



BUT WHO
DO YOU SAY I AM

MARK 8:29

Cover by:
David Grice
&
Clara Overton

COLUMBIA PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

In this booklet you will find thoughts, meditations, prayers, personal experiences, photographs and illustrative art inspired by scripture. Each one designed to guide us through this season of introspection and renewal.

Please know that every passage and piece of art was created by one of Columbia's *practicing* disciples. There may be typos. You might find yourself turning the devotional sideways due to formatting challenges. Many different Bible translations were used. It isn't a perfect creation, but whether short or long, drawn in minutes or a project that took hours, each addition was prayed over and included with purpose.

May you be blessed by what has been prepared within these pages.

*I want them to be encouraged,
and knit together by strong ties of love.
I want them to have complete confidence
that they understand God's mysterious plan,
which is Christ himself.*

Colossians 2:2 (NLT)

ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

By Pat Wheeler

*We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.
~2 Corinthians 5:20b*

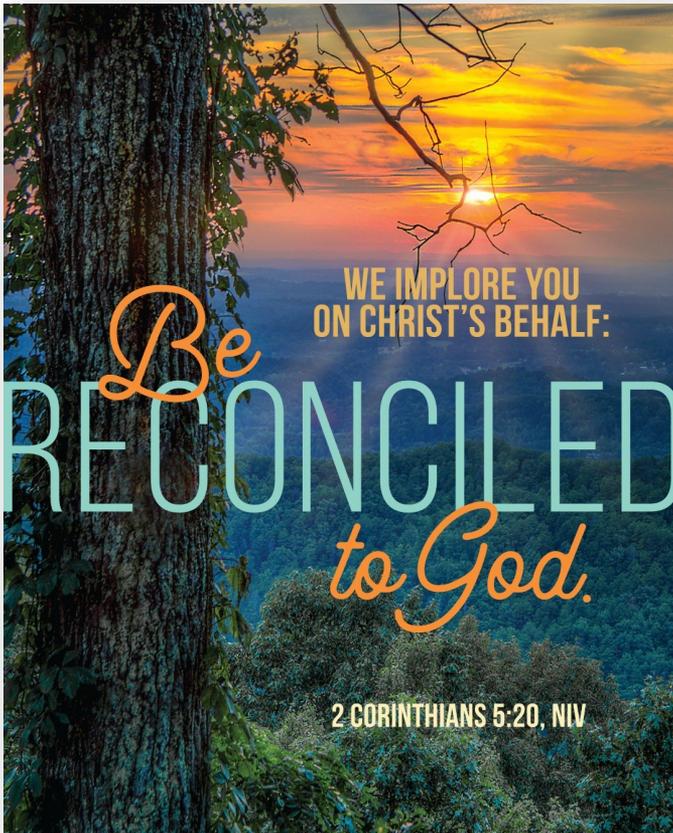
God is on bended knee and with tear-rimmed eye begging all men to be reconciled to Himself.

God has removed any barriers to complete fellowship between Himself and mankind.

The Lord has done all He can possibly do.

Now man must lay down his arms of rebellion, must cease his stubborn revolt,

And ... be reconciled to God!



THURSDAY, MARCH 6

By Laralyn Ellsworth

*Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet,
for the place where you are standing is holy ground.*

~Acts 7:33

Barefoot Shoes

I'm running in these three-dollar-sign barefoot shoes

They are guru recommended

As seen on YouTube

Inspired by indigenous traditions

They came in a compostable box

Made of 100% recycled materials

And I bought them because words

Printed with organic ink said

Wide toe box

Zero drop

Better

Lighter

More natural

Foot-shaped shoes

Save your soles

So now I'm running as if I am barefoot

In these shoes that are better

Than all the other shoes

And my feet are close

So close to the ground

I can practically feel every pebble

As I stride over potholes and puddles

And when my heel finds a stone especially sharp

I hold in a yelp and think

Yes that's okay

That little pain is the proof

I'm wearing barefoot shoes

Because I'm such a serious runner

These shoes are making me faster

And my gait is unfettered
And I'm so very close to the road just beneath them
The only thing separating me from the earth is
The most expensive pair of shoes I own
Of course I did once spend a whole year of my life
Actually barefoot
And drove mom crazy
With my asphalt-black soles showing up on her porch
She would welcome me with sigh or smile or shaking
head
Armed with wet wipes thrust out in greeting
Which I accepted with eyerolls
And erased my footprints from my skin
To protect the sterile sanctity
To be invited in
During that year I left tracks
On San Jose sidewalks and summer hot pavement
In cafes and airplanes and through Adirondacks
I casually referred to sh**s as foot cages
And replaced the O and E with asterisks
Because footwear was clearly a curse
These habits I got from some strangers online
My fellow brave-soled
Kindred in spirit
We told each other
We the unshod
Are the only ones walking right
How can anyone stand otherwise
It was like this in Eden
This is how to be free
And I told my church friends
On God's earth
All ground is sacred
But your high-tops tell me
you don't believe it

I don't know why I put my feet back into their cages
Maybe I heard one too many warnings
About needles and parasites
About germs
Fungus and podoconiosis

There's always a reason to keep your soles shielded
So now my closet is full of options for every occasion
Comfy sneakers and simple slip-ons
Strappy sandals and date-night heels
Platform boots studded and lugged
Basics and classics and trends that I tried
And of course
My favorites
A few just for dancing
And I go running with my barefoot feet
Safely inside my barefoot shoes
An oxymoron laced to the end of each leg
Spending miles wondering
If it's all very ironic
Or hypocritical or pointless
If I've been sold a scam
A three-dollar-sign story
About this life-changing technology
That will undoubtedly help me cross the finish line faster
I barely feel the bumps beneath me
While musing on whether I should get rich inventing
More things that are pretending to be
All of the realness without inconvenience
Perhaps an umbrella that lets you
Feel rain without getting wet
Sort of like my alarm clock that simulates a sunrise
Inside the house
Anytime I like
And will even play bird sounds to make it authentic
I head home and get barefoot for real
Feel cold hallway tile
And soft bedroom carpet
My husband rubs my tired feet
And it's easy here
To leave soles unguarded
But out there
In the world that I run through
Where dirt and germs and stones
Are kicked up and carried
Could I spend a year of my life

Or even a day
Walking around like
 Fire can't burn me
 And if I trip
 Someone will save me

Actually living as if
 Everywhere is holy
 Not just certain special
 Sanctified ground
 But every step
 Every breath
 Every second we share
Like my heart
 Followed my feet
 Took off its sandals
 And left them behind

FRIDAY, MARCH 7

By Pastor Scott Peterson

Say therefore to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them...

