

HOLY
COMFORTING
FUNNY
ENCOURAGING
CHALLENGING
PRAYERFUL
THOUGHTFUL
WISE
LOVING

WORDS

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2015

GOOD WORDS

Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up. - Proverbs 12:25 (NRSV)

Rev. Emily Wright, Senior Associate Pastor, Roswell Presbyterian Church

Is there a word or words from Scripture that have been meaningful to you during a certain time of your life? Is there a word or words from a family member or friend that were spoken to you during a certain time of your life that have stuck with you through the years? This Lent, we have asked members of the congregation to reflect on these two questions and to give us a “word”.

As I reflect, various words come to mind...

- ...sit up straight (still have the worst posture)
- ...don't talk so loud (still talk too loud)
- ...shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh (maybe just don't talk at all)

And so I toss those negative words aside, sit still, and listen to God's word...

- ...God does not look at outward appearance but at the heart
- ...blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
- ...we will not fear, though the earth should change

These are the words with real power. Power to bring life on a gloomy day; hope at the bottom of a pit; peace in the midst of chaos; and comfort in the midst of grief. These are good words.



SHALOM

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Rev. Zac Morton, Associate Pastor for New Church Development, Roswell Presbyterian Church

The word that grabs me more than any other in Scripture is “Shalom.”

Shalom is a Hebrew word, but you have probably heard it spoken before, especially in Jewish circles. I had the opportunity to live in Israel for two summers, and I heard the word Shalom more than any other. People use shalom to say hello, goodbye, thank you, or simply to wish someone well. It is used in formal settings and casual settings, with close friends or for someone who just held open a door for you.

In our Bibles, shalom often gets translated as “peace,” but it means far more than that. The word shalom refers to God’s peace - the world as God intends for it to be. My experience in the world is that it is currently less than God intends. I often live a life that is less than God intends for me. But the word shalom has reminded me that when my experience is less than, God is greater than, and that God is pulling me, others, and the entire world toward a greater Shalom. It is a word that I try to use often, because it has given me courage, hope, and fulfillment on more than one occasion.

Shalom is hope. Shalom is redemption. Shalom is beauty. Shalom is the moment a tiny baby grasps your finger and smiles at you in wide-eyed wonder. Shalom is for me and for you and for the person waiting for the bus on the side of the road. Shalom is the future - the future God has for all of us, which will be better than any word we have to describe it.

PRAYER (from Numbers 24-26):

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you shalom. Amen

FORGIVENESS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

C.C. Campbell

Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Colossians 3:13 (TLB)

“Charlene, honey, don’t you think it is time you **forgive** Bob?” That was how my very wise Mother began a telephone conversation in 1991. I had been divorced for ten years and thought I was doing “just fine”. However, I finally realized that I was not doing “just fine” but that I was, in fact, holding a grudge that was affecting my behavior and relationships with friends and family.

I had lost my best friend in that divorce. When my worst fears of his lack of steadfast loyalty to me had been confirmed, I could not reconcile with that fact and we ended our marriage of 21 years and friendship of 25 years. We did our best to remain “civil” for our friends, family, and more importantly our three daughters.

Little did I know how my lack of **forgiveness** was wearing on my relationships but, more importantly, on me. And, once I forgave him my world did indeed become a brighter place. Our friendship is again intact. My friends like that, my family likes that, my children especially like that, and I REALLY like that!

PRAYER:

*Lord, thank you for lifting that heavy burden from my shoulders, I love **YOU** for that. Amen*

BE STILL

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Gretchen Collins

Be still and know that I am God...I will be exalted among the Nations, I will be exalted on the earth.

Psalm 46:10

This verse resonates with me as I crave quiet times. I know my need for stillness, peacefulness, and security. That is why this particular verse has long been a favorite.

My busy, on the go, too many commitments lifestyle is familiar to lots of us. I love a challenge and have dozens of interests, as is true of many in our church. I need downtime to counteract this frenetic pace. So please, turn off the TV, the computer, and the many manufactured noises with which we live.

Be Still and let me hear the symphony of chirping, rustling, rippling sounds outside my window.

Be Still and let me listen to the poetry of thoughts that swirl through my mind when there is no background noise.

Be Still and let me see this beautiful world, without the distraction of conversation.

Be Still and let me hear God; let me fall into the silent times in our worship services.

Be Still and let me feel gratitude for the love of dear friends who are my family in this congregation.

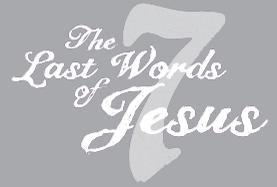
Be Still and let me talk to God; let me know God.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I pray that I do not let distractions and busyness take me away from you. Help me to remember your loving presence and not let worldly clutter separate me from you. Amen

WITH ME IN PARADISE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22 - FIRST SUNDAY in LENT



Seven Last Words of Jesus

Seven short sayings. No one would really even think twice about them in normal situations. But this wasn't a normal situation. And this wasn't a normal man. These were spoken by Jesus... on the cross... while he was dying.

In these words, we see his humanity and his divinity. We see physical pain, abandonment, and the reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus uses common words like "forgive, mother, son, today, thirst" and that most crucial question "why?" These words give us a glimpse of the mysterious, beautiful, and heart-wrenching love of God. His costly love for you and for me.

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:39-43 (NRSV)

SFJTD

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Anita Damon

When my husband, Steven, and I were first married and living in Orlando, Florida, we were members of First Presbyterian Church there. One Sunday, printed in the bulletin, was a little blurb that, as an admitted control freak, caught my eye. I cut it out, placed it in the front of my daily agenda, and to this day often refer back to it. It reads like this:

Good Morning! This is God.

Today I will be handling all of your problems. Please remember that I do not need your help. If you have a situation you cannot handle, do not attempt to resolve it. Kindly put it in the SFJTD (Something For Jesus To Do) box. It will be addressed in My time, not yours.

Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold onto it or remove it. Holding on or removal will delay the resolution of our problem. If it is a situation you think you are capable of handling, please consult Me in prayer to be sure that it is the proper resolution.

Because I do not sleep nor do I slumber, there is no need for you to lose any sleep. Rest My child. If you need to contact Me, I am only a prayer away.

Twenty-five years have passed and that piece of paper is a bit faded, but its message is not. When something stressful is happening in my life, I look to those words for comfort, knowing that in prayer, when I put the problem in God's hands, He will take the burden off my shoulders. As my family will tell you, "letting go" is not in my nature! This is a lifelong challenge as a career worrier! But God has never let me down when I have placed my concerns in the SFJTD box. Now, if I could only master the patience part...

