Peter was on a "precipice" in the courtyard outside Jesus' trial. He had a few minutes to choose his words. Which way would he go? God already knew Peter's heart, just as He knows ours. He knows our past, present, and future. His grace is sufficient and His forgiveness is complete. Because Peter loved Jesus, he was heartbroken over what he had said. His repentance affected the world through his words in the Bible we read today. He became the battle-ready "Rock" which Jesus had called him.

We tend to become like that which surrounds us. May we, like Peter, become what God tells us we are: forgiven, set free from the power of sin, battle-ready. For years my prayer for myself and my loved ones is that our sense of significance and self-image be a reflection of the Lord's thoughts toward us. Because I can choose which thoughts to dwell on in my mind, I am often convicted to ask Him to take them captive to His obedience. He has never failed to then bring words of life to mind - ammunition for the battle within me. Like Peter, I've lost some battles, but God has won the war giving us the final victory. Live in that truth.

Prayer: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my ROCK and my Redeemer.

Saturday, March 17, 2018

Don Miley

The NRSV Bible gives “Forgiveness” as a heading for this passage; and yes, I can agree that Jesus is teaching Peter that there should be no limits on forgiveness. However, as I was meditating on this passage my thoughts edged towards legalism.

I see someone wanting to know to what extent he has to go to be justified in forgiving his brother or sister. In his heart he could be bragging, “Hey, look at me. I’m willing to forgive 7 times” (as if that was extremely generous). Or even asking, “Just tell me the number because I’ll do it, but I’m not going over.”

Then I found this explanation: Legalism is an attempt to gain favor with God or to impress our fellow man by doing certain things (or avoiding other things), without regard to the condition of our hearts before God. At the root of legalism is the sin of pride, because the legalist thinks that he is able to commend himself to God by his own good deeds. I would add to this by saying a cause of legalism is a lack of generosity or grace... ultimately being un-Christ-like.

You know that we are justified by grace, through faith, in Jesus (Rom 3:9-31) and that our actions are an outpouring of that faith (James 2:14-17). It is by His grace that He transforms us sinners into saints who love God and who love others. May we live limitless in terms of how much of God’s grace we reflect to our brothers and sisters.

Spend some time today asking God to show you where you have legalistic tendencies. Make a list (ex. daily time with Him, corporate worship, tithing, Bible reading/study, loving/serving others, selfish ambition, etc.) and ask Him to search your heart and reveal to you where your deeds or your interests are more important than your relationship with Him or others.



Sunday, March 18, 2018
Anne Curtis Giovanelli

I will be the first one to tell you that forgiveness is hard. I struggle with forgiveness and I find it hard to let things go. Even after you “forgive” someone for something, there is often a lingering bitterness, something in the back of your mind refusing to allow you to forget. “Forgive and forget”... easier said than done. But true, complete forgiveness comes when you let go of past wrongs and move forward.

In Matthew 18:21-22, Jesus highlights this point. When Peter suggests that we should forgive a wrong seven times, Jesus counters that we should forgive seventy-seven times. We should give forgiveness above and beyond what we initially are even willing to give. And that can feel nearly impossible.

I don't have any tips or tricks for making forgiveness any easier, but something that I find to be encouraging comes later in Matthew. After denying that he will betray Jesus three times, Peter realizes as the cock crows that he has done just that. Betraying Jesus must truly be the ultimate sin. And yet, Jesus does forgive Peter. Peter has done the unthinkable, but Jesus shows him grace and forgives him. Obviously, we don't have the grace of Jesus—we aren't perfect and we shouldn't expect others to be either—but I think we can take an example from his forgiveness of Peter.

Look toward the future, to the bigger picture. Try to forgive that little bit more. That little bit is the hardest, but it's also the bit that brings peace.





**Bible reading for Week 5 (March 19 - 25):
“Lead Us Not Into Temptation”**

Matthew 21:1-17 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven!” 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” 12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a den of robbers.” 14 The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became angry 16 and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’” 17 He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Matthew 27:45-46 45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Fifth Monday in Lent, March 19, 2018

Ed Hurley

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Temptation and Evil: one leading us... the other snaring us. Recently Pope Francis proposed a new translation of the Lord's Prayer because the prayer asks God to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Francis countered, “It is not the Lord that tempts. It is not He that pushes me into temptation and then sees how I fall. A father does not do this. A father quickly helps those who are provoked into Satan's temptation.”