~Exodus 6:6

What is freedom?

The dictionary tells us that "freedom is the power or right to speak, act and change as one wants without hindrance or restraint." But as every driver of a car knows, restraint is not only necessary, but good at times. In fact, too much freedom without restraint ends up in dangerous chaos.

The biblical idea of freedom is not about restraint, rather it is about being set free from slavery. Enslavement is the ultimate act of coercion to force control on people. God sets the Israelites free from slavery not so that they can be unrestrained and live however they want, but so that they can be free to be the people that He created them to be; created in His image to love and care for the world and one another.

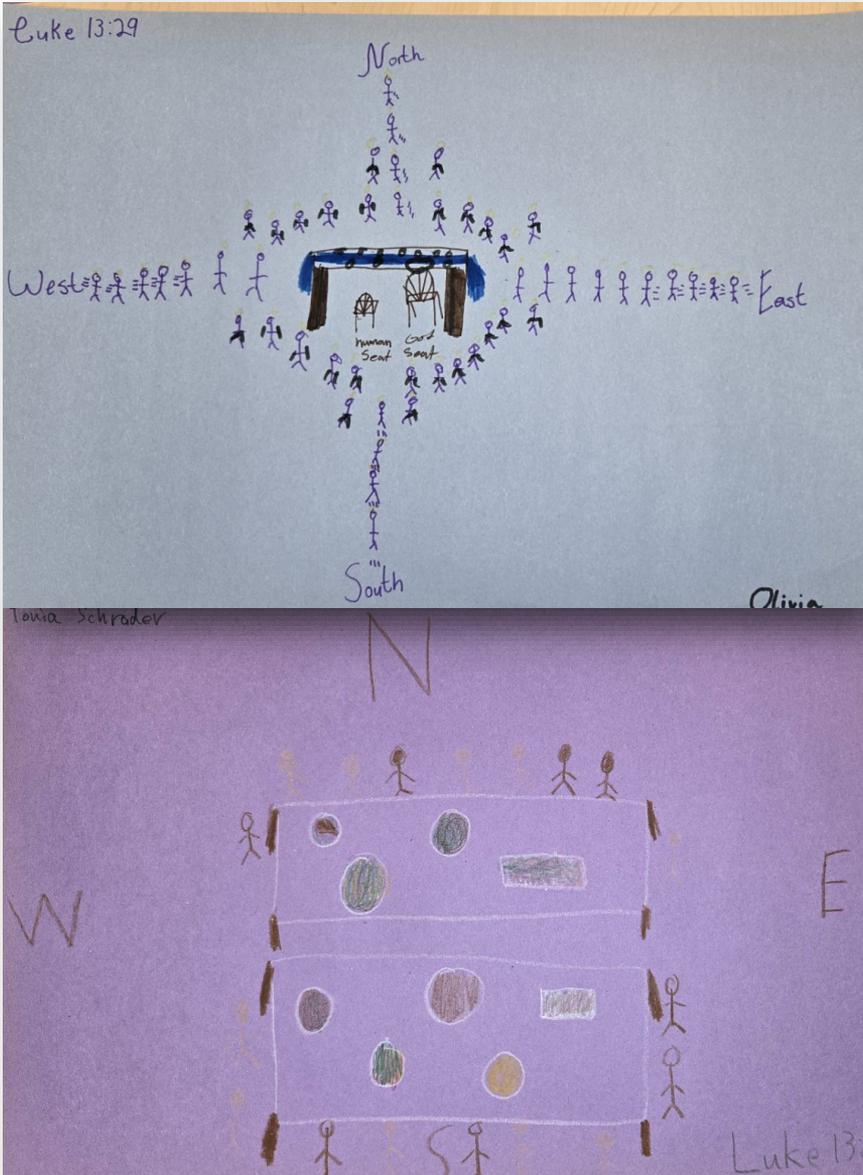
In Galatians 5:13 Paul tells us to not use our freedom (in Christ) to indulge the flesh, rather serve one another humble in love. How can you live into this freedom today? Ask God to help you love and serve others with a good and faithful heart as you go about your day.

SATURDAY, MARCH 8

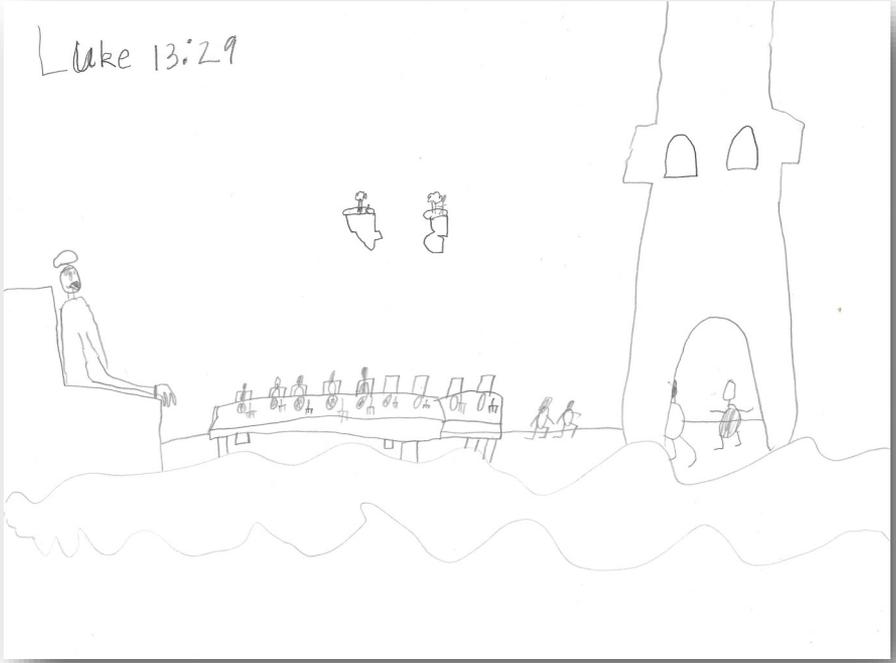
Artwork by: Olivia Egger, Tonia Schroder,
Sajan Carlson & Joy Stegemiller

