



Lenten Devotional

2018

*By the Community of
St. Peter's by the Sea*

2018 Lenten Devotional

This Lenten season we are inviting you to dig deeper into scriptures, and to consider a new spiritual practice, read, pray, listen and especially open your heart to God. This is an invitation to sacred time and space.

Lent can be a time of giving something up or engaging in something new. We are inviting you to explore and to go deeper in your faith. Find more meaning in your relationship with God and with those in your communities. Keep the Bible next to this devotional and read more of the quoted scripture. In some cases, you will notice the scripture was too long to fit so you will need the Bible or www.biblegateway.com to read the scripture passage. Pray on the scripture. What else might it mean for you?

Next, we ask you to make your faith active. This might include praying more, reading more of the Bible, joining a small group, reading to kids, visiting a friend in the hospital or at the Canterbury, or lending a hand in the community. How is God calling you to be active in your faith? This will be different for each person – we are one body, each part unique.

You will notice the Saturdays ask you to journal either in the devotional or a separate journal. What have you learned or experienced during the week with the scriptures and with your active faith journey? What would you like to do or change in the upcoming week? What was most meaningful?

Each Sunday until Easter you will have that week's sermon scripture to meditate upon. What did the sermon give you? What does this scripture call to you to do or feel? Write these thoughts down. Live them out in the during the week.

Jesus called, "Come, follow me". How will you answer that call this Lenten season?

Wednesday February 14, 2018

Ash Wednesday

Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.

In the fast-paced, Los Angeles world of self-reliance, we'd all love a shortcut to salvation, forgiveness without repentance and no need for any shift in our lives. But self-justification, and self-atonement, and self-salvation are not possible, and not the way of our God.

We are dust, and to dust we shall return. We cannot do it ourselves.

And that is the crux of our faith, that is the deeper hope and wider joy of Ash Wednesday. We don't have to do it ourselves. God's forgiveness is complete and ever-flowing. Day after day of new beginnings, born again, a new person, in the cleansing power of God's grace.

All we need do is humble ourselves, recognize our weakness, confess that we have fallen short of God's highest and best dreams for us, and commit to needed changes.

On this Ash Wednesday, this first day of the Lenten season, this day of communion, may we accept, welcome, reach out for God's outstretched arm, God's embrace that reaches deep and wide to us, and to the world God loves.

Prayer: Our God, help us to remember, always, in life and in death, we belong to you. In Christ's name, Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

Deep Love

John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted-up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted-up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

In verse 17 and the one that precedes it Jesus states simply that he didn't come into the world to pass judgment on us but to save us. Why? Because God loves us. Not a Hollywood love that's only "for show" or only "talked about" but a love so real and so deep that it creates a joyful hurt, so vast that it covers everyone: me, you, and all the world.

When I consider the shallowness of my love compared to the depth of God's I get a glimpse of how far I have to go to fully appreciate what Jesus did for me, for us.

God's love IS Deeper than the ocean

Wider than the sky

Higher than heaven

And floods the gates of hell.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to accept and pass on the deep love you demonstrated on the cross. Amen.

Friday February 16, 2018

Deep Pain : My Blessing

James 1:2; Galatians 2:20

And when my turn came, to figuratively hang upon the cross, to experience excruciating pain that could not be relieved, I whined and bargained and pled my case as if to an imaginary court. I looked for relief, for shelter, for hope in a place that was dark and alone. I just wanted the pain to stop, the awful pain. I remember feeling trapped in my mind and seeing no escape. I thought, this is not how I had pictured my life. I had always thought I could overcome anything, whatever my problems, any adversity. I was wrong. I wasn't as brave and courageous and fearless as I had thought. But God was not done with me yet ... he would show me a light.

I had been invited to a Sunday morning men's breakfast at the home of a Presbyterian pastor, by a friend. "Just come along," he had said, and so I went. After breakfast, a young guy, a thirty something, a professional basketball player no longer playing in the NBA, got up and shared the story of his life. I recall being set back in my chair. I wasn't alone. Someone else got up, every day, with pain, from a broken heart. He too had struggled and did not know how he could find his way back. He too had experienced his personal time on a cross. His story offered hope.

The basketball player then read to us James 1:2. **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."**

I was learning that my task was to go deep so that I could appreciate the lesson that my pain was to teach. To let my pain wash over me so that I could begin to accept what St. Paul had meant in **Galatians 2:20, when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..."** St. Paul was teaching me that I had to die to self to relieve my pain, to end my anguish, to find a rainbow at the end of my terrible storm. I had to begin with the lesson of James and finish with the lesson of Paul. I had traveled a journey that required surrender before I was ready for transformation.

My pain was both like death and then again like birth. Going deep, allowed me to be remade. Pain was the instrument that led to my blessing. It was so worth it. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your many blessings, continue to grow me. Amen.

Contributed by: Bob, a Christian man

Saturday February 17, 2018

Musings of the Week

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do in the next week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday February 18, 2018

Baptism

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.

What does this scripture say to you?

Was there something you learned in the sermon or at Adult Ed. today that shed new light on your thoughts of this scripture?

Prayer: Lord – thank you for opening our hearts to your words. In your mercy, hear our prayers, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Monday February 19, 2018

Well Fed

Psalm 81:10, 16

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it . . . You would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.