The Holy Father is correct. James writes in his Epistle (1:13), “When someone is tempted, they should not say, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ because God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.” Temptation is not God's doing, but the devil's. Temptations nevertheless come to all.

Jesus' ministry had begun with him being tempted by the devil. If only he would fall down and worship the evil one, all manner of “good” would be accomplished. Jesus never gives in. Temptation swirled around Jesus as he made his way to Jerusalem and entered into this week that changed the world forever.

Tragically, but truthfully, evil is real. Jesus battled evil most intensely on the Cross feeling divine abandonment. Yet, God never left him, nor does God leave us.

So, we pray this most immense of all the phrases of the Prayer: for temptations to be removed and evil to be cast from us. We know the evil of which we are capable. Our denials, our double-mindedness, our betrayals. Just like these leaders who made God's Temple a mockery. “My house shall be called ‘a house of prayer’ but you are making it a den of robbers.” Pharisees and Sadducees, are we among them? Where have we been passive, if not willing, partners for the perpetuation of evil?

At my ordination service in 1981 my mentor David Crawford said, “We live in an age when the subtlety of our temptations has outstripped the sensitivity of our unaided consciences. We therefore participate, not willingly, but inevitably in those things which, if chased up into the clearing, we would flee.” That's you and that's me: snared, trapped, duped. “Evil” is “live” spelled backwards – the antithesis of life. Evil is not God's gift. It's a twisting of God's creation, a negation of its original goodness, and therefore, an assault on God.

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On Palm-Passion Sunday the keepers of tradition fall prey to evil. Yet the blind and lame come to Him and are cured. The children sing His praises. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" This week, may He be blessed. May you be blessed, and may you be a blessing!

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Ken Laney

Matthew 27: 45-46 Practicing our Faith

Whether the scripture is from the King James or NRSV, "lema sabachthani" is a challenge for us to understand. Jesus is at his lowest point of grief on earth. Every time I think of the crucifixion, "lema sabachthani" is imbedded in my mind.

It was as important to the Hebrews exiled in Babylon to be true to their God as it is today that we be true to our faith in Jesus Christ. From the Book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego practiced their faith in God by refusing to bow down and worship the golden statue as King Nebuchadnezzar commanded. Their alternative, to be thrown into the furnace's perfect fire, was God's opportunity to shield them from harm and present The One True God to the Babylonian authorities.

Today, can we imagine that the Son of God in Jesus Christ was possibly the fourth person present in the furnace protecting Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from harm? Although we are limited in our understanding that the Messiah arrived on earth 500+ years after Babylon, hasn't the Son of God always been there one way or the other in our understanding of the Trinity? Did God forsake his Son or did we?

Today it seems we have our own "Babylon" as the Church is challenged to influence positively our community due to the "golden statues" that rule our day-to-day life. Just as doctors practice their medical profession and lawyers practice their legal profession, we need to practice our Christian profession. We may not be clergy, but we are called as Christians. May we take the calm confidence that was demonstrated by the three young Hebrews in exile and carry forth our practice of learning how to love the Lord with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us not continue to forsake Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Rhonda White

Triumphal Entry

We often like to think that Jesus had a clear view of the future and knew every detail of his life beforehand. I don't think this is true. I think that Jesus, like us, had to depend on a daily practice of prayer and contemplation to hear the Father. I think that the Holy Spirit revealed the Father's plan in increments as it was needed. Jesus prayed "give us this day our daily bread" just as we do, not knowing how the bread would be provided.

It is interesting to enter into contemplation of the triumphal entry asking these questions: What did Jesus know? What did the disciples know? How did Jesus' and the disciples' knowing inform each other? Jesus knew very clearly his mission: preach good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed (Luke: 4:18-19). He also knew that he would suffer and die as he had forewarned his disciples (Matthews 16:21). But he may not have known that his obedience to ride a donkey and colt into the city of Jerusalem was the fulfillment of the Zechariah 9:9 prophecy. This revelation may have come to him and his followers later. This realization may have become a great comfort and confirmation to Jesus and his followers that they were indeed following the will of the Father.

I ask you to consider some of these same questions about your life and ministry. What do you know about the ministry God has given you? What events have served as reminders or confirmations that you are indeed following the will of God? What simple act of obedience can you do today that will later be a source of comfort and confirmation to you?