*Then people will come from east and west, from north and south,
and take their places at the banquet in the kingdom of God.*

~Luke 13:29



Luke 13:29



SUNDAY, MARCH 9

By Mary Lou Williams

*"Jesus answered, 'It's written,
You will worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.'
~Luke 4:8*

This scripture comes from Jesus' forty day time in the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. He had eaten nothing during those days and was starving. When Satan suggested several options Jesus could explore to alleviate his suffering, his reply was to reference Deuteronomy 6:13 to worship the Lord and only him.

Gracious and loving God, when we are tempted – when we are envious of other people's possessions – when we tend to worship physical things or activities – remind us of Jesus' response to Satan: "worship the Lord your God and serve only him." Let that be our response. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 10

By Tricia Williamson

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.
But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the father,
Jesus Christ the righteous.
~1 John 2:1*

While John uses the expression “my little children” as a term of endearment, I cannot help but think of the children I recently visited with during my trip to Senegal. Many have families that love them while some unfortunately may feel as if no one loves them. Yet most do not know that Jesus loves each of them equally and that he will always be there to defend them.

Give thanks today for the opportunity to know God’s love and that He gave us His son, Jesus, to always advocate for and defend us. And pray for the children of Senegal and throughout the world who, for whatever reason, are deprived of or have limited opportunity to learn of God’s grace and never-ending love.



TUESDAY, MARCH 11

By Terry Hurley

*Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin,
and I will put fine garments on you."
~Zechariah 3:4*

Back in the 80's I worked for a land developer/custom home builder. My job included attending subdivision lotteries, representing the company at our home closings, and handling the day-to-day office operations. For each of these duties I had a different dress code – jeans and t-shirts, dress slacks and silk blouses, or suits and heels, depending on the appointments of the day. I wore a cloak appropriate to the situation.

Don't we all dress according to the message we want to convey? During the day, we dress appropriately to our work, we might don a special outfit for a business dinner, or we come home at the end of the day and slip into our most comfy sweats.

But this passage speaks of a cloak we don't remove. Jesus took the cloak of our sin, our shame, our self-righteousness to the cross. He gave us a new cloak – one of love and understanding and humbleness. Wow! What a gift! This cloak is special in that we don't ever take it off – we wear it to work, to our special occasions, and especially in our day-to day lives.

The honest truth is sometimes we will leave this cloak at home, or get it a little muddy, but this is a most forgiving cloak – when we wear it, we are always clean again! Wear this cloak humbly and with great reverence to our God, who sacrificed His only Son so that we will always be warm and loved in His cloak.

Father God, thank you for taking our cloak of sin and pride and giving us this beautiful new cloak of grace and love. May we wear it every day, wrapped in your covenant of love, so that all we encounter will see You as we go about our day. In the name of our Savior, Your Son, Jesus Christ we live and pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

By Sally Stalnaker

*I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my words.
~Psalm 17:6*

Lord, your love is unfailing. I will call your name and You will hear. You will hear my words and know my heart. You will be with me. You will be with me each moment. Help me always turn to you, Lord. I give it all to you, for I trust that You will bring peace and make all things new. Amen.



THURSDAY, MARCH 13

By Kirsten French

*Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering,
for he who has promised is faithful.
~Hebrews 10:23*

This verse reminds me of the first time I became aware of the prayer of confession time during the service; I had to be around seven.

In talking with my mom about how worried I was about all I had done wrong during the week, she told me that was what the confession time was for; we confess to God and he forgives us. We don't have to carry around our sins with us like a yoke weighing us down; we can come confidently to the throne of God and he will forgive us because he is faithful.

I then worried that the confession time could never be nearly long enough for me to confess every wrongdoing for the week; the time was too short! She reminded me that this time is really for us to bring these sins and worries to God; *he has already forgiven us.*

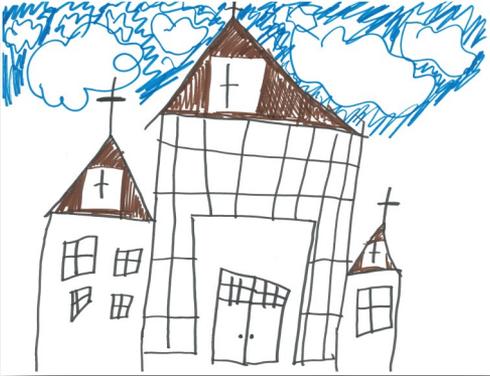
We can never fully recognize the depth of our sins
nor can we do anything to earn this forgiveness;
it is a gift freely given.

Therefore, we can approach the throne of God with hope,
knowing that the God of the universe loved us so much
that he would choose to give the greatest sacrifice,
his Son, so that we might be reunited with him.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14

Artwork by Kayla Teng & Elise Hoffman

*One thing I asked of the Lord; this I seek:
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in His temple.
~Psalm 27:4*



SATURDAY, MARCH 15

Artwork by Reed Ovall

*"Come," My heart says, "seek His face!"
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
~Psalm 27:8*



SUNDAY, MARCH 16

By Dan Zeamer

*Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
~Genesis 15:6*

God knows our hearts and knows how often we are afraid. Afraid of not fitting in, afraid of not having enough, afraid of not being enough. This passage reassures us that our heavenly Father, creator of all the universe, loves us and protects us. All he wants us to do is trust in him and follow his commands. Trust that he is our provider, protector, and his love is truly enough and will sustain us.