Is there anything better to eat than crusty warm homemade bread dripping with butter and honey? The sweet satisfaction of a mouthful of bread and honey is an image of God's profound care and love for us. He not only saves us from the slavery of our sins and whatever oppression weighs us down through Jesus' death and resurrection; he promises to fill us with that which delights us. Not just a little nibble of delight and joy; no, God says "open wide." Often, I just open up a smidge to the good things God has for me. I let fear get in the way or my ideas of what will satisfy me limit the blessings possible in my life. I decide a stale cracker is enough, but God wants to give me so much more.

Prayer: O God, help me listen to you and follow you through this Lenten season. Give me the faith and courage to believe in your overflowing care and love.

Contributed by: Laura Hanley

Tuesday February 20, 2018

Jesus Speaks

Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.

For about three months I have been dealing with constant pain in both hands and now my left knee. I was concerned it was rheumatoid arthritis. On the morning I went to my doctor for the blood test, I didn't have a chance to read my devotionals, my favorite being "Jesus Calling." When I came home I read it for January 11, and Jesus said to me: "Trust Me by relinquishing control into My hands. Let go and recognize I am God." The whole writing was just perfect for me spiritually, emotionally, and physically, but I will quote one more part. "Lay out your concerns before Me: pour out your heart. Then thank Me for the answers that I have set into motion long before you can discern results. Thankful prayers keep your focus on My Presence and My promises." I felt such amazing peace as I prayed after reading this.

When I went back for the results, my gentle doctor told me I have "elevated markers of inflammation, specific tests for autoimmune arthritis (rheumatoid arthritis, lupus) are negative! I have post infectious, reactive arthritis.

So, now with great thanksgiving and dependence on the Lord and great joy and hope in my heart I am setting out to change my diet to an anti-inflammatory one, choosing foods that will calm and eventually eliminate the inflammation in my body that is attacking my joints.

Prayer: Dear Father God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus to live on this earth and to know our human frailties. Thank you Jesus for the love and care you pour out to us when we call on Your name. Amen.

Contributed by: Nancy Cypert

Wednesday February 21, 2018

Deep and Wide

**Zechariah 4:6
Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says
the Lord Almighty.**

Dana and I have been cross-cultural missionaries for 45 years. How exciting is that? And, it's been a DEEP and WIDE experience to say the least.

It's been DEEPLY HUMBLING maintaining an intimate relationship with our Lord and God. It's so hard to walk in constant relational integrity with JESUS. We get so distracted by the world, the flesh and the devil. It's like the world, the flesh and the devil are always supplanting our spiritual life. It's a war, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

It's been DEEPLY DIFFICULT to really get inside cultures. God, in Jesus, worked through the Jewish culture. 100%. Then Jesus said, "As I was sent, so send I you." But when your cultural DNA is 100% American, or European-American it's crazy difficult to attempt to live, breathe and operate in another culture.

It's been DEEPLY FRUSTRATING that many people reject a relationship with God due to the organizational emphasis of Christianity or some extreme version of the Good News.

It's been so DEEPLY WIDE to be so loved and inhabited by God. It's been WILDLY WIDE to see God transform lives and to see God doing more than we can ask for or imagine. Abiding in Christ results in much fruit!

What an EXTREMELY WIDE place, the South Bay. What an opportunity we have to see God's Spirit work, helping people to be His followers.

Prayer: LORD, GOD, continue to transform me and use me by your Spirit. We want to be used by You in deeper and wider ways. Use us to change our families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities so many others will be followers of YOU, the King of the Kingdom. Amen.

Contributed by: Tom Steers

How Deep?

Hebrews 11:1

FAITH...is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see.

I read this every morning, because it hangs on my kitchen wall, reminding me of the wisdom of its words. My mother used to speak of her "little angels", who watched over her and demonstrated the power of faith – when she lost something, later found, or struggled with a problem, when the answer surfaced.

As a volunteer, faced with the challenge of increasing the level of literacy in the children of our communities, I was encouraged to expand my horizons beyond the immediate locality. In spite of the fact that I was hesitant about the future success of the project, I trusted my instinct that my faith in the future would lead the way.

Not only was the literacy project in nearby Wilmington a success, but through St. Peters, I was put in touch with a member of the Peninsula Symphony, who arranged through a grant to expose the children to an introduction to music education as well.

As the words of a popular Irving Berlin song state:

"How deep is the ocean?
How high is the sky?"

We will never know, until we delve into the depth and breadth of the manifestation of our faith.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for disclosing the power of faith and thereby revealing the depth and breadth of your love for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday February 23, 2018

How I Might Go Deeper

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God

As I have traveled this road of faith, holy week is my favorite season of the church calendar. That I even know the church calendar by heart shows what a church nerd I am.

I am drawn to periods of examination and rending my heart for God. Mostly, because daily I feel confronted with my own humanity and how I need a Savior. So, Lent provides me with that season to go quiet, go within, and think about all that is complex and mysterious about faith and my own faith journey.

The questions that I ask in this season are two-fold:

1. God, what keeps me from you? What obstacles have I created to stop me from knowing, hearing, and seeing you?
2. Lord, how can I serve you today?

There are many more questions to ask yourself in this Lenten season, but this is where I start daily and see where God leads me. It can even be a practice with a friend or partner to ask these questions of one another during Lent. May this season be filled with questions and listening to God who has so much more for us to see, know and hear of God's way.

Prayer: God, I pray my heart and mind may be attuned to you this day. Render my heart that I may know what keeps me from you.

Contributed by: Devon Singh-Barrett

Saturday February 24, 2018

Ponderings of the Past Week...

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do next week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday February 25, 2018

Foretelling

Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

What does this scripture say to you?