*No one, when tempted, should say,
"I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil
and he himself tempts no one.
(James 1:13)*

*Discipline yourselves, keep alert.
Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil
prowls around, looking for someone to devour.
(1 Peter 5:8)*

Thursday, March 22, 2018
Dana Waters

Some 33 years prior to the fateful week when Jesus entered Jerusalem before his death, wise men from the east had entered Jerusalem looking for the king of the Jews. They found their way to king Herod who “was troubled” along with “all Jerusalem.” The idea of a rival power was to the one in power, and usually is, troubling; and when Herod was troubled, everyone else was troubled, too.

Come down the years to the time when the babe of Bethlehem has become the increasingly popular Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. He enters Jerusalem in the manner the prophet Zechariah had said the king of Zion would come. Amid the throng of pilgrims arriving for the Passover were many from Galilee who knew the amazing things that Jesus had been saying and doing there. They were the ones who sensed a new day and were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” But that was not necessarily welcome news to those in power, and once again, “the whole city was in turmoil.” “Who is this?” was the question asked by all.

Come down the years again to our time. Jesus is not an unknown figure – or is he? Philip Yancey writes a book asking how well, actually, is Jesus known? Are the ideas commonly held about Jesus close to the truth? What would you say if asked about Jesus? I have recently had occasion to hear some rather vague and empty replies to these questions. No wonder some folks have little interest in investing one’s life in such an unchallenging figure.

If Jesus was no more than a nice person who taught nice things, how could Herod or the religious leaders of Jesus’ day have felt threatened by him? Maybe the crowd from Galilee was on to something when they shouted, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Lent may be the perfect time for you and me to ponder again the question, “Who is this?”

Friday, March 23, 2018

Charles Fowler

Matthew 21:12-14

A House of Prayer

“Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”; but you are making it a den of robbers.’ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.”

The temple’s outer court, where women, children, Gentiles, and other marginalized people worshipped, is where the priests allowed buying, selling, and money-changing to occur. The resulting chaotic crowd prevented the blind and lame (and Jesus) access to worship until he cleared it.

Jesus referred to Isaiah 56:1 where the LORD says, “Maintain justice and do what is right...” and to verse 7 where he says of two groups (eunuchs and foreigners), “...These I will bring ... and give them joy in my house of prayer.” Jesus also references Jeremiah 7:5-11: “If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien..., then I will let you live in this place... . Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, ... and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?”

God has shown me that I have benefited from a system of injustices to blacks, first as slaves, then as second-class citizens, and to aliens who often worked (and work) under oppressive conditions to insure that our infrastructure, food chain, clothing and apparel are produced well but cheaply. What would Jesus say to this?

Saturday, March 24, 2018
Mary Margaret Vick

“Humble” and “meek” are not words that normally come to mind when thinking of a king. However, in Matthew 21:5 Jesus is described as being humble when he entered the city of Jerusalem. The scripture tells us of crowds cheering him and laying down branches and coats to welcome him into the city. In the midst of all that excitement, we read of Jesus riding into town on a donkey. Most of us would have a hard time keeping our humility when faced with such adoration, and we certainly wouldn't choose to make our grand entrance on a donkey's back. But Jesus used this instance as another opportunity to teach us through his actions.

Each of us has been given a multitude of gifts and opportunities, and it's easy to get carried away when we are being praised for some accomplishment or success. But Jesus has shown us, by his example, the value of humility. If Jesus, the King of kings, can retain his humility in the face of the love and attention described in the book of Matthew, then we certainly must do all we can to remain humble and grateful for the blessings we have received from the Lord.

Prayer: (author unknown)

Lord Jesus, when you walked the earth,

Your humility obscured your Kingship.

Your meekness confused the arrogant

Hindering them from grasping your purpose.

Teach me to follow your example and

To never view myself greater than anyone.

Let my heart always imitate your humility. Amen.



Sunday, March 25, 2018
Preparation for Holy Week

Spend some quiet time thinking back on these past weeks. Review your notes. Write down responses to some of these:

I've learned that _____

I'm surprised that _____

I have decided to _____

I'm humbled by _____

I long for _____

The spiritual practice I most want to continue is:

- Daily prayer
- Giving thanks at meals
- Bible reading
- Bible study
- Regular worship
- Helping others
- Fasting
- Praying in color
- Meditative doodling
- _____



**Bible reading for Week 6 Holy Week (Mar. 26-Apr. 1):
“The Kingdom, Power and Glory, Now and Forever”**

Matthew 28:1-20 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.”