In other words...

Don't worry,
God's got you,
now carry on.

MONDAY, MARCH 17

By Chunghah Hoffman

*O give thanks to the Lord; call on His name;
make known His deeds among the peoples.
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wonderful works.
~Psalm 105:1-2*

On How to Be an Evangelist

"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts." Psalm 105:1-2

Do you think of yourself as an evangelist? What do you think of when you hear that word? Perhaps a televangelist walking around on stage waving a bible? Someone going door to door delivering tracts? The person on the street yelling through a megaphone? Trying to "witness" to people who may not want to hear what you have to say? For many of us, the word evangelism evokes some negative emotions. But when we think of the actual meaning of the word *evangelize*—to share the good news—we realize we are all called to be evangelists, as it is an essential way for people to learn about Jesus and for the kingdom of God to grow.

As I read today's verses from Psalm 105, I am immediately reminded of the story of the woman at the well from John 4 because of the simple lesson in evangelism it offers.

The woman at the well, as you may recall, is the story of a Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus during her visit to a well to draw water. She is incredulous when Jesus asks her for a drink, because Jews did not normally associate with Samaritans. They proceed to have a conversation in which Jesus reveals some pretty incredible truths. He talks about living water that never dries up, a new way to worship God, and about the type of worshippers that God seeks. And when he seems to know all the intimate details of her life and past, she concludes he must be a prophet. He reveals that he is the Messiah.

Immediately following this encounter, the woman leaves her water jar behind and hurries back to her town. She tells her people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (John 4:29) I love the simplicity of what she shares. Despite all the amazing theological insights Jesus has revealed to her, the thing she chooses to share is so simple, self-centered even. She simply shares what Jesus did for her.

Read what happens next:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world. (John 4:39-42)

What an amazing outcome from her simple testimony. Many people who heard her started to believe immediately, and were prompted to seek out Jesus for themselves. They invited him to stay, and yet even more became believers through his teaching.

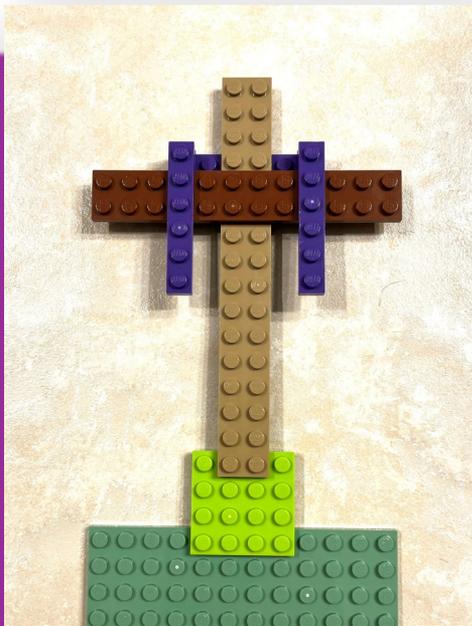
Simple, yet effective. As you can see, evangelism doesn't need to be complicated or awkward. We don't need to brush up on apologetics, provide scientific proof, convince, persuade, or prepare to debate. If you have ever recognized God at work at any point in your life, you have all you need. The Samaritan woman had a personal encounter with Jesus that changed her, and that is what she chose to share. *He sees me and he knows me!* she probably thought. She was so amazed and full of hope she could barely contain herself.

Testimonies are powerful. When we hear about the wondrous ways in which God works in people's lives, he begins to seem real, living, and true. For how much more real can God get than meeting us where we are, in ways that are personal to us, transforming our hearts, and redeeming the broken pieces of our lives? Though the Samaritan woman offers an express invitation (*Come, see...*), I think in every testimony there is an implied invitation, beckoning the listener to encounter God for themselves.

Who might you be in this story? Are you one of the townspeople who has heard of God working in the lives of others and have an inkling of belief? Like them, will you draw near to Jesus and invite him in, anticipating your own personal encounter? Or, are you the Samaritan woman who has already experienced God working in your life? Are you filled with gratitude, excitement, and hope, ready to set down your proverbial water jar because you cannot wait to share what God has done for you?

It can be so simple. *This is what God has done for me, and I am grateful.* Don't keep it to yourself! Give credit where credit is due. Share your praises with friend or neighbor, family or stranger. God will provide the opportunity. Share your praises with your community of faith so we can all be strengthened in our belief. To reiterate, *"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts."*

For further reading: John 4:1-42, Mark 5:19-20



Lego creation by Victor Bisch

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

By Nicole Webb

Artwork by Harper & Eli Webb

*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond your strength,
but with the testing He will also provide the way out
so that you may be able to endure it.
~1 Corinthians 10:13*

Of all the options for the devotional, this one chose me. Some of my friends call this a God Wink. A small sign from God in your everyday life.

Anyone who knows us or has seen us in church, probably noticed the rough 2023-2024 we had. We experienced a serious life event in the form of a cancer diagnosis. Being on the other side of the diagnosis now, I can see that God provided "a way out" for our family.

The perspective of looking back has provided countless examples of God's handiwork that we are fortunate enough to experience and even feel while trudging along through the last 2 years. Our CPC family has been a large part in this "way out" along with our family whom are supportive beyond words.

Life is made up of these experiences, it's all part of our time here on earth. I believe these moments are ways for us to seek God and bring us closer to Him. They provide opportunities for Him to show Himself to us. We cannot strengthen our faith and relationship with God without having to work at it.

We cannot gain confidence until we've gone through something that allows us to see that we are strong and smart enough to actually make it through; Similarly we need to exercise our faith, encountering things in this life that are meant to be ways for God to show Himself to us. Strengthening our faith through life's challenges and having God walk with us through life's ups and downs. He knows the plan, and we can just hold his hand and walk through it with His strength.