Was there something you learned in the sermon or Adult Education today that shed new light on your thoughts of this scripture?

Prayer: Lord – thank you for opening our hearts to your words. In your mercy, hear our prayers, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Monday February 26, 2018

A Woman

Mark 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

A hemorrhaging woman...This scripture speaks to me of truth...the healing power of truth...I can see this woman in the story, I know this woman in the story, actually I have been the woman in this story...she is desperate, she is afraid, she is exhausted after trying everything ... and yet still she bleeds. Her last and final hope is that this Jesus, this traveling, teaching healer can cure her, and indeed touching his robe caused her bleeding to stop. And this is where the story becomes interesting to me...she received what she had for years longed for, her deepest desire had been met, her bleeding stopped. She could have walked away anonymously cured, free from her physical disease. But she could not live with herself if she was not honest with the one who called to her. Knowing that identifying herself might somehow put her at risk she spoke up anyway...she was willing to speak her truth, even if it meant 12 more years of hemorrhaging... her physical cure was no longer as important as her spiritual health. She could not walk away from the truth of who she had been without thanking the one who called her by name. The woman was searching for a cure when it was healing all along she was after. I guess you could say her faith cured her but her truth set her free ... ahh, the healing power of truth.

Prayer: Holy One, May I always find my way back to your healing heart that sets me free to speak my truth in Love. Amen.

Contributed by: Lynn Taylor

Tuesday February 27, 2018

Join Me

2 Timothy 1:8-12a

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do.

"Join with me in suffering for the gospel." An unusual, and difficult, invitation! Not the way we generally extend an invitation to church membership. Instead, we envision and desire a church with packed worship services, booming youth and family programs, successful mission projects, fun community activities, dynamic programs, exciting speakers, and the approval and approbation of the surrounding community. And yes, that would be lovely. But that was not the experience of the early church, and it was not the experience of the Apostle Paul. Yes, there were new churches starting up all around the Roman world, there was joy in fellowship, excitement about the gospel, healings and dramatic rescues. But there was also fierce opposition, poverty, persecution, dissension, discouragement, suffering. The gospel was not welcome everywhere. And yet, for Paul, to announce the gospel was a holy calling, a vocation to be carried out by the power of God, a gift of grace. For he witnessed to the glorious appearing of "our Savior Christ Jesus" and his Good News, and it was of value beyond any suffering. The question is, is it of that great a value to us? We want to be a successful church in service of the gospel. But are we willing to join the Apostle Paul in suffering for the gospel?

Prayer: Lord, you have told us that being your followers will involve suffering and even persecution. This is hard to take—scary and even off-putting. Help us to rely on your power and grace and aid us in being witnesses to our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Contributed by: Marilyn Melzian

Wednesday February 28, 2018

Shaking

Haggai 2:6-9

For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory', says the Lord of hosts. 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' declares the Lord of hosts."

I keep hearing people say the world is going crazy. I don't believe that. The world is just fine; it's the people in it that, in my opinion, are "going crazy". Why is that? There is an open, aggressive hostility toward the faith, toward Christ, toward the Bible, and toward God's view of life and reality, and toward each other, even within our own campus.

We live in Southern California. Most are aware of the reality of the earth being shaken. But Haggai is talking about something deeper, something wider. The nations **are** being shaken. Recent catastrophic events – fires, flooding, acts of terrorism – are all witness to this. Haggai's words are prophetic. Go back and read the passage. This is what God said he would do..."And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in... And in this place I will give peace."

The church must be a place of hope where people know they are welcome and can find peace. When we find ourselves feuding and debating over "things," the church is anything but peaceful and welcoming. We must keep the main thing, the main thing. And, the main thing is the saving grace of Jesus Christ available for all.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we look to you for peace and guidance when things are "shaking," trusting in your word and knowing you are in control. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Contributed by: Anonymous

Thursday March 1, 2018

Bible Study

Timothy 2:15

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

My husband and I have been members of a St. Peter's by the Sea Bible study for six years. There are five other couples, and we meet each month alternating at each other's homes. We have received so many blessings throughout our times together. We learn so much from each other as each hosting couple selects the topic and format. One topic was kindness, and we were given 25 ways to express kindness to others. Other topics have been discussing different Bibles, the disciples, the Wise Men, Job, Angels, Holy Spirit, Hymns, Deity, and many other interesting subjects. In December, we have a traditional dinner together and enjoy researching and singing Christmas hymns. We also participate in many different missions such as Ageable Sociables, Neighbor to Neighbor, Harbor Interfaith Services, and Operation Christmas Child (shoeboxes). We keep an ongoing prayer list of anyone we know who needs our prayers, and we analyze our list every month. Our Bible study members have become a loving group who try to analyze the teachings of the Bible so that we can strengthen our Christian faith.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, grant that we might continue to learn more about You each and every day. Create in us a real hunger for Your truth. Remind me, dear Lord that we should spend time with You today and every day. Make us a disciple of Yours, eager to learn all that You would teach us. Amen.

Contributed by: Nancy Browning

Friday March 2, 2018

Leaning into Today

Psalm 118:24

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

The brevity of life was made most clear to me when I lost my mom and mother-in-law to cancer just weeks apart, and with a young baby. The value of each and every day created by the Lord and spent with those we love, became very real. I needed to lean into each moment that He prepared and put before me. I began to wonder in those early days of loss, "How will I make it through today? How will I make it through what's before me?" The pain and the fear crippled me as a young, inexperienced mother, now motherless myself. The burden of my new reality felt far too deep, and too wide to ever be whole again. It was in my ashes that the Lord met me in the Psalms, in the crying out. As if to say, "my daughter, this day, I made it for you. Chin up, look what I have put before you in your son. Find me in this pain, and you won't ever be without me in your joy."