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, please help me to trust You with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding. Amen

FAITH

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Bernie and Janet Dailey

And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

Acts 3:16 (NRSV)

In 2001 when Bernie and I walked through the doors of RPC for the first time, we were greeted by Jerry Bowden. We knew from his friendliness and love for this church, it was going to be our new church home.

After hearing Lane's inspiring sermon that Sunday, we knew we would be back. From that day forward, we knew who to turn to in a time of crisis, not knowing what was in our future; my surgeries and all our four children having very serious issues. Our lives took a huge Dump! There was a point shortly after our youngest son went to prison that we just wanted to give up everything including church. Truly, if there is a God, he would not do this to our family.

After a short period of time, some therapy and counseling, we started regrowing our faith. We grew positive in our life and "Faith" was restored.

We praise God each day for reassuring us as our faith grew. A door opened when our second son gave up his drugs and drinking and turned his life over to a Higher Power. He is now five years' clean. Praise God. We are still struggling with another son, but we have faith, that he too, will find his way. Our daughter has found new counseling that is working for her.

We thank God in all his mercy that we have such a wonderful church with everlasting support.

PRAYER:

Holy God, I thank you for your faithfulness to me. Help me to respond in faith no matter what life brings today. Amen

KINGDOM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Charlotte McFarlin Connah

As a young girl, I was captivated by the idea of “kingdom.” I read every fairy tale I could and was mesmerized by the notion of a far-away land ruled by a prince and everyone lived happily ever after. In Sunday School, I listened intently to lessons on the Kingdom of Heaven where the Prince of Peace reigned, and so began my concept of an eternal Heaven where I hoped to awake one day.

However, in my adult years, I began to wrestle with Jesus’ saying, “The kingdom of God is within you,” (Luke 17:21). I questioned how to fully achieve that, but I had not yet grappled with the other kingdom, the earthly kingdom. It was during a trip to the Holy Land that my whole world was rocked. Visiting the West Bank and the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem brought me face to face with the Lord’s Prayer, which I’d recited all my life, all too quickly and without pause, and consequently missed the core of Jesus’ teaching... “Thy kingdom come **on earth**... as it is in Heaven.” Heaven is the model, not just the final prize saved for last. Sitting on the shore of Galilee in that same place where Jesus uttered, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17), I listened as the Sermon on the Mount was read and realized that Jesus delivered the blueprint in the Beatitudes on how to achieve his kingdom on earth *and* within.

The goal of every Christian is to fully love God, self, and neighbor. So I must ask WHO is my neighbor? Every person in every place on earth without regard to gender, age, race, orientation, political persuasion, or faith tradition has been made by God, in his image, and is my neighbor. How then do I look upon persons and see the image of God? What must I do? What must I sacrifice as I prepare for Easter during this season of Lent? It requires more than not consuming cornbread and chocolate for 40 days! I must give up judgment, prejudice, my ego... and how, knowing that with every day comes a new challenge? I start with the Lord’s Prayer and I *pause*, sitting in silence, awaiting an answer...

PRAYER:

*My Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come; your will be done... **on earth**... (Dear God, help me this day to build your kingdom in this place.) Amen*

GOD HAS A PLAN

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Joan Creviston

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

At a time in my life when I was at a low point and feeling lost and alone, I was reminded by a dear Stephen Minister that God has a plan for my life and I would not be alone. Her words echo in my mind when I need comfort, direction, and purpose in my life.

In reflecting back on my life in times of sadness and feelings of despair, I always turn to God for guidance and direction. It gives me peace and comfort knowing that God is in charge of my life and that He has always provided for my daily needs and spiritual nourishment.

PRAYER:

For your Guidance and Steadfast Love, God. I am truly grateful. Amen

BAD NEWS TRUMPED BY GOOD NEWS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Chris DeGrace

I recently had to deliver some bad news in a work meeting, and struggled for some time trying to find the “right” way to phrase it. This was not news that would alter the course of anyone’s life, but it was very awkward and I dreaded it. After pondering on it for a few weeks, the day was upon me and I still didn’t know what to say.

The night before, I lay awake in bed worrying, and dreading daylight and the meeting that it brought. At 3:00 a.m. I gave up getting any sleep and retreated downstairs to the safety of my favorite spot in the house, my “Archie Bunker” chair. I noticed my wife’s copy of *Jesus Calling* on the side table, so I decided to check out the current day’s devotional.

To my surprise it dealt with my exact problem, handling a difficult situation and viewing it as a “rich opportunity” from God. The scripture from Isaiah 30:20-21 reads:

20 Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. 21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

The devotional encouraged me to open myself to what God was teaching me through this problem and that by doing so it would lose its power over me. I said a short prayer thanking God for this opportunity and asking for the strength, courage, and wisdom to face it.

When the time came for my meeting later that morning, I still didn’t know what I would say, but instead of feeling the typical symptoms of anxiety, I felt a calmness come over me. I’m not sure I said the “right” words, but with God’s help, I faced my problem and it **did** lose its power over me. Although I knew that God would be with me, the scripture from the devotional opened my eyes to a different way of thinking of a problem as a lesson, with God as my tutor.

PRAYER:

Father, help me to open my heart to your lessons so that I can overcome my problems that seem insurmountable. Amen

SIMPLE TRUTH

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Carrie Weatherford, Director of Youth Ministry, Roswell Presbyterian Church

Several years ago, I found myself in a particularly hard place in life. As I was discussing this with a friend, he offered advice that I found extremely helpful. He said, “Carrie, write down a list of a few simple truths that you can cling to and that will give you strength each day.” At that point in my life, many things felt chaotic, so the idea of writing a few simple truths was extremely appealing! In my quest to find simple truths I would cling to, I went to Scripture. One of the first to make the list is one of my favorite passages, Romans 8:28.

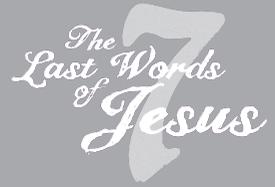
Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” The simple truth is that this Scripture gives us assurance that God is working for our good. It doesn’t mean that bad things don’t or won’t happen, but it does mean that I can trust that no matter what, God is always for me. The fact that God is at work is also comforting. We have a God that doesn’t just sit around and watch the comings and goings of people. We have a God who walks with us and is always at work even when we’re not or we can’t be. Truly, if God is for me who can be against me (Romans 8:31)? These are the truths to which I cling.

PRAYER:

Holy God, in this season of Lent, may we cling to the truth that you are a God who is faithful, who loves us, who is always working for our good, and who would make the ultimate sacrifice for us to have eternal life through Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen

WOMAN, HERE IS YOUR SON

SUNDAY, MARCH 1 - SECOND SUNDAY in LENT



Seven Last Words of Jesus

Seven short sayings. No one would really even think twice about them in normal situations. But this wasn't a normal situation. And this wasn't a normal man. These were spoken by Jesus... on the cross... while he was dying.