8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 telling them, “You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ 14 If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Monday of Holy Week, March 26, 2018

Ed Hurley “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

➤ ***Remember, Holy Week service today at noon in the chapel.***

Yesterday on Palm/Passion Sunday we entered into the Week of All Weeks - the week of incomparable horror and hope. The concluding phrase of the Lord's Prayer, a “doxology” added by early church leaders and not part of the original six petitions as taught by Jesus, is still a fitting and important way for the prayer to conclude. This doxology is a significant bookend to Palm/Passion Sunday because, with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, our hopes arise for God to come, to speak, to act and fulfill all he has promised. Yet that day of palms and praises alone will not be sufficient for deliverance from evil. It takes all the events of this week - the descent into darkness followed by the ascent into light bursting forth on Easter Morning proclaiming “Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!”

This concluding phrase of the Lord's Prayer is drawn from King David's prayer upon the investiture of his son Solomon as the next king and David's own imminent death. “David blessed the Lord in the presence of the assembly...’Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11). A sort of Handel's “Hallelujah Chorus” bringing to a crescendo what Easter accomplishes as nothing else in all creation: the final victory of God.

This week enter deeply into the darkness. Feel the bewilderment of the disciples as they try to take in all Jesus is teaching about abiding, praying, serving, foot-washing, and celebrating Passover while Jesus transforms and completes the ancient ritual: no longer a sacrificial lamb but his own body. “Take, eat; this is my body. Drink all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

This week and every day of our lives, let us make that confession and let us declare boldly as we have been taught to pray this prayer; God is the divine design, he is the meaning of everything; he is the ultimate purpose and the final goal of everything that happens!”

Tuesday, March 27, 2018
Carolyn Hunter
Go Anyway!

➤ ***Remember, Holy Week service today at noon in the chapel.***

Have you ever felt a “nudge” from your conscience to do some act of kindness like take a meal, send a card, make a visit or phone call, serve on a committee, or teach? We all have these moments, but we make excuses like “I don’t know what to say,” “They won’t know I’m not there,” “I don’t have time or energy,” etc.

Read the story of the two Marys who early in the morning after their sabbath went to see where Jesus lay. An earthquake, an Angel who opened the tomb, and terrified guards did not deter them. They were rewarded for their devotion by hearing Gods’ angel tell them not to be afraid because Jesus was raised from the dead as He promised and was waiting for them near in Galilee.

As they ran to tell the disciples, Jesus met them. Can you imagine the fear, confusion, and joy! What if they had “talked themselves out of going” (made an excuse)? This story was told among the Jews that Jesus met the eleven disciples even though some doubted. He gave them the Great Commission to go, baptize, teach, and make disciples. Jesus then promised that he would be with them always.

The doors on the inside of our sanctuary say, “You are entering the mission field.” Forget your fears and doubts and go anyway! The joy of seeing Jesus is waiting!

*And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.
(Colossians 3:17)*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
(Philippians 4:8)*

Wednesday, March 28, 2018
Gayle Hurley

➤ *Remember, Holy Week service today at noon in the chapel.*

From Vulcan to Lake Martin. In Alabama terms that's about the distance Jesus tells his disciples to go after he rose from the dead. Three days after the crucifixion, some women with heavy hearts and motivated by a deep desire to help, to pay respect, to tend to the lifeless body of their beloved teacher, had gone to the tomb expecting great sadness. Instead they were met with earth-shaking, life-altering wonder and joy at the sight and message of an angel followed shortly by a warm greeting from Jesus himself. Jesus told them to get word to the disciples who were then hunkering down in fear behind locked doors and head to the lake to meet him there.

The journey from the tomb outside Jerusalem to the Sea (more like a lake) of Galilee was do-able but not easy. I wonder if I would have been ready to leave that safe place behind locked doors and make that significant trek to meet Jesus again. How willing am I today to leave my cozy home on a Sunday morning and meet my Lord in a place of worship with fellow Christ-followers? What waits for me there? Am I willing to leave my comfort zone?

Thankfully those first disciples of Christ were willing to heed the call to go from "Vulcan to Lake Martin" and beyond. From my home to church with a car? I can do that and much more through Christ who strengthens me and who waits for me "at the lake." The Lord with arms open wide says, "Come on in. Just as you are." The water is fine.

*Amen.
And the power and the glory forever
For thine is the kingdom
But deliver us from evil
Lead us not into temptation
As we forgive our debtors
Forgive us our debts
Our daily bread
Give us this day
On earth as it is in heaven
Thy will be done
Thy kingdom come
Hallowed be they name.
Who art in heaven,
Our Father,*

Maundy Thursday, March 29, 2018
Jessica and Daniel Killilea

➤ ***Remember, Holy Week service today at noon in the chapel
and tonight at 6:30 in the sanctuary***

We did it. We condemned him. It's our fault. We're the reason he was sent by the Father to this earth, born of Mary. We're the reason he is to die. We chose Barabbas over the Messiah. The darkness is inevitable now. There he lays, dead in a tomb. What have we done?!