Today is now, today is the day set before us. May we learn that it is enough.

Prayer: Lord God, be near to us in our brokenness and pain. Be with us in our doubt and worries. Reveal your presence in the voice of a loved one, or the words of a friend. Comfort us with more of YOU and less of us. Thank you for this day. May we seek to know your glory and the gravity of your goodness, today and every day. Amen.

Contributed by: Colleen Cox

Saturday March 3, 2018

Reflections of the past week

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do next week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday March 4, 2018

Jesus Clears the Temple

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

What does this scripture say to you?

Was there something you learned in the sermon or Adult Ed today that shed new light on your thoughts of this scripture?

Prayer: Lord – thank you for opening our hearts to your words. In your mercy, hear our prayers, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Monday March 5, 2018

4 U

1 John 5:12
He who has the Son, has the life.

As I stroll through the parking lot at St. Peter's, I am amused by the bumper stickers, window decals and license plates that define us. I, for one, love fast cars and San Luis Obispo. **2SLO4ME**. It makes me laugh!

And, **1 John 5:12** resides, for eternity, underneath my high school yearbook picture. Each senior could choose a phrase. I convinced the editors, and staff, that my relationship with Christ defined me – and, my high school experience.

Forty years later, at a high school reunion, I was approached by a classmate who said, "Do you still love Jesus?" It took me a few seconds to recover. "Yes. I. Do." The warm embrace that followed was special. How I had chosen to define myself so many years ago, mattered – and was remembered.

Our parking lot: a cornucopia of cars full of statements about who we are. But, very few profess our love of Christ and/or St. Peter's. Including mine.

GOD4U2?

Prayer: Dear Father, forgive us when we don't proclaim you. Give passion and compassion to our voices, and deeds, that will draw others to your remarkable promise. Amen

Contributed by: Bill Chillingworth

Tuesday March 6, 2018

Remember, be Kind & Good

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

I can never remember a time when I didn't go to church. I grew up in Staten Island, NY and was part of the Park Baptist Church community from infancy. Before my birth, my grandfather was the organist there and my grandmother sang in the choir. On the chest in the hall where we now live stands the clock which the choir gave to the couple on their wedding day.

When I enrolled in Sunday School I enjoyed the attention of dedicated teachers. I think it was Nellie Warren who asked each child in her class to select a verse from the Bible which started with the first letter of her first name. "R" led me to the nice short verse, "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy," the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

A vivid memory of Park Baptist Sunday School was that at the end of every session we would gather in a circle in our basement space, and the teachers would sing, "Now Sunday School is over, and we are going home. Goodbye, goodbye, be always kind and good." The children would respond, "Goodbye, goodbye, we will be kind and good." I think we believed we would actually be kind and good. At least we would try, out of respect and love for our kind and good teachers.

Our family kept the Sabbath holy in so far as we never skipped Sunday services or went to movies on a Sunday. We had a big dinner at midday with our grandparents. Later, after supper with my aunt and uncle and cousin, we would play games around the table. My uncle would create riddles or arithmetic problems for us to solve and design "battleship" games on graph paper, a far cry from the electronic ones available today.

Throughout the years, attending church on Sundays was a routine. Getting up on a Sunday and going off for worship was and is a habit. We feel lost without it. If we should miss a week now, we may receive a phone call inquiring if we are all right. When we watch the congregation going forward and returning from communion, how many faces and their stories are familiar to us! How touched we are by the adventures and trials these dear family members have experienced! Worship is home. The Sabbath is holy. What a blessing!

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your commandment to set aside a day as a day for you. Thank you for St. Peter's by the Sea, our family here and our place in it. Help us to be "kind and good" on the Sabbath and beyond.

Contributed by: Ruth Lohrer

Wednesday March 7, 2018

A Grandparent's Love

Psalm 100:5

For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations.

Ah, the joy of being a grandparent! Parenting is challenging, occasionally frightening, constant, and all-consuming. Grandparenting is polar-opposite. It is given as a gift, filled with surprises and the time to enjoy each age and stage.

The question is, what do we owe these young people? If, as the Psalmist says, truth endures to all generations, we owe grandchildren a sense of history and a faith background to take forward to yet the next generation. Most grandchildren love to hear stories about their parents, which is good fun. Add to that, the values we sought to instill (in their parents) and hope that a nugget of the importance of those words sticks.

Indeed, grandparenting is a gift ...pay it forward.

Prayer: Help us to use our words for the greater good and to spread to each generation, the good news of God's grace. Amen.

Contributed by: Ruth Barton

Thursday March 8, 2018

Bring on the God-Colors!

Matthew 5:14-16

"The Message" Bible says it this way: "here is another way to put it: You are here to be the light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – **SHINE! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in Heaven." (Emphasis added)**

Wow! Clear as day: **Bring out the God-colors in the world; publicly SHINE for Jesus; keep open house; be generous with our lives; open up to other about God and His Son Jesus.** How will you stretch yourself to obey?

Prayer: Please Lord; in your grace and mercy give me courage to shine, reflecting You on those around me. Amen.