In these words, we see his humanity and his divinity. We see physical pain, abandonment, and the reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus uses common words like "forgive, mother, son, today, thirst" and that most crucial question "why?" These words give us a glimpse of the mysterious, beautiful, and heart-wrenching love of God. His costly love for you and for me.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:25-27 (NRSV)

CONTENT

MONDAY, MARCH 2

Lynn Durham

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:12-13

When I was growing up, my best friend talked about her parents' marriage and said they were "content," which for her was a negative. In her mind, content meant boring. Content meant stale. Content meant unsatisfied in some way. I accepted that definition as my own. Don't we all want excitement? Passion? Growth? Who would want to just be content?

As an adult, I have a completely different view of contentment. I now see it as being gratified, serene, and fulfilled. I pray for that in my life. I could easily be described as a "Type A" personality - always rushing to do more, be better, and achieve success. I love goals and measuring things. But the older I get, the more I ask the Lord to help me slow down, appreciate the incredible blessings in my life, and be content with who I am and what I have.

I love the Apostle Paul's phrasing in his letter to the Philippians - the secret of being content. It is like a secret - something hidden - because, in today's world, we are expected to constantly want more. We admire overachievers who have made a lot of money, or have a nicer house than ours, or whose children are better behaved than ours. Aren't we supposed to strive for more? But I crave the peace of contentment and I know I truly can do "everything through him who gives me strength" and that gives me hope to live a fulfilled life.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, please lead me to be content in all things simply through the knowledge that I am a child of God and nothing could ever be better than that. Amen

23rd PSALM

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

Rick and Louise "Petie" Bush

When I was eight or nine years of age, I often visited my dear friend, Ms. Artie T. Aylor, a beautiful, kind, elderly lady in her eighties. Before she passed away, she created and presented me with a personal, handwritten journal, which was inscribed with Bible verses. One of the verses in the journal was the 23rd Psalm. This was such a treasure to me. Though I did not know it at the time, that verse would help me get through many dark days. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

The hardest time of my life was during my early weeks of pregnancy. I developed a blood clot in my brain due to the pregnancy. Over the weeks, as doctors tried to deal with my condition, my husband Rick and I were not given encouraging news. We were told that it was not wise to continue the pregnancy over fear for my health. Rick and I were devastated and very conflicted over what to do. Through my prayers, I experienced an indescribable peace that allowed me the strength and confidence to continue with my pregnancy. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Fast forward almost 27 years and our daughter, Suzanne, is now married and expecting our first grandchild later this year. God is awesome! *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your unconditional love, mercy, and grace and for holding us in the palm of your mighty hands when we have to walk through life's dark and frightening valleys. Amen

STRENGTH

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Sarah Dunlap

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak... Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29, 31

Lent is a time for reflection. Typically, we pray for strength to follow the journey to the cross, draw closer to the life we were shown to live through Christ's example.

Dear friends of my family welcomed their first grandsons on October 7, 2014; the twins were born at 24 weeks. Doctors were not overly optimistic in the first weeks of life as the babies weighed only 1 lb. 7 oz. and 1 lb. 9 oz. respectively. However, here we are at week 12 (still in the NICU) and both boys are growing stronger every day. The mom, Leigh Anne, emailed me today and both babies are approximately 4 lbs. Each week, Leigh Anne has written an update on the boys; starting each one with a Bible verse and about how God has blessed her and her family.

The focus of our faith is often on what can the church do for us: answer our prayers, give us salvation, or get us through a difficult challenge.

As I reflect on the journey we walk through this Lenten time, I am reminded by the strength of this Christian mother that we are to walk this journey, carry the cross with Jesus close by our sides every day.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, you know every decision I need to make and every challenge I face. I need You to give me strength, wisdom, and direction. Amen

KEEP IT SIMPLE SUSAN: JESUS IS A SUPERHERO

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Susan Burkett

“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Susan), we have all heard it many times, your last “S” was probably something like “Sweetie” or “Sugar”, I just happen to have an “S” name that fits perfectly. The saying has become a bit of a cliché, but the words are beyond meaningful to my family. If my Dad ever owned a mantra, it was **K.I.S.S.** We heard it all the time because he made it relevant from doing math homework to learning how to ski down a mountain slope. Don’t try to reinvent the wheel, do what you’re supposed to do, once you’ve got that down pat, build up from there.

In the wake of my Dad’s passing this year, I was forced to look into the eyes of my then three-year-old, the Frick to my Dad’s Frack, and explain where Poppy went and why he couldn’t see him anymore. My faith was confronted hard and fast by Jake’s significant questions about Poppy, Jesus, and Heaven. Though simply and innocently asked, they were the important questions, the real ones that form our Christian faith’s foundation. How do you simplify the magnificence of Heaven and Jesus’ greatest gift for a three-year-old to understand? While I do not have those answers (I can only pray that I did okay to help lay his Christian foundation), I heard my Dad whispering **K.I.S.S.** in my ear with each question he asked.

One particular morning we were in the car, the sky was the bluest of blue, the color of my Dad’s eyes, and the clouds were heavenly. I caught Jake gazing at the sky and I asked what he was thinking. His answer: “Jesus is a Superhero!!” **K.I.S.S.** - “Yes, yes He is.” Because, it is true that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. He heals the sick, feeds the masses with one single loaf of bread, made a blind man see, He died for us, and is risen. All miraculous feats. So in our family, we are sure that Jesus is a Superhero, and the greatest one at that!

PRAYER:

*It is my Lenten prayer that we all take time to **K.I.S.S.** and revisit what it’s like to have a child-like faith, with the intention of firming our own foundation, even if it means to picture Jesus in a Superhero cape for just a moment. Amen*

THERE IS A PLAN

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

Tammy Borngesser

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

This scripture is important to me as it helps me to understand that there is a plan, even if you don't see it right ahead of you.

I'm sure everyone can think of times where God has really come to light and impacted their lives. I did not grow up in church and did not really discover God until early adolescence. My mother was dating my now stepfather, who's father was a Presbyterian Youth Minister. We called him Pop, and Pop was my first introduction to church. I loved him and admired him very much and was so happy that my mother found this amazing family that welcomed us with open arms.

When I was a young teenager, 13 years old, I struggled with problems, as most teenagers do, with insecurities and peer pressure, and I was not going in a positive direction. At that point in time, if your parents were divorced, you got to choose who you wanted to live with when you turned 13 years old. I was at the point where I got to make the choice, to either stay with my mother or go to live with my father. If I stayed with my mother, I would continue down this negative path, and my parents would continue to argue. Also, I felt that my mother's boyfriend loved her very much but was nervous to marry her because she had a teenage daughter. I knew that if I moved in with my father, it would solve a lot of financial problems, and that there was a good chance my mother would marry into this amazing family that I was so hoping we could be a part of.