The earth shakes, but does anyone besides the guards and some women notice? Or is everyone too busy – worrying about the man who's no longer with them, worrying what will happen to the world, or just worrying about their everyday lives – to notice? Jesus' death and resurrection caused a huge ruckus. For some, Easter is a reminder to rejoice, but many have hardened hearts toward all of the chaos and sin in the world. Jesus' mission was to knock down those barriers, calling all of us to partake in God's mission.

This is a time to be moved, to leap up and rejoice that "He is risen!" No matter where you are, the Lord is there, full of life and wonder. God can roll away the stone of our hardened hearts. How will you respond to Him? Will you be crippled with fear like the guards, or will you run with great joy like the women?

On this Maundy Thursday, it is obvious there is still pain and darkness in the world. No one is immune to it. Jesus experienced pain and darkness throughout his life, too. Sure, it seems that the darkness is gaining on us (just look at the news). Sometimes it takes months or years for God to pull us out, but He never leaves anyone in the darkness alone. The stone has been moved and the earth rumbles with celebration and joy. Easter reminds us that light always prevails. Darkness can't conquer the light. The light has energy, purpose, and strength that cannot be ignored. Easter is not one single day or celebration. It's the way of the Christian life.

We're the reason he is to die. But that death leads to eternal life.

Good Friday, March 30, 2018
Larry J. Michael
The Burden of Proof

➤ ***Remember, Holy Week service today at noon
in the sanctuary.***

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the most amazing event of history. Jesus, the Almighty Son of God, had been crucified and it looked like evil had won the day. But, three days later, the Lord arose from the grave, triumphant over sin, death, and the grave!

Mary Magdalene and Mary went to the tomb to anoint Jesus, only to find that he had risen from the dead! They went and told the disciples. Jesus appeared to them... the first of many occasions when he would appear alive to them and many other witnesses.

On the day that he was to ascend to heaven on a mountain outside of Jerusalem, the eleven disciples were there with Him. The Bible tells us, "When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted" (v.17). When I read this all too familiar passage of the resurrection, those words leaped out from the page. After all that the disciples had seen and experienced with Jesus and the multiple appearances after the resurrection, "some doubted"? What was that about?

All through Jesus' ministry he performed miracles, healed people and gave amazing teachings. Many people believed and others doubted. It seemed like the burden of proof was always on Jesus, to do one more miracle, one more amazing performance, before people would believe.

The disciples who doubted came to rise above their doubts and became bold leaders in the early church. Do you have any doubts about Jesus, who he was, what he came to do, the fact of the resurrection? The burden of proof no longer lies with Jesus but with those who would seek to prove otherwise. Let us be faith-filled and resolutely live our lives so that others may be drawn to Christ through our example and witness. Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen indeed!

Saturday, March 31, 2018

Becky Smith

➤ ***Remember, Easter Vigil service today at 4:30 at
Fresh Air Farm in Bluff Park***

Matthew's story of the empty tomb began at dawn on the first Easter morning. How excited Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were to see that the tomb was empty and to hear the angel of the Lord proclaim that Jesus had risen! Both of these devoted women had been with Jesus at the cross and they had been present when Jesus was placed in the tomb. They were the first people on earth to experience the joy of the resurrection on the first Easter morning.

With fear and great joy the women ran to tell the disciples about the empty tomb. Suddenly, Jesus met the women and they took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then, as instructed, they went to tell the disciples where they should go to meet Jesus. When the eleven disciples met Jesus on the mountain, Jesus did three things:

1. He assured them of His power.
2. He gave them a commission to make the entire world His disciples.
3. He promised them that He would be with them always.

What a glorious hope we have because omnipotent Jesus is alive and He is with us always! The Easter message is the main focus of Christianity. Christ has risen, and because of His resurrection, we as believers have the ultimate hope - eternal life with God and the certainty of life beyond the grave! What specific actions can we take to share this powerful message of hope?

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for giving us victory over sin and death, and we thank you for your assurance of being with us always and forever. Help us to be united as the body of Christ bringing your message of hope to people everywhere. In your Holy name we pray. Amen



Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018