Contributed by: Anonymous

Friday March 9, 2018

I Will Help You

Isaiah 41:9-13

I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all. For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

At a time in my life when troubles surrounded me and I felt nearly overwhelmed with anxieties and grief, this scripture comforted me and challenged me to press more closely into the arms of my God.

In this passage, God is talking to Israel, but in the moment when I needed to hear it, he was speaking these words directly into my life. My perspective on my trials changed when I stopped to consider that God had called me to be His, that He had chosen me, that He promised to be with me and He promises that He is MY GOD!

At the time, it seemed to me that only the might and greatness of a big God could sort out the mess in my heart and mind and bring me to the other side of the valley I was in. Truly, at the time, it felt like a war was raging in my life, so you can imagine my comfort when God assured, "those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all" Nothing at all! A war would be like nothing at all! I desperately needed to know those words and believe them.

The passage ends with the most precious image of assurance. "I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you". I needed the help of God in that moment. I could barely believe these words in their entirety at the time but I had an acute sense that if I could just hold onto a thread of this promise, God would show it to be true. This passage became my hope and by clinging to it, God taught me to trust in a new and powerful way. He is our God, friends and He has us in His hand.

Prayer: Oh Precious Father, would you help me to remember and cling to the truth of your word today. Thank you for Your promises and thank you for holding us through the wars that rage all around. Amen.

Contributed by: Chelsea Downes

Saturday March 10, 2018

Introspection of the Last Week

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do next week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday March 11, 2018

Lifted Up

John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

What does this scripture say to you?

Was there something you learned in the sermon or Adult Ed today that shed new light on your thoughts of this scripture?

Prayer: Lord – thank you for opening our hearts to your words. In your mercy, hear our prayers, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Monday March 12, 2018

An Honest Look

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

When it comes to an honest evaluation of ourselves, it's likely that we fail. Often, we tend to see ourselves and our ways as better than others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with the attitude of self-evaluation right off the bat... "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Poor in spirit" is speaking of a spiritual poverty. When we are poor in spirit, we tend to see ourselves more accurately as the sinful individuals we are in the sight of God. Our own beatitudes would teach us that blessed are the rich and famous; blessed are the beautiful; blessed are the powerful; blessed are those who seem happy; blessed are those who worship like I worship... The person who is poor in spirit is the opposite of today's world view of being proud and self-righteous.

As we find ourselves at the foot of the cross during this season of Lent, may we take an honest look at who we are and what God is calling us to be. John 3:16-17 tells us, "For God so loved the world, that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us spiritual eyes that we might take an honest look at ourselves. I thank you for loving me so much that you would send your Son for me. Open my eyes and soften my heart that I would clearly see and follow your ways. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

Contributed by: Anonymous

Tuesday March 13, 2018

Growing in Grace

John 20:21

**Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."**

Devotional (a haiku):

The tomb was empty.

They thought he was the gardener.

What grace will you grow?

***Prayer: Loving God, help me to feel your peace growing
within me today and help me to lovingly tend to it within
another. Amen.***

Contributed by: Anonymous

Wednesday March 14, 2018

Hope

Jeremiah 29:11

**For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you
and not harm you, plans to give you hope....**

I find hope in nature. I find peace in nature...and I find God in nature.

As I look back on those times in my life where I feel close to God... they always involve moments of simplicity. Get rid of the noise, thoughts, stuff that turns my focus away from my Lord. For me...this means going for a walk. The location of the walk does not matter ...because God is everywhere ...on a walk along the ocean, down a trail, among the trees even down a busy street. I find peace as my feet pound the pavement, dirt or sand. I find hope as my thoughts focus and my mind starts to listen to the plans God has laid out for me. He never leaves me ... he is always there ...some days I have to walk farther to find/ hear him ...but he is always there listening ... ready to give me hope that everything will be okay.

Prayer. Jesus, thank you for being there always. For not giving up on me, for liking me no matter what I do, say or think. For taking on my worries, fears and complaints ... and always wanting the best for me. Amen.

Contributed by: Debbie Veale

Thursday March 15, 2018

Oceans

Romans 12:11-12

**With unflagging zeal, aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord.
Let hope keep you joyful...**

When struggling with all that life throws my way, the Holy Spirit comforts me. I realize that these "Holy Spirit moments" are taking me "deeper and wider" in my faith journey.

A song describing this growth of going "deeper and wider" is Hillsong United's song titled, *Oceans*.

*"You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand
Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now
Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander"*

Prayer: Father, you are the Lord of life and all possibilities. Help me turn my eyes and heart toward you and see all the possibilities of all that I can be, do, learn, live in this relationship with you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Contributed by: Susan Sanborn

Friday March 16, 2018

Peace like a River

Isaiah 66:12a

**For this is what the Lord says: "I will extend peace
to her like a river..."**

I've got peace like a river...

Water constantly moves, washing away the dirt and stains. Feeling refreshed, feeling clean I can step again onto dry land. Why do I feel so...*free*? Because my soul has been washed by the hope, love, grace and mercy of the Lord. Fresh. Every. Single. Day.

The song quickly comes to mind and I smile...

*"I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river in my soul."*

Prayer: Lord, was my soul in your grace and mercy? Grant me peace "like a river" when life seems turbulent. Amen.

Contributed by: Anonymous

Saturday March 17, 2018

Reflections

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do next week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday March 18, 2018

Servant Leadership

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

What does this scripture say to you?

Was there something you learned in the sermon or Adult Ed today that shed new light on your thoughts of this scripture?