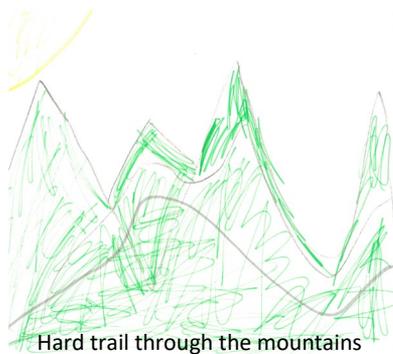
It is my privilege to have my faith grow during a tough time, alongside all of you. Encouraged by our family and church family when it would have been easier to just sit back and question God, rather than seek Him. These tests allow us to endure and gives us the ability to surround ourselves with the community we need to become more faithful. God's "way out" for us was the friendships we have made and strengthened, having a family able to assist us with

their time and care, the continued research into cancer that is making survival rates higher each year, the ability for our kids to carry on worry free, a support system that is still available, and programs through church to continue education and growth in faith. Just to name a few. Truly the work of God is overwhelming and I'm unable to count the ways he has provided for us.

So no matter what you are facing, take the next step and look for God to provide the way out.

Lord, thank you for walking with me as I seek you. You're there even if I question you and surround me with the opportunities to find you and create my community that can help my faith grow.

Please stay with me even if I question you and let fear in. Help me to remember that fear is a liar, and You are there every day and everywhere. Let me see the ways that you provide for me to endure the hard times.



Help me to see the graceful and righteous path out of the challenges, giving thanks to you the entire journey. And if I falter, I know You'll be right there when I need you. Amen

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19

By Brian Strickland

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
Will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
~Psalm 91:1-2*

At different times in my life, these words have been a comfort and encouragement to me. I remember a couple of occasions where mentors of mine in the faith shared these verses of God's refuge of love and protection over my life.

The first was from my high school youth group leader, Margie. While reading the Scriptures to us students, she repeatedly lifted us up to the Lord with these verses. Margie blessed us and encouraged us as she invited us to know that Jesus is our refuge and fortress, and I felt His warmth and truth and I longed to enter in and put my trust in him with my life.

Some years later, I was invited by my friend Denise to join an intercessory prayer group. I remember these verses being shared in a powerful way. "Living in the shelter of the Most High, and abiding in the shadow of the Almighty..." I was experiencing God's powerful work in my life as I had previously not been following God as I should have been the last couple of years. He was drawing me back, forgiving me as I let go of things that were keeping me from being close to Him. God was restoring my life and putting me back on the path He designed for me. I sensed His powerful love and movement in the Holy Spirit in personal prayer, my daily life and vocation and He drew me into this prayer group which I had experienced in high school.

I hope the words of this Psalm remind you of God's protection over you, and His unconditional love over you, and His presence with you, inside of you and all around you wherever you go. Know that He is always with you!

THURSDAY, MARCH 20

Artwork by David Grice & Luke Klump

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, "Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?"

They answered the king, "True, O king." He replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the fourth has the appearance of a god."

~Daniel 3:24-25

After our Sunday school class read chapter 3 of Daniel, we took time to brainstorm truths we learned from the obedience and courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

One observation was that faith has no limit. We never know what obstacles or opposition we might face in life, but the God we serve will supply us with what we need when we trust and obey.

Another truth highlighted so vividly in this passage is that God is always with us! We may not see him but that doesn't change this truth.

A final takeaway from this story is that our faithfulness allows others to see God's power. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had bowed down to the golden idol (prohibited in the Ten Commandments) the Babylonians may never have known the one true God.

God's Word is indeed living and active, always encouraging, challenging, and revealing truths we need to be reminded of!



Faith has no end



God is always
with us

David Grice

FRIDAY, MARCH 21

By Mary Sisson

*O God, you are my God; I will seek you; my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is not water.
~Psalm 63:1*

A dry and weary chunk of land in Senegal is where Eric Toumieux saw potential, even though it was considered cursed. But God had given Eric a vision of lush green, a thriving farm, a center of Christian ministry.

He enlisted Luciano, an Italian water expert, to drill a borehole. Luciano's tools saw tiny pockets of very salty water. But Eric's faith saw "the precious dew from heaven above and the deep waters that lie below" (Deut. 33:13). When Luciano drilled 150, 250, 300 feet with no water and was ready to give up, Eric convinced him to come one more time. At 330 feet they heard a big rumble, and pure, sweet water gushed from the borehole.

What 20 years ago was just rocks and sand, today 91 hectares have been restored. Trees abound. So many birds have returned that birders flock from Europe to see them.

Beer Sheba is a thriving organic farm, raising and selling enough meat to support 90 employees, training farmers and interns, offering medical care. Eric's wife, Hee Suk, runs a school for area children. God's restorative power abounds.

Are you feeling dry and weary? Dig deep, and bring that thirst before God. Pray big. If God can turn rocks and sand into an oasis of green, think what He can do with your life!



Beer Sheba Entry



Moringa tree

SATURDAY, MARCH 22

By Marilyn Kimble

*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit.
~Luke 6:43*

Eugene Peterson in "The Message," translates this verse as, "You don't get wormy apples off a healthy tree, nor good apples off a diseased tree." Peterson goes on to add, "The health of the apple tells the health of the tree."

In this passage, Jesus is pointing out that like a flourishing tree, our lives must be rooted in spiritual truth and equipped by the indwelling spirit so that our beliefs, relationships, and practices produce positive, godly results. Good fruit produced by the Spirit is described in Galatians 5:22 as, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Although Jesus' desire is for each of us to have hearts that are pure, our humanly nature pulls us in the opposite direction producing those "wormy apples."

It is only with hearts transformed by faith and trust in Jesus
that we can, as individuals and a church community,
be like a healthy, flourishing tree that abounds
with good, spiritual fruit.

We can then freely share that good fruit
with family, fellow believers and our neighborhoods.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23

By Heidi Kjos

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
~Isaiah 55:8*

Most of us have experienced a storm or two along the way in life. Maybe your storm has been loss of a loved one, loss of a job, struggles with addiction, feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, grief, shame, fear —> name your storm. Often these storms happen when our expectations don't match God's plans.

“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.**

When going through life storms, it is difficult to keep this hope alive and trust that God's ways are better than our own.