I prayed very hard for help with my adult decision that I had to make as a young girl. Ultimately, I chose to move in with my father because I felt like it was the best decision. I really think God helped me through that very tough time when I needed strength.

Really getting to know your father for the first time, as a teenage girl, is no easy task, but in the end, it turned out to be the very best thing for my family. It's my testimony that I truly believe God has a plan for each and everyone of us. We may not feel it at the times we are making tough decisions, but if you pray for the right path, it will come to light in some way.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I thank you for your guidance and I truly appreciate the many blessings you have provided to me and my family. I will continue to follow the path you lead for me. Amen

ORDINARY

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

Linda Carlyle

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

Romans 12:6a

How many times do you feel just plain ordinary, not smart enough or talented enough to handle a responsibility? You feel inadequate. Then you are the person God loves to use to show his extraordinary power. Feeling inadequate is the right mindset that he uses because you have to rely on his power and not your own. When God puts something on your mind, he is speaking to you to fulfill his will. In fact, feeling inadequate is almost a spiritual requirement for the job. Think of all the people God used in the Bible including the twelve disciples. They were ordinary men chosen to be his instruments to spread his message. You have read about the fathers of the faith that God chose to do his mighty deeds, but some replied, "Me? Not me. Please send someone else!"

God knows our gifts and talents. He chooses us even when that talent isn't fully developed. Our responsibility is to take that first step in faith. God always chooses work perfectly suited to us even when we beg to differ. He will enable you to do what he asks when you obey him.

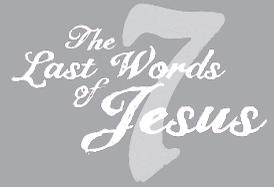
Once I was asked to fulfill a church duty that I felt extremely inadequate for. My response was, "I'm not as talented as... I can't be (super church worker extraordinaire's name inserted)..." but I was asked to prayerfully consider it, which I did. In talking to a Christian friend about my dilemma, she had the perfect response. She said, "What an honor and God must want you to grow!" As a Christian, keep your mind and heart open to what God wants you to do. He knows you better than you know yourself. Grow into your gifts and share them.

PRAYER:

Loving Father, Help me to listen to your still, quiet voice. Knowing that what I give, I receive, help me to return gratefully the gifts I have received from you. Amen

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

SUNDAY, MARCH 8 - THIRD SUNDAY in LENT



Seven Last Words of Jesus

Seven short sayings. No one would really even think twice about them in normal situations. But this wasn't a normal situation. And this wasn't a normal man. These were spoken by Jesus... on the cross... while he was dying.

In these words, we see his humanity and his divinity. We see physical pain, abandonment, and the reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus uses common words like "forgive, mother, son, today, thirst" and that most crucial question "why?" These words give us a glimpse of the mysterious, beautiful, and heart-wrenching love of God. His costly love for you and for me.

The Death of Jesus

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

Mark 15:33-36 (NRSV)

KEEP MY HEAD UP

MONDAY, MARCH 9

Sara Ballantine

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2

Psalm 121 was my mother's favorite passage in the Scriptures, and it certainly is one of my favorites as well. During this season of Lent, I am reminded again of this passage.

On our walk through Lent, the journey can be rough and tough as we focus on a more simple life, as we give up certain pleasures, and as we look inward and reflect on who we are. The demands, pressures, and temptations of our daily lives can certainly make staying on track a challenge. How comforting it is to know our help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

As a young girl, my grandmother often told me to walk with my head up, always looking forward, not at my feet. With my head up, it is easy to look to the hills and know my help is there. All I need to do is ask.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me to keep my head up, and may my journey through this season of Lent be smoother as you wrap your arms around me and guide me along the way. Amen

COMFORT FROM GOD'S WORD

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

Suzie Consoer

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Work, school, kids, homework, extracurricular activities, and the list goes on. It doesn't take much to realize how stressful our lives can get. In the midst of it all, I try to keep myself calm, but not always with complete success. That's why this verse from Proverbs is so helpful. I call it my "go-to" verse whenever I'm in a troubling time or have some doubts. The words always make things a little clearer.

My dad, who passed away 18 years ago, was a huge influence in my life. His passion for living every day to its fullest was something I loved and something I've always striven for in my life. One of my dad's favorite Bible passages was Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of The Lord forever.

He would read it almost daily, and I now read it often and it gives me such great comfort. As we get closer to Easter Sunday, I am so thankful to call RPC my church home... and I pray that all of us will find clarity and comfort from God's word.

PRAYER:

God my shepherd, help me to trust you today with all of my heart. Lead me beside still waters today so that my soul may be refreshed. Amen

HOPE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11

Julianne Shirek, Director of Middle School Ministry, Roswell Presbyterian Church

But as for me, I will always have hope. I will praise You more and more.

Psalm 71:14

Hope is a word that I cling to when it seems like I can't do anything else, and Psalm 71:14 is a verse that I have stored away in my heart for the past 10+ years, especially during the more difficult seasons. I can't tell you how many times I have repeated that verse in my head, trying with all my might to actually do what it says. And let's be real... ALWAYS having hope isn't the easiest thing. When I am in the middle of what seems like the darkest of nights and daybreak seems light-years away, it certainly doesn't feel like I have hope.

But I do. The trick is reminding myself of that. I love looking back and seeing proof of God's faithfulness in my life. Proof that He is for me. Proof that I do, in fact, have reason to hope. Time and time again, He has brought me through seasons of feeling completely shattered, and He has restored me. When it seems like everything is falling apart, I remind myself that in Him, all things hold together. And for that, and so much more, I praise Him. The more I focus on praising Him more and more and more for who He is and all He has done in my life, the easier it is for me to hope.

During this Lenten season, may we be reminded of the ultimate, everlasting hope we have in the death and resurrection of Jesus. When life is going well, we have hope. When things are broken, we have hope. When our circumstances are crazy and chaotic and confusing, we have hope. Because of Jesus, we have hope. Always. May we remember that truth.

PRAYER:

Dear God, I praise You for who You are and for all You have done. Help me to live out Psalm 71:14 and to remember that because of Jesus, there is always hope. Amen

FAITH

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

Amy Schroder

Lent is a time of reflection. When I reflect on my journey to this point in my life, to this town, to these people, and to this church, I have one consistent theme... Faith. My faith has been, at times, the only thing that has stayed true about my belief in my relationship with God. When all other things seemed blurred, my Faith was clear.

I was honored and excited and mostly apprehensive when asked to write a Lenten Devotional. I have never done anything like this and admit I have only owned my own Bible for a few months. What it forced me to do is put my Faith into Action. It required me to explore the meaning of Faith and it solidified for me, that my Faith in Jesus was exactly what brought me to this point in my life.