Prayer: Lord – thank you for opening our hearts to your words. In your mercy, hear our prayers, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Monday March 19, 2018

Deeper Love

Hymn #83-O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High

At St. Peter's by the Sea, sometimes, most times, the hymns have been especially chosen to reflect the sermon. The hymns found in our Presbyterian Hymnal (J. Knox Press, 1990) have been written to encompass the message found in scripture, and often times use the exact wording from scripture, or the scriptural words but not in the same scriptural order. And sometimes, the words are simply an interpretation of scripture. So as I thought about our Lenten theme, Deep and Wide, these words continued to flood my mind. Being a singer, it's not just the words, it's also the tune that rings in my head, to the point that singing the tune in my head brings about the same reaction that the lyrics by themselves would bring. How Pavlovian. So I share Hymn #83 from our hymnal and ask that you consider the words, humming along if you'd like.

O love, how deep, how broad, how high;
How passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take
Our mortal form for mortals' sake.

For us baptized, for us He bore,
how holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptations sharp He knew, For us the tempter overthrew.

For us to evil power betrayed,
Scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed;
He bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up His dying breath.

For us He rose from death again;
For us He went on high to reign;
For us He sent the Spirit here to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.

All glory to our Lord and God For love so deep, so high, so
broad: The Trinity whom we adore Forever and forevermore.

Prayer: Loving Heavenly Father, You sent your precious Son to us, to suffer a death so cruel that we cannot comprehend, just so that we would be saved from the sins of our own making. Let us acknowledge the depth and breadth and height of Your love for us, that we might know You better, and love You deeper, for all of our days evermore. Amen.

Contributed by: Loretta Duvall

Tuesday March 20, 2018

Going Wide

John 15:5

(Jesus said) If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Evangelize – spreading the Gospel. I am not sure I like that word ...okay, honestly ...it is not the word I do not like, it is the implied call to action which scares me. I am not the type of person to knock on doors or stand on a corner to talk to strangers about Jesus.

But what about going to Mexico to build houses with some other adults from St. Peter's? Didn't I meet some strangers, people I did not know before (hey ...there were some new faces from the church)? Or how about the family who was getting a new house? Or the people who walked by and wanted to know what we were doing and why? Hum ...was I actually spreading the Gospel? Maybe going wide is not so scary and you know what ...it was actually fun. To be truthful... it was rewarding ...I think I got a lot more from the experience than I gave. A deeper appreciation for my faith, realization of the gifts God has bestowed on me, the graciousness of the family receiving their new home and sharing the experience with a great group of people.

Evangelize ...going wide with Jesus... I like it.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see the opportunities to go wide with you every day. Amen.

Contributed by: Debbie Veale

Wednesday March 21, 2018

Seeing God

Isaiah 43:19

For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

There is a moment in each of our lives, I'm sure you can bring it to mind easily, when you were utterly hopeless and at a crossroads. Worry and fear of the unknown clouded your mind, your heart raced. And yet, He made a way where we believed there was no way. I could name 100 stories about the big and seemingly small ways the Lord brought to life a work He had been harvesting for years before I ever needed it. One brought to mind is in our very church body at St Peter's who were prepared to love and serve Kevin and I in our time of great loss. He had been preparing your hearts for the support you didn't know we would need. He was making all things new before we knew what we needed. A meal prepared, words of encouragement spoken, financial support, child care, worship, a caring presence. It has been through YOU that we have seen firsthand the way He had already done a good work in you, for us in our wilderness. Friends, we can be certain as scripture reminds us here, He is always at work. In our doubt, in our fear, in our pain, in our suffering. He wastes nothing. He is always faithful. He makes all things new.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your faithfulness in our lives. Thank you that you see our sin and yet you love us. Thank you for the gentle care you lavish upon us in the form of community and service. We praise you because we know you will always make a way for us. We love you because you've made yourself known to us. Help us remember your faithfulness when we feel hopeless. Give us courage and strength to believe when we cannot see what's before us. Be near Lord God, we run to you.

Contributed by: Colleen Cox

Thursday March 22, 2018

Prophecy - Realization

Isaiah 53:3 - He was Despised

Matthew 26:36; 40-41 - The disciples Fall asleep.

Matthew 26: 56 - And they all Fled.

Matthew 26:69; 73-75 – Peter - And he went out and wept - bitterly.

These quotes have formed the cornerstones of my personal faith journey since I was a child! They tell the tale of Jesus who, at the most crucial of times, was left utterly alone by those who loved him most. I've often asked myself, *'Where was the Love they so ardently professed? How could they do this? Would I have done these things? Perhaps?'* These feelings are expressed in the piece I wrote for the 2017 Advent Devotional about God's Gift to us "For God so loved the world", etc. I marveled that anyone could give his only son to be crucified? And I reminded myself that this Gift – impossible for a mere mortal to give, was a gift from God Himself! No wonder! So here again, we see the difference between mere men, and Jesus and His Holy Father. Mortal men failed Jesus in his hour of need. But all this was pre-ordained by The Father, in order that the scriptures might be fulfilled (see Isaiah).

Every time I read about the Disciples deserting Jesus, and Peter Denying him, I too weep bitterly inside – it's as though these are symbols of my own failings to live up to Jesus' lofty expectations for me. So, whenever I take the Cup, these same feelings cause me to renew and re-double my efforts to make room for Jesus in my heart, and in my actions toward others. I'd like to think I'm a better Christian for it.

I can't wait for Holy Week, and the fulfillment of God's Christmas Gift to us all.