My mom was my high school tennis coach and she often said, “You can control two things—> your attitude and your effort”. In difficult times, do not pretend to be happy, but have a positive (hopeful) attitude and don't despair as God is always with you and trust His ways are so much better than our own. To weather the storms of life, do not be self-centered, rather be God-centered and grow and act in God's word, for his plans for you are great!

Every storm in your life is an opportunity for you to experience God in a different way as you walk with him.

PRAY: Ask God to give you (or someone you know who is going through a storm) strength to endure the storm and patience for His divine timing and amazing ways.

MONDAY, MARCH 24

By Stephanie Bisch
Artwork by Leah Bisch

*Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you?
Does this mean nothing to you?
Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?
~Romans 2:4 (NLT)*

I once read that God is so enamored with us, so full of love and wonder, that it nearly makes him miss our failures. God is busy fangirling over each hair on our head, taking great delight in us.

Many people I know, myself included, take great delight in seeing little babies. As a Mom of three kids, I can tell you that strangers and relatives alike are often looking to spot a resemblance between my kids (as babies especially) and someone in our gene pool. Did any of my kids inherit some physical feature or mannerisms or character traits from me? From my side of the family? Hopefully the good ones!

Yet how many of us, if we know we are made in the image of God, search for a resemblance amongst our church family or ourselves? Does God cast his gaze on us, smiling warmly as He spots a resemblance in us that reminds Him of Himself? Or other beloved saints from throughout history?

Of course we know much of our physical and personality characteristics aren't inherited, but are forged by our lives as we live them. God is kind to see all our past failings as stepping stones of learning and mistakes to be forgiven. God is tolerant of our dramatic tendencies to make molehills into mountains and to act as if the struggles of daily life might be more urgent than anything else, even our commitment to follow Him. God is patient, endlessly patient, as we wander through our spiritual journeys.

Are we taking God for granted?

God is good at flipping expectations and reminding us that He is greater than any box we might put Him into. Our world wants us to believe that kindness, tolerance, and patience are for the weak. We

certainly have ample examples where people with power are expected or even praised for being unkind, intolerant, and impatient. They are important people! They have places to be! They don't have time or cannot possibly expend energy by treating those lower than themselves well! And yet God, more powerful and important than anything in the universe, displays these characteristics.

God is leading us away from sin and towards himself. Not by shouting or shaming us into submission. His kindness, tolerance, and patience do not imply his approval of everything we do. Our souls crave connection and community. It is easier than ever to feel lonely. Yet God surrounds us and leads with kindness, tolerance, and patience. Hoping we will follow Him. Hoping we will bless the world by reflecting His kindness, tolerance and patience. When God looks at us, may He see the resemblance.



TUESDAY, MARCH 25

By Claudia Gonzalez

*Y orar en el Espíritu en toda ocasión
con toda clase de oraciones y peticiones.*

~Efesios 6:18

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions
with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

~Ephesians 6:18

Amado Dios, te pido discernimiento para todos nosotros ya que vivimos confundidos entre el bien y el mal; ya que no podemos identificar estas importantes cosas en nuestras vidas ayudanos y guíanos para ser mejores cada día. Ayudanos a hacer mejores padres ya que nuestros jovenes son el futuro y queremos un futuro mejor para nuestros nietos. Señor te pido que nos ayudes a aprender a orar ya que tu palabra lo dice "oren en todo tiempo según les inspire el Espíritu" pongan en practica todo lo que leen en su biblia, pongan toda su confianza en él; danos sabiduria para poner las palabras correctas en nuestras bocas y asi poder predicar tu palabra. Te pido por cada una de las personas que asisten a esta iglesia, tu los conoces mejor que yo a cada uno de ellos y sabes lo que necesitan; te pido por todos ellos, se parte de nuestras vidas recordanos siempre que tu estas con nosotros salvanos de todo mal. Enseñanos a hablar para edificar no para criticar. Te pido por todas las familias ayudalas y unificalas y protejelas de todo mal amén. Todo te lo pedimos en el nombre de Jesús, Amén.

Dear God, I ask you for discernment for all of us since we live confused between good and evil; Since we cannot identify these important things in our lives, help us and guide us to be better every day. Help us to become better parents since our young people are the future and we want a better future for our grandchildren. Lord, I ask you to help us learn to pray since your word says "Pray at all times as the Spirit inspires you" Put into practice everything you read in your Bible, and put all your trust in him; Give us wisdom to put the right words in our mouths so we can preach your word. I ask you for each of the people who attend

this church, you know each one of them better than I do and you know what they need; I ask you for all of them, be part of our lives, always remind us that you are with us, save us from all evil. Teach us to speak to edify not to criticize. I ask you for all families, help them unify them and protect them from all evil, amen. We ask everything in the name of Jesus, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

By Laura Ericcsen

And again he said, "To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened"

~Luke 13:20

A Prayer of Thanks from the Preschool Director

Dear Heavenly Father,

We come before you with a heart full of gratitude and awe in reflection on the words of Jesus in Luke 13:20.

Lord, as we walk down the preschool hall, we thank you for the beautiful reminder that the kingdom of God grows in many ways we do not always see or understand. Just as yeast works invisibly in dough, you work quietly within me and our wonderful teachers, helping us to transform the lives of our sweet students and their families.

We pray, Lord, that we continue to be open to your transformative work. Help our teachers and myself to see that even the smallest acts of faith have a huge impact on our students. Just as the yeast leavens the entire loaf, may your love permeate every part of each of us and overflow to all the little people who roam our hall each day.

Give us patience.

Let us be instruments of your love and grace in this tiny part of your world we call Circle of Friends.

In Jesus name, we pray.

Amen.



THURSDAY, MARCH 27

By Steve Klump

*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.
For our slight momentary affliction is producing for us
an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.
~2 Corinthians 4:16-17*

This message seems especially suited to the “golden years” of our lives. As we age, our bodies begin to decline and we lose much of what we thought made us, “us”. The ability to do physical work, engage in our much-loved sports and recreation, and even to navigate the world on our own- it all begins to slip away.

If we are fortunate enough to live into the “graying decades” of life, all this becomes painfully obvious.