The Bible tells me in Hebrews 11:1: Faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance about what we do not see. I have limited knowledge of scripture and this topic had me searching all things related to Faith in the Bible. I came across Proverbs 3:4 which says: Let love and faithfulness never leave you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and people.

In my time of reflection during this Lent season, I am grateful, confident, and assured that if I have nothing else to hold on to, I have Faith and with that, I have God's Favor.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for faith! Thank you for the favor that you give to me even when I do not feel or deserve it. Amen

A PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING

FRIDAY, MARCH 13

Bonnie Braine

My mom, a lifelong Bible study attendee, knows a lot of scripture by heart. Over the years as I struggled with worries and concerns - some big and some that just seemed big at the time - she's often said to me to remember that as Christians, we can have a peace that passes understanding. Every time she would say those words to me, I'd think to myself "...down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart! Where? Down in my heart!!" Remember the children's choir song, "I've got the joy [joy, joy, joy] down in my heart"?

It wasn't until about ten years ago after the birth of my oldest child that I really understood what those words from the song and from Philippians 4:7 actually mean: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It's been a real relief to me to think on these words and actively try and place my worries and concerns in God's hands. I may not understand why things are the way they are; whether it's hungry children on the other side of the world, crime in our community, or even why my child didn't do what I expected him to do. "He's got the whole world in his hands" (remember that song, too?) and if we can remember this, we can have peace without having to have the understanding. God is in control.

PRAYER:

*Holy God, fill my life with peace that passes understanding today. May this peace bring joy to my heart.
Amen*

LISTEN AND FOLLOW

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

Judy Bredahl

Give to everyone who asks you, and from one, who takes your things, don't ask for them back. Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them.

Luke 6:30-31

My husband and I were out driving recently and saw a car pulled over to the side of the road with the hood up. A man was standing beside the car on his crutches. We decided to stop and help if we could. The man had run out of gas with his family in the car and had forgotten his wallet and cell phone. A policeman had spoken to him and was sending a tow truck with gasoline, but the man needed money to pay for the gas. We gave him the money he needed and continued on our way.

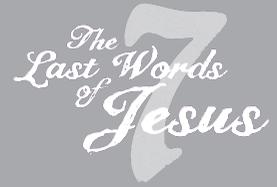
In this Lenten season, listen for God's words of guidance and most important of all, follow them.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, please help us to know what it is you would have us do and give us the courage to accomplish it in your name. Amen

I AM THIRSTY

SUNDAY, MARCH 15 - FOURTH SUNDAY in LENT



Seven Last Words of Jesus

Seven short sayings. No one would really even think twice about them in normal situations. But this wasn't a normal situation. And this wasn't a normal man. These were spoken by Jesus... on the cross... while he was dying.

In these words, we see his humanity and his divinity. We see physical pain, abandonment, and the reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus uses common words like "forgive, mother, son, today, thirst" and that most crucial question "why?" These words give us a glimpse of the mysterious, beautiful, and heart-wrenching love of God. His costly love for you and for me.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."

John 19:28 (NRSV)

BLESSINGS

MONDAY, MARCH 16

Fran Abbott

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

I have always loved Paul's letters. The ones to the church in Corinth have always spoken to me especially, as I frequently find myself turning to them. My husband has been battling stage 4 cancer for the last three years. While we and many others pray every day for his healing, I'd like to share some of the many astonishing Blessings we have received on this journey.

These Blessings come from so many directions. Every time Rick's weekly blood work has no new flags, every scan that comes back without new growth, every cancer marker report that comes back lower; all these things are huge Blessings. Yet, there are so many others, the greatest of which is time.

My husband worked 60-70 hours a week from March to November for many years. When this diagnosis forced his retirement, we rediscovered each other in whole new ways. He has rediscovered his love of nature, photography, gardening, and me! There are too many Blessings to count.

We are fortunate enough to live near our youngest grandchild, Michael, who at 2 1/2 years old, is Pop's best friend. One of God's greatest Blessings is watching the two of them together, seeing the joy and love between them and the patience with which Rick spends time with him. Whether it is playing Hide and Seek in the trees in the backyard, or helping him ride his truck, or feeding the birds and squirrels, or cuddled in the chair reading; time with Michael heals my husband far more than any medicine.

From the superior doctors who saved Rick's life and all of his parts, to the wonderful caregivers we've met throughout his treatment, to the many who continue to support and pray with and for us, God has put many angels in our path.

As we prepare to celebrate God's greatest gift of all, everlasting life, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, let us know that prayers are answered every day in many ways. If we keep our focus on the unseen, invite the Holy Spirit in every day so that we may focus on our many Blessings, not our temporary trials.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for the amazing Blessings revealed in so many ways. Help me to hold your right hand through each and every day so that I may see them all and rejoice in your Love. In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen

STILL GOD'S WORLD

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

Greg Billups

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Matthew 6:26-27

How many of you have ever experienced worry? I certainly have. With the 24/7 news reports letting us know of all the bad things going on in this world it can be hard not to worry. Jesus has a different take on worry. He tells us to look at our surroundings for evidence that we have a Father that cares for us.

It makes sense when you think about it. Consider the birds all around us and consider the details that God took in creating them. Their wings, eyes, even the sounds they make. They are all created for a purpose. Think of all the detail and planning that went into creating them. Now think of how God has created us in his image and what all that took. Surely God would never create a being that he had no intention of taking care of!

I have always found great comfort in these words. Yes, bad things will happen and will continue to happen. Yet when worries and anxieties plague us we can always look outside and be reminded that this is still God's world.

PRAYER:

Lord, help us to remember that this is still your world and that you are in control. Amen

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

Jonathan Dawe

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ instructs us saying, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* This guidance from Christ frequently reminds me to focus my attention on eternity and the life of my spirit each day, rather than keeping my consciousness pitifully restricted to the physical, material, and egotistical worries and concerns of daily human life in the earthly world.

Each day at breakfast, I say a little prayer of thanks and ask that my morning meal be used to nourish my body with health, strength, flexibility, and endurance so that I may be of service to God’s will and the Kingdom of Heaven. That my life be used in the pursuit of Christ’s purpose for me in whatever I do that day. There is no greater treasure than to feel the joy of walking with Christ and attempting to live in humble imitation of His example.

Houses, cars, clothing, riches, praise, and human life itself pass away, but the soul endures. I want my heart to be always where the real treasure is. Mother Theresa once said that God does not ask that we do great things, just that we do small things each day with great love. When we serve Christ, we are enriched beyond earthly measures.