Prayer: Dear Father – open wide my heart, that I might begin to love as deeply and widely as you have shown us with your Son Jesus. Amen.

Contributed by: David Witherspoon

Friday March 23, 2018

Sighs too Deep

Romans 8:26-30

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

"Sighs too deep for words". Sometimes I overthink words. Maybe that's why this passage from Romans sticks in my mind and heart. I am reminded I don't have to have the words. The Holy Spirit whooshes in my soul like a wind and my heart is connected with God. God's love for us is deeper than words.

I guess at Lent we are surrounded by God's deeper-than-words love as we follow the Son God sent for us to the cross and wait for his rising and the joys of Easter. I smile when I think that sharing the Good News though does generally involve using words. Good thing we have a Bible filled with them and the Holy Spirit to help us when it all seems too much for words.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for your help – for your sighs too deep for words. Thank you for meeting us where we are. Thank you for helping us to live more fully into God's love and to share God's love with others. Amen.

Contributed by: Elizabeth Logan

Saturday March 24, 2018

Reflective thoughts

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this week?

What would you like to do during Holy Week to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be still so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday: The Triumphal Entry

Mark 11:1-11

Everything about how Jesus enters Jerusalem in the week before the Jewish Passover communicates purpose. And yet his disciples and others in the crowd gravely misunderstood this purpose.

Riding on the back of a colt, Jesus started at the Mount of Olives, where the Messiah was expected to assert his universal kingdom. He came when the people were preparing to recall how God freed their ancestors from Egyptian slavery to be a nation led by Moses. Full of these thoughts of human kings and earthly kingdoms, the adoring throng laid leafy branches and cloaks on the road, shouting praises fit for conquering royalty. To the occupying Roman Empire, these treasonous acts challenged its rule and authority. Yet Jesus chose to ride the animal ridden by princes when they desired to signal peaceful intentions. Jesus came in humble dignity to face betrayal, suffering, pain and death.

Much like those shouting praises, we often shower Jesus with superficial love and expect him to behave in ways that only meet our needs superficially. We can't see our true need for the deep love Jesus offers: A love that endures and overcomes the horror of crucifixion; a love not broken by suffering or rejection, humiliation or death. Through his death, Jesus overwhelms all death. Through his humiliations, Jesus can transform all suffering and all humiliation.

What limited vision of God's love do you hold onto? What keeps you from truly, fully trusting God? What sufferings do you imagine you're avoiding by settling for a superficial relationship with God? Lay it all down and follow Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to see how different God's kind of love is from the world's kind of love so that I can be transformed from fighting you tooth and nail into one who actually loves God and can do real acts of compassion toward others. Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Barbara Buck

Monday March 26, 2018

Surrounded by Love

Romans 8:38-39

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

I'd heard those words at the funeral, yet most days in that season of seminary, I wasn't so convinced. A dear friend had died suddenly. I was leading others in prayer, reading scripture to them, preaching, but where was God for me in those first few months of mourning?

I knew the laments of the psalmists.

I knew Job's cursing of God.

But I wasn't angry with God.

I wasn't confounded by God's providence—

I just neatly put God away for awhile.

I didn't trust God to share my anger, my confusion, my hurt.

By my shelving, attrition, and neglect, I in essence abandoned God.

Yet God embraced me still.

In holding the baby while her mother sang in the youth choir—seeing how a church could choose to be present amidst the complex struggle and joy of another, in running on the frisbee field and attempting to master Hebrew together in brokenness—rediscovering laughter and hope with my friends, in receiving cards and calls from my family—God's loving presence absolutely surrounded me in that season even when I had pushed God away.

God's love is deep and wide, even when our faith isn't. May we be reminded of that grace in whatever season we find ourselves this Lent.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, help me to be honest with you this Lent. I know that's what true faith in you asks and offers. Easter reminds me that you know me fully, and yet love me completely. How might I reach out to another today in that grace? Amen.

Contributed by: Molly Logan

Tuesday March 27, 2018

I am not Alone

Esther 4: 14-16

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Relatively frequently over the course of everyday life, I am struck that most of us are moving like pieces in a game or play, doing our part and playing our role, but not really engaging with our life and those around us. When I think about it, sometimes it feels like I play a role because it feels like I have no idea what I'm doing and the alternative of being vulnerable myself is too scary to consider. I believe who I really am is someone that is broken, and lost, and incapable of making any real difference in the world. This is a lie. While alone I may be all of those things, I am not alone. God is with me through every breath from my first to my last. God has gifted me, and every one of us, to bless this world.

I am not broken – I am healed.

I am not lost – I am found.

I am not incapable – Perhaps this is the moment for which I have been created.

Prayer: God- I pray that I am not able to only see others as you see them, but that I am able to see myself as you see me. I pray that when I see what you see, I then have the courage to do as you would have me do for your glory. Amen.

Contributed by: Anna Sudeth

Wednesday March 28, 2018

Deep Within our Hearts

Jeremiah 29:13-14

You will seek Me and find Me when you search with all your heart. I will be found in you, declares the Lord.

I've always thought of myself as a Good Friday Christian. I have always been drawn to the underside of faith, the dark shadow times, the suffering of Christ and the mixedness of the disciples. This is what resonates with my experience of faith. Just like the disciples, I struggle with the suffering of others, my relentless anxious mind, and the divided heart I have in being true to following Christ is my common experience. I think that is the story of Holy Week...the story of his mixed wobbly followers (LIKE ME) and how Jesus redeems all our brokenness with His act of love. I find resonance and hope in these days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Mostly, because God's goodness and Jesus' ultimate gift of salvation isn't dependent on me as a shaky, fickle disciple. Ultimately, God knows this about us. We are Good Friday Christians, being betrayed by our own humanness, and Jesus saves us...from ourselves.