Yet it starts sooner than we like. I talk to people a generation younger than me (I’m 76 years old) who are already feeling the aches and pains of a body in decline.

I’ve known for years that the compensation for this is a growing spirit. I’ve taught that even when we can’t “do” anymore, we can still “do” the work of the Spirit. We can pray. We can encourage others. We can lend our voices to the concerns of our community.

Paul tells us that advancing infirmities don’t amount to that much, even though they can make our lives harder.

The hope he gives is that we are growing to bear the “eternal weight of glory beyond all measure”.

This is an extraordinary thought. What, exactly is this “weight of glory?” It seems to be the knowledge that the limits of this life are transcended by the infinite possibilities that the life of the spirit gives us. And when the life of our spirit is formed by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are not only able to bear the “weight of eternal

glory” , but our work is not limited by our finite, physical abilities and restrictions.

To bear the “eternal weight of glory” is to fully participate in the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens. We don't have to wait to cross “over to the other side” to take on this work. Here in this limited existence or ours, we can reach across the generations. Backward in time to claim the work and heritage of those on whose shoulders we stand. Forward to the future to help prepare and put in place the resources of mind and “stuff” that our “grands” will need to fight the good fight.

Think about what your parents gave you that has made your own life significant; that has given you the values and “toughness” that you've needed. And think about how you can do the same for your own offspring – and others who might find inspiration in what you have done.

The “eternal weight of glory” sits on our shoulders. We can either carry it bravely and proudly, or we can shirk all of this and live only for ourselves and our own “needs and desires”.

And this applies at all stages of life: Each day we bear the weight of glory” – if we will.

I pray that you might carry that weight
bravely and powerfully.

FRIDAY, MARCH 28

By Sabine Carlson

*Then I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.
~Psalm 32:5*

Once my aunt sent us a bunch of Easter candy. My brother, Sajan, and I both wanted one piece, but my dad said no. When my dad went to get the mail, I told Sajan that we should both sneak one piece of chocolate. But when my dad came back, I shoved my piece of chocolate into my mouth, but Sajan couldn't hide the chocolate. Then my dad got mad that we disobeyed him. I started crying and apologizing. I felt bad that I got my brother in trouble, and I didn't listen to my dad. This shows that my dad forgave me just like Jesus forgives our sins.

Psalm 32:6 also says, "Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." I can confess and go to God as my safe space.

As we grow older, our sins sometimes become bigger. Instead of sneaking chocolate, we might lie, talk about people behind their backs, disobey in more severe ways, or fail to speak up for what's right. We should always remember to confess our sins, accept God's forgiveness, and take refuge in God's love.

Dear God, please forgive for the big and small ways that we sin. Thank you for forgiving our sins even when we don't deserve it. Thank you for being our safe space. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29

By Audrey Grice

I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

~Luke 15:7

I was really struggling to decide what direction to take this devotion, but I decided I wanted to look at the word repentance. According to the Miriam-Webster Dictionary, to repent means "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life". I think this definition is so beautiful because it highlights a step I forget much too often: dedication to the amendment of life. It's so easy for me to identify an area in my life where I need to seek repentance, but after I confess my sin, nothing changes. God's call for repentance isn't just a moment of regret that is washed away by His mercy, it is a continual dedication to the amendment of our lives to better serve the Lord.

Repentance is a thing we do out of a desire to become closer to God, not in an effort to cleanse ourselves from sin or somehow use our good works to earn His favor. We are called to step out of our sin into the Way, and one of the ways we do that is through the continual process of repentance in our lives. I want you to think about areas in your life where you might feel the Lord calling you to repent, or places where maybe you confessed to sin but didn't seek change from that sin. Together, let's repent, turning away from sin and dedicating ourselves to the pursuit of the Lord instead of our own flesh.

I can guarantee there's going to be a party happening in heaven when we do.

SUNDAY, MARCH 30

By Erin Lambley

Artwork by Callan Lambley

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
look, new things have come into being!
~2 Corinthians 5:17*

Lord Jesus,

It is so easy to see your new creation in a child. It's harder to see that in ourselves. During this Lenten season, please open our eyes to the new creations all around us - the buds of a flower in Spring, the tweet of a baby bird recently hatched, and the first rays of sun at the break of dawn. We know that in you, we are a new creation. Thank you for loving us and reminding us of your wonderful gift of life in every new creation we see.



MONDAY, MARCH 31

By Erin Endreson

*God looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.*

~Psalm 53:2

Right now, I find myself looking all around me
for those who are wise.

I often get discouraged, disheartened, and disabled
because I only hear or see those speaking the loudest.

But I need to remember that very often
those speaking the loudest are not the wisest.

When I remind myself that God
is also looking for those that are wise,
I find comfort because I know
I can put my anxiety in his hands
because he is all-knowing and all-powerful.
And as long as I am speaking his Word,
I am as wise as I can be.

TUESDAY, APRIL 1

By Luisa Mis Ramirez

*Y que amarle con todo el corazón y con todo el entendimiento y con todas las fuerzas, y amar al prójimo como a un mismo es más que todos los holocaustos y los sacrificios.
~San Marcos 12:33*

*And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.
~Mark 12:33*

Este versículo menciona
los dos mandamientos más importantes
que como hijos de Dios debiéramos seguir,
y aplicar en nuestras vidas todos los días.
Yo creo que viviríamos en un lugar mejor
si lo ponemos en práctica.
¡Podríamos ser una gran familia celestial!

This verse mentions the
two most important commandments
that as God's children we should follow,
and apply in our lives every single day.
I believe that we would live in a better place
if we practice it.
We could be a great heavenly family!

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2

By Mary Jensen

*And taking the five loaves and the two fish,
he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them
and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.
And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up,
twelve baskets of broken pieces.
~Luke 9:16-17*

Imagining Yourself in Luke 9:16-17

And taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled, and what was leftover was gathered up.