PRAYER:

Lord God, help us daily to see our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only treasure truly worth pursuing, and let our actions always be according to this knowledge. Amen

FREIGHT TRAIN

THURSDAY, MARCH 19

Laura McNeill

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

For those of you who don't know, these past three years have been quite a roller coaster: a divorce, custody battle, selling our old home, moving to a new home, a new school for the kids, and starting a new job for me, all while raising my three beautiful children as a single parent. Not one to complain, I have weathered this storm but not without moments when I doubted God's plan, questioned my faith, or felt like throwing in the towel.

The verse I selected has been my rock for these trials. I read it almost nightly and some nights more than once, until the words truly sink in. God never promised it would be easy. I am sure he didn't say "Paul, go preach my word and your path will be smooth." Nor did Job have an easy go of it to say the least. Peter, the Rock, doesn't speak of Christ's way as being simple. But what I know to be true is this: Nothing, no earthly challenge, will separate me from His love. He never let me get to the end of my rope, close at times, but I always felt His presence gently pulling me back up and His constant guidance on what to do next and how to weather the next storm.

During these times, my faithful earthly father would say, "Hang on; there is a light at the end of the tunnel." To which I would reply, "But, Daddy, what if it is a freight train?" He would say, "have faith, honey, it isn't." Now on the other side of the tunnel, I realize that light was God's steadfast love, amazing grace, and Holy Spirit.

God didn't promise easy, but He did promise He would never leave us. The journey has taught me to find comfort in those words.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your steadfast love which endures forever. Amen

BLESSED BE YOUR NAME

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

Jackson Casstevens

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

One of my favorite verses has always been Proverbs 3:5-6. I have found it has been very meaningful to me throughout the different seasons of life. But recently I have appreciated the verse even more due to difficult experiences. I have always liked this verse because it reminds me that God is always doing things behind the scenes.

I just went through a transitional period in life (I just graduated from college) and I could not (and cannot still) see how God wanted my life to progress; what route my life was going to take. And this bothered me. I like to know what's ahead so that I can plan for it! But if I just trust him, he will work everything out for me, which is what this verse promises. He will make the path in front of me appear straight. And I can look straight ahead at him as I walk through life.

Along with that verse, there is a song that has stood out to me that always gives me joy no matter what I'm experiencing. I have called it my "bread and butter" song, even though that may not be the appropriate use of that expression. But I consider it my go-to worship song. The song is called "Blessed be your Name", and I love it because it is about blessing God no matter the circumstances. Through the best of life and the lowest points we experience, God's name is always blessed. I can rejoice amidst suffering, and I can praise Him for His goodness. Both the song and the Proverbs verse have given me something to set my eyes upon and hope in on a daily basis.

PRAYER:

God, I pray that you remind us of your worthiness, that your name is blessed in whatever circumstances we are experiencing, and that you give us faith to trust you. Amen

PRIDE

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

Traci Churchill

I frequently read the Bible indirectly - that is, through another inspiring source that leads me back to it - and so it was during a particularly difficult passage of my life that I picked up a book gathering dust on my shelf, *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis. Even more indirectly, being a child of the '60s, it was the introduction by Charles "Chuck" W. Colson (of Watergate fame) that galvanized me. I have never forgotten the first time I read these words:

It was one of the extraordinary moments of my life. The words from that book - Mere Christianity, written by the great English Scholar C.S. Lewis - ripped through the protective armor in which I had unknowingly encased myself for forty-one years. Lewis wrote about man's great sin - his pride - as a spiritual cancer.

The events of my life flashed before me. I thought I had been driven by a desire to provide for my family, build a good law firm, serve my country. But in reality what I was doing all those years was feeding my pride, proving how good I was. Lewis convinced me that all my efforts had been in vain, that in my drive for the top I had missed the real pinnacle - to know God in a personal way.

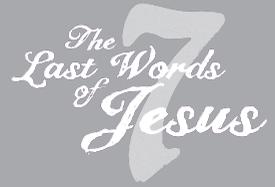
And so it was that I learned that pride is a sin that kills from the inside out, and that, unwittingly, unfaithfully, I had spent the majority of my life a victim of - and committing - the sin of pride. All of the pieces of my then-shattered life started to come back together after this.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Help us to realize that we are not on this journey of life alone, and that we may share joy as well as sorrow with those around us, and find strength in the support we receive in times of pain. Amen

IT IS FINISHED

SUNDAY, MARCH 22 - FIFTH SUNDAY in LENT



Seven Last Words of Jesus

Seven short sayings. No one would really even think twice about them in normal situations. But this wasn't a normal situation. And this wasn't a normal man. These were spoken by Jesus... on the cross... while he was dying.

In these words, we see his humanity and his divinity. We see physical pain, abandonment, and the reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus uses common words like "forgive, mother, son, today, thirst" and that most crucial question "why?" These words give us a glimpse of the mysterious, beautiful, and heart-wrenching love of God. His costly love for you and for me.

A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:29-30 (NRSV)

LIGHT

MONDAY, MARCH 23

Carla Wren

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light.”

Matthew 6:22

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:14-16

Both of these scriptures have been my “go-to passages” anytime I’ve been going through struggles. Like many over the years, there have been cancer scares, loss of jobs, deaths in the family, that have resulted in a deep sense of depression. Days turned into weeks, weeks somehow turned into months. At my lowest point, I decided to pray and open my Bible. I had hoped that I could find comfort and asked God to guide me to a passage that would give me comfort. It was these passages that I found.

Sometime later I realized that like Christ carrying the cross, we all have our own burdens to carry. But it is through these times that I became closer to God. These struggles have taught me to open my heart and eyes. Through the cancer, I learned I was stronger than I once thought. Through a job loss, I learned that I was open to new career possibilities, and through a death in the family, I learned empathy. So while we all go through burdens, we also grow in faith and a greater understanding of who we are as individuals and how we can make ‘heaven on earth’.

“With one hand the past holds us back and the other moves us forward.” Let the hand that moves us forward be the hand that makes us stronger.

PRAYER:

Light of the World you shine down into darkness. Open my eyes, let me see. Amen

BE STILL

TUESDAY, MARCH 24

Rev. Laura Dorsey

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Psalm 46:10 (NRSV)

I bonded with this phrase from Psalm 46:10 long ago! Did I discover it on my own or was it part of a lesson? I have no idea, but I took hold of it for a lifetime.

There are other biblical references along this line. In the Book of Numbers, Moses asks others “to stand still so that he may hear”. In 1 Samuel, it says “stand still awhile that I may show you the word of God”, and “stand still that I may reason with you before the Lord”. A verse in Job says “stand still and consider the wonderful works of God”. Another beloved Psalm offers “commune with your own heart”. Each of these strengthens my attachment to “Be still and know that I am God.”