Prayer: God, we pray our hearts will be found in you this season. Give us strength to seek you and find you daily with our whole hearts.

Contributed by: Devon Singh-Barrett

Thursday March 29, 2018

Maundy Thursday

John 13

In this chapter John chronicles all the things that Jesus tried to cram into the disciples' heads before he turns toward Gethsemane and the crucifixion events are set in motion. Had this occurred in 2018 I could imagine that one of the requisites for the room where they were going to celebrate Passover would have been a power point set up. So much is packed into the events of this chapter that having such a presentation would have helped those who were experiencing the Passover meal to get "more out of it". Maybe even a set of notes would help. Something to take home and study and go over when one has more time to absorb all that Jesus felt necessary to tell them. One can experience the strain and the intense urgency that he must have felt knowing that this was his last chance to teach his disciples about who he was and what God's purposes for his human life had been and to foretell the events that were bearing down on this band of brothers.

From foot washing to pointing out his betrayer and in almost the same breath stating that, "He, Jesus, has been glorified and that God has been glorified in him", we begin to sense the deep import of the momentous events as they unfold. Ending the chapter with Simon Peter's betrayal is a disappointment, but don't stop there! Allow yourself the favor of reading it and the following three chapters slowly over the next three days as a companion to the events that make up the end of Holy Week. Easter is our reward.

Prayer: Oh God, I believe that you still strain to make yourself known and understood. Give me grace to listen and "hear" your voice, and to believe that your ways are best, no matter what. Amen.

Contributed by: Lenita Witherspoon

Friday March 30, 2018

Good Friday

John 18:36-38

Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

On that day in Jerusalem the Lord of all the worlds comes before the representative of the greatest earthly lord, and he speaks of truth. What is the truth to which he witnesses? *"I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the door of the sheep," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the Son of God," "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the way, and the truth and the life."* Pilate is presented with something real, strong, uncompromising and glorious statements. And his tragedy is that he deflects it, and with his question, "What is truth?" shows that he is not of the truth. With Life right in front of him, his concerns are all about power (*Is he a threat to the Emperor? Is he going to cause a revolution?*). Being reassured on that point, he shrugs his shoulders and walks away. He has his answer, he gets to keep his job, and to keep the peace he gives Jesus to the crowd. And Life dies.

"Man's maker was made man that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother's breast; that the Bread might hunger, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired on its journey; that Truth might be accused of false witnesses, the Teacher be beaten with whips, the Foundation be suspended on wood; that Strength might grow weak; that the Healer might be wounded; that Life might die."—St. Augustine of Hippo (Sermons 191.1)

Prayer: Lord, be my bread, my light, my truth and my life. May I see that you are the truth—let me not turn away. Amen.

Contributed by: Marilyn Melzian

Saturday March 31, 2018

Reflecting on Lent

What did you learn or experience this week by reading these scriptures?

What meant the most to you this Lenten season?

What would you like to do in the year ahead to grow deeper in your faith or wider in your reach?

Prayer: Loving Father, help me to be still, prepare my heart so I might hear and know the direction you are leading me. Thank you for sending your Son to teach me your ways. It is in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sunday April 1, 2018

Easter

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Easter is the love of God come back to us. Even when we try to push Jesus away, he comes back. It's what love does. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means there is life after death. Resurrection means that the way of Jesus is true. It means that to live like Jesus is to live into the fullness of who we are created to be. It means that sins are forgiven, and life is made whole. And there is no doubt that Easter is not over. The angel says he is not here. "He has gone ahead of you to Galilee." We need to understand this. The angel is not giving the women an address to meet Jesus. It's not that Jesus has retired to a nice coffee shop where he can catch up with his disciples. Galilee is a place of ministry. Galilee is where Jesus taught and where he pushed back evil. It is where he healed that which was broken and where he forgave that which we cannot fix. Why is this important? Because that is where we see the love of God alive in this world. Resurrection is not just about life after we die; resurrection is the battle God wages to repair and heal and redeem that which we cannot make right in this world. Easter isn't over. For the love of God has come back to us. And God's love is set loose in this world. The love of God will show up in your life; look for it. Receive it. Give thanks. And then go deep and wide sharing the good news of God's great love with the world that God loves. Happy Easter!

Prayer: Make us Easter people, O God, for ourselves and for the world that you love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Contributed by: Rev. Paul Barrett

The Lenten Devotional - 2018

A Closing Word:

We pray that this collection of writings has blessed your life and increased your wonder at what God is doing in your life and in the lives of those around you. Jesus came to save us and teach us the way to live life. It's a journey of learning.

So go out and find your Galilee. Live your life as Jesus has taught us and know that you are never alone on the journey. Remembering it is a journey from infancy to resurrection – each step, every day.

This Devotional was compiled with humble
editorial ink drops
by Valerie Ryan

~ May the Peace of Christ be with you always~

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Palm Sunday

Services at 8:00AM, 9:15AM and 11:00AM
3:30PM Concert

Maundy Thursday Service

7:00PM in Reeves Hall

Good Friday Service

7:30PM in Sanctuary

Easter Sunday

Services at 8:00AM, 9:15AM and 11:00AM
Easter egg hunt following 11:00AM service



Art by Trudy Wessels