The passage provides what I need to live within my faith. Through the years as a youngster, a parent, a professional, around questions, across barriers, and in spite of derailments, I am given permission to be quiet and listen. Sometimes I claim that quiet where I am. At other times, I discover this in a garden or sanctuary. Invariably I am found, nurtured, and blessed.

Belonging, being in relationship with God requires no pushing or shoving. But the journey toward Jerusalem with Jesus is noisy and confusing. All the more reason I am drawn to this stillness that I may hear His instruction, be with Him along the triumphal entry, sense rejection, and understand His parables and prophecies. In this way, I discover anew what I have known and experienced.

PRAYER:

Eternal God, we give thanks this day for your love and guidance. Be with us and enfold us in your peace as we journey alongside one another. In Christ name we pray, Amen

UNFAILING LOVE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

Carmen Ebbing, Office Manager, Roswell Presbyterian Church

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever.

Psalm 107:1

Have you ever felt alone - that no one loved you or cared about you?

I felt that way several years ago after my divorce. I had family and friends that loved and cared for me but there was something missing.

I told a friend how I was feeling and he told me to go to my Bible and instead of searching for a verse - let the book open where it wants. Psalm 107 was the book and chapter - I read verse one and that was it! When I did eventually read the whole chapter - every verse applied.

I did not realize I had pushed aside my faith in the Lord's unfailing love. I was not alone, He was always and had always been with me and watching over me.

When I accepted this then I was able to go back to being me, pretty good at my job, enjoying life with a bit of sassiness, and that my glass is always more than half full!

PRAYER:

Good and gracious God, thank you for your constant presence and assurance in my life, yesterday, today, and forever. Amen

TOMORROW

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

Chuck Cape

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:34

I’m a planner. Perhaps it’s my engineering background. Or perhaps I’m an engineer because I’m a planner. Regardless, I feel most comfortable when I know what’s going to happen. This is my normal. Tomorrow is going to be ok because I have a pretty good idea of what’s going to happen.

The problem, I’ve determined, is life. While life can be beautiful, life is also slippery. Often messy. And life definitely pays no attention to my plans. And it’s always some random day, when... everything... changes.

In 2014, for Sharon and I, that day was a Thursday in June, when we lost our son, Paul. At this point, it’s still too soon to see the lessons. Perhaps they’re there. But for now, as we go through that first year with holidays and birthdays and other anniversaries, the grief is still too big. Like having a giant weight on your chest and it just doesn’t want to loosen up.

And yet... I have no doubt that God has been with us through this ordeal (although to be honest, I can’t say that I’ve always felt that). But I have seen it, in several ways (particularly recently) where things that had absolutely no business of working out... just did. Coincidence? Maybe... but I don’t think so. I think that perhaps this is God’s way of reminding us that we don’t need to worry about tomorrow so much. He’s got it under control, and for us to remember that today is what matters.

So take that extra moment... right now... tell your spouse that you love them... play with your kids... call your Dad... or visit an old friend.

Because tomorrow doesn’t always come... all because of a random Thursday. Yes, life is slippery. And that’s when God says, “Take My Hand”.

PRAYER:

Lord, I give you tomorrow... Beginning today. Amen

IN JESUS, I AM FREE

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Heidi Cantrell

“How has your life changed since you became a Christian?” I was caught off guard recently when someone I had just met asked me this question. I admit I had to think about it. Ask me my testimony and it rolls off my tongue, but how have I been since? I was surprised that I couldn’t immediately answer. “Of course my life is different!” I wanted to shout. But how, exactly? Then the words fell into my mouth. “Free, I am free.” Yes, I have found freedom through Jesus. It is written, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:1-2

I’ve heard that verse hundreds of times, but for the first time I *listened*. God gave up his Son to die on a cross so that I may have a life free from the law of sin and death. If God has not condemned me, then what power does the world have over me? The world says we must act a certain way, live a certain way, raise children a certain way. But my Lord has freed me from the ways of the world. I am free to follow the path He has laid for me. My path may be different from yours, but as a Christian, I am free to celebrate you on your journey and not carry the baggage of judgment that comes from a worldly view.

Freedom in Christ also gives peace of mind. There are many things I do not understand in the Bible nor can I defend every verse. I cannot rationalize the Creation story with the fossil record, but it does not shake my faith. I have peace that God knows the answer and He is, after all, in charge. I am free to live without fear of the unknown, for He knows all and I am His.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I am so thankful that you sacrificed your life so that I may freely live. Thank you for taking sin and fear with you to the cross and leaving them there. Please help me to acknowledge the worldly ways that bind me so that I may give them to you and live truly free in your grace. Amen

MY PARENT

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

Julia Stoll, Preschool Counselor, Roswell Presbyterian Preschool

Lord, I am your child and you are my parent.

When I am an infant, you feed me. You keep me safe and warm. You show me that a strong attachment to you makes me a secure person.

When I am a toddler and my emotions run wild, you soothe me. You calm me in my tantrums and teach me to manage my feelings.

When I am School age, you show me knowledge, guide me in the ways of human connection, and you help me recognize and acknowledge my gifts.

When I am a teenager, you settle my impulses and lead me back to the ways of good.

When I am an adult, remind me that child of God is a child of God no matter the age. You continue to feed me, to calm me, to show me knowledge, and lead me to good.

Lord, I am forever your child and you are forever my parent.

Amen

A WORD FROM THE CENTURION

MARCH 29 - PALM SUNDAY

The Death of Jesus

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Luke 23:44-49 (NRSV)

THINK

MONDAY, MARCH 30

The Reverend Dr. Lane Alderman, Pastor, Roswell Presbyterian Church

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20 (NRSV)

When I was in elementary school, my father came home from a conference and gave me a small desk paperweight with the word "THINK" on it. From that point on it sat in my room or on my desk. It went to college and seminary with me, and it has been on my desk at all three churches I have served.

It's a double reminder for me... it reminds me of the mountains of advice and wisdom and love my father has shared with me over the years. I would not be who I am today without the guidance he has given to me. He is a wise father, but he is also an accomplished churchman who knows and understands the inner workings of a church. Whenever I have had a challenging issue to face in the church, he has always been one of the first people to whom I turn. That paperweight reminds me of his support for my ministry.

But it is also a piece of outstanding advice that I try to remember as well. When faced with one of those challenging issues, I know that I need to stop... and pray... and think. I also know that when I have forgotten that advice and acted too rashly, it has almost always backfired on me!

For me, that little sign is a reminder of James' challenge when he cautions us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger." In word... we need to think before we act. I'm convinced that the world... our marriages... our jobs... our lives would be better if we took that simple piece of guidance more seriously!

PRAYER:

Gracious Lord, thank you for the wisdom from those who love us, and thank you for the reminder to slow down before I respond. Remind me anew to think... to be quick to listen and slow to speak. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

REMEMBER

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

Robert Brannon

Most often, when Lenten season comes around, I find myself somewhat caught off guard. I'm still recalling the joy of Christmas when we so richly celebrated our Savior's birth with worship and beautiful music. Not only do we remember the sacred event of Jesus' birth, but we also recall the many warm memories of family, church, and friends. And to me, this Lenten season is as much about remembrance as Christmas is.

When I think back to my early days, I remember that the Holy Scriptures were first read to me by my mother and father, Sunday school teachers, and long succession of dedicated preachers. Undoubtedly, I have these dear souls to thank for my belief in Jesus Christ.

Now, as the season has returned, I begin to read again and remember certain Bible stories that have become the core of my personal belief. Especially compelling in the Gospels are the verses telling of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His teaching of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Later on, the accounts of His struggles in the wilderness, His sufferings, and His ultimate sacrifice through death on the cross are the bedrock of my faith today.

As I look ahead toward the coming of Easter, I will remember my loved ones who gave my foundation in Christ's Church. My aim will be to spend less time on my priorities and to devote more time to what He has in plan. The ancient Irish poet continues to inspire me with the hymn that ends "Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all."

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, may we use our time wisely during Lent to remember and reflect upon your greatest gift, Jesus, who is our Lord and Savior. Amen

ALWAYS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Jody B. Danneman

I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Psalm 121:1-4 (NRSV)

Psalm 121 has always resonated with me; and even though I heard it many times as a child in church and Bible studies, it wasn't until I heard it during my sophomore year at college that it really touched me.

Hollywood tends to focus on the social aspects of being a college student. Yet, we all know that there can be extreme stress with doing well academically, fitting in with your peers, and living for the first time on your own away from home. In many ways, college can be a time of loneliness, even though people surround you.

This scripture comforted me by saying that I wasn't alone - that the God of the universe was with me always. This God, who created the Earth and everything on it, was always going to be there for *me*. He would be there all the time and anytime. He never took a break or time off. God loved and was always there for me.

It was this realization that gave me a new sense of purpose, a feeling of tranquility, and a grounded confidence because my God was with me always.

The funny thing about these lessons you learn at a young age is that they can tend to fade, as you get older. Yet, I have found that in today's world when all the distractions tug at you and drag you down... all you have to do is lift up your eyes to the hills and find God there for you.

PRAYER:

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for never turning your back, for never taking a vacation, and for never sleeping. Thank you Lord for always being there for us. Amen

FORGIVENESS

APRIL 2 - MAUNDY THURSDAY

Marcia Dingess

And since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

Hebrews 10:13-18 (NIV)

This may come as a surprise for those that know me, but I am not perfect. Of course I say this in jest, but when I look back at my life and live it today, I have to acknowledge being overwhelmed with my sin. If I dwell on my shortcomings, it is easy to be completely burdened by guilt of past sins and fearful that God will not *really* forgive me when He looks at my name in His book. This, too, is a sin for who am I to think my sins are less forgivable than yours?

When I feel unforgiven, this verse in Hebrews reminds me that I can rest because God took care of my sin when He sacrificed His own son Jesus! I love how the verse says "those who are *being* made holy". I can rest that I *am* being made holy through the Holy Spirit. I can rest that the Holy Spirit stirs within me when I do not live in God's ways and steers me towards Him. I am really excited that God says He will not remember my sins - WOW! How can that be? That can be because I have been forgiven by Jesus paying the ultimate price - for me. These are words in the Bible and I believe it. I can walk in faith that I *am* being made holy and I *am* forgiven.

PRAYER:

Thank you God for your Holy Spirit. Thank you for your forgiveness and making me new. Help me to live in your ways and prepare me to face you by making me holy. I love you, Lord. Amen

DEEPER STILL

APRIL 3 - GOOD FRIDAY

Lynn Bullock

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Psalm 46:10 (NRSV)

As in all of our lives, we all have ups and downs. Highs on the mountain top equal great moments in our lives, but there are those valleys which equal a low point in our lives.

I found myself in a very low, dark, and sad valley in my life. This particular journey was very deep and scary. I had to figure out how to get out of this black hole. I did not know how to do this other than to do it myself!!!! I had to fix it, control it, and take charge of this trip through the valley.

This valley was getting the best of me. I was not coming out of this valley as fast as I needed to. I could not control or fix this particular time in my life. What is going on?? Every day I seemed to get down on myself and really had a hard time getting out of bed.

Nothing I was doing was working, and I found the more I tried to change it, IT was not changing. Until one day I had had enough! I just stopped. I got on my knees and turned it over to God. The message I heard was BE STILL. I am here... I got this! Let go girl!

And I stopped, I let go, and I focus on and meditate on the word all along keeping Psalm 46:10 always present. Be Still and know I am here. How awesome is that!

PRAYER:

God, thank you for being so close when we are in a pit. May your love pull us out and up and onto dry ground. Amen

FAITH

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

Lauren Burhans Robinson

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

After graduating from college, I found myself eager to attack the world and all that it held for me. Life was at an all time high. I had been dating a guy for almost four years and was “expecting” a ring, had a roommate in mind to live with, and knew that I would find the perfect teaching position.

Then, in the blink of an eye, my world spiraled apart. The guy I was dating didn’t think I was “good enough” for him, my roommate found a job, and the economy had just tanked making teaching positions extinct. All the hard work that I had done to make sure my life was set out the way I had imagined seemed useless.

After finding myself living with my parents, I decided to turn my eyes and mind to the Bible. Every day, I would open it up and find new verses to read and decide how I can take it and relate it to my life. One day, I came upon Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see” and Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith, it is impossible to please GOD.” Then, it hit me. How could I have been so selfish to determine how my life was to go and to have such little faith? Throughout all of those instances, GOD was trying to tell me that I’m not in control, and I needed to have faith. From that point on, I handed everything to GOD and found faith. Faith in the future. Faith in GOD’s plan for me.

PRAYER:

Heavenly father, please help me to have FAITH in you, and all that you hold for me. Amen

A NEW WORD!

APRIL 5 - EASTER SUNDAY

The Resurrection of Jesus

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSV)

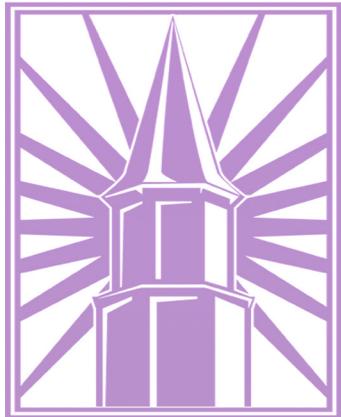
The Rejoicing in Heaven

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

Once more they said, "Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns."

Revelation 19:1-6 (NRSV)



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