Jesus sent the 12 of us out on mission: to announce the arrival of God's promised kingdom with His coming. He wanted us to practice all that He had been teaching and modeling for us. We left Him in Capernaum and went out, preaching the good news AND healing so many sick people. He bid us go without a walking stick, food, or extra clothes. We were to rely on the Father to care for our needs out of His abundance. In nearly every town, someone offered us hospitality and gave us a home base from which to do our work.

When we returned, we were excited, as well as exhausted. It had been an amazing experience of partnering with God *in His power!* People heartily welcomed the good news and were physically healed by our prayers and touch. We had nothing, and we had everything!

Jesus saw our exhaustion. Being the good shepherd that He is, He invited us to go with Him to a desolate place and rest awhile. We loved that idea! In Capernaum, people were constantly knocking on the door and asking for something. We didn't even have time to eat! We got in the boat and headed across the lake to an isolated camping spot that Jesus knew would be perfect.

As we approached the shore, we were astonished that our desolate campsite was overrun with needy people! We were so disappointed! This was **our** planned time away for quiet conversation and rest. But Jesus looked at the crowd with such love and concern. He said they were "like sheep without a shepherd." (Mk 6:34). He sat down and began to teach them about His kingdom breaking into our world – the same message He had sent us to announce. These people needed hope. They needed healing. And ... they needed food!

As the shadows grew long, the 12 of us came to Him and suggested He send the crowd to town to get some dinner before dark. There were no stores or restaurants in the wild. He looked us square in the eye and said, "You give them something to eat." We couldn't believe it! Did He do the math? With a crowd this size it would take every last denarii we had to just offer them snacks. We had only a few loaves of bread and a couple of dried fish with us. We had expected to rest, not feed 5000 people!

He took the loaves and fish in His hands, lifted them up toward heaven and gave thanks to the Father for the food that we **DID** have. Very calmly He divided it 12 ways and sent us out to share these meager bits with the crowd. That's when something strange happened. We kept passing out bread and fish but our baskets never ran out. Before long every person in the crowd was happily eating and satisfied! And that's not all – our baskets were still full! Clearly, we had witnessed a miracle. We felt a little foolish having been out "on mission" prior to this, relying on God's provision and having every need met. What made us think that God's presence with us would end when our planned mission was over? It was but a foretaste of the kingdom life to which we have been called every day:

Jesus, always with us! Jesus, always enough!

Prayer:

Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd!

You loved people even when they interrupted Your plans.

Thank You for the compassion You have for our humanity -

our need for hope, for help,

and for practical everyday things like food.

Help me to remember that because You are always with me,

I will always have enough to share -

enough time, enough food, enough emotional energy -

whatever I feel I am lacking.

Everything I am and have, You have given me.

I offer it to back to You with gratitude.

Make it enough, as only You can,

to care for the people around me.

Surprise me with Your abundance today!

Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

By Tifny Mathena

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you,
O Jacob, he who formed you,
O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
~Isaiah 43:1*

My daughter has a handwritten note on her wall that reads:

Do not fear, Stella,
for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name;
you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and through the rivers,
they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

—
**Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honored,
and I love you.**

Perhaps we could all use a handwritten note, with our own name written in, stuck somewhere we can see.

Lord, may we be reminded every day that you see us, you know us, and you love us.

You call us each by name. We belong to you.
Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 4

By Shari Ridgway-Sanders

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

~Isaiah 43:19

Wilderness has many meanings and can look very different each time we experience it.

empty loneliness
abandoned isolation
hardship wild.state
preparation disfavor
darkness
lost
Wilderness
bewildered pain hidden
stark.need neglected
uninhabited
uncertainty

Isaiah 43:19 is meant as encouragement, a hope where you thought it was impossible. When we experience "Wilderness" whether for a long season or a moment, we may get stuck and it is hard to see the beauty that the Lord is creating for us. A song I like to listen to when I need a reminder of all the wonder God has created in my life is "Name" by Nicole Nordeman. If you listen, I hope it brings you the same peace it does for me and I pray that you recognize the "streams" that may have been hidden and experience the fulfilling love that Jesus has to offer.

SATURDAY, APRIL 5

By Anna Haagenon

*Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary,
and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.
But some of them went to the Pharisees
and told them what Jesus had done.
~John 11:45-46*

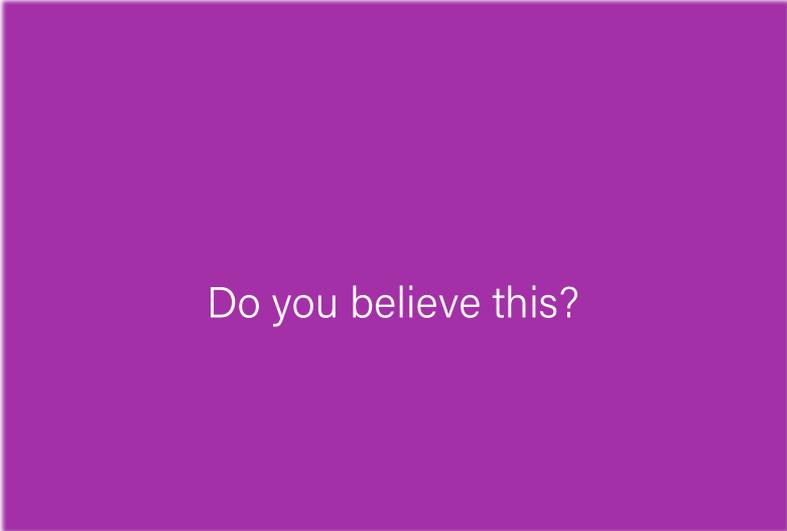
Let's put this verse in context. Mary and her sister Martha were close friends and followers of Jesus, as was their brother Lazarus. The sisters sent word to Jesus regarding their brother, "Lord, the one you love is sick." As with all things, Jesus would use this news to show God's glory. When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus was dead and had been buried in a tomb for four days. Jesus came upon the scene, witnessing the mourning of the women surrounded by friends there to comfort them. Both sisters clearly knew that, had Jesus been there, he had the power to heal Lazarus but their imaginations didn't seem big enough to fathom a power stronger than death. Jesus is full of compassion and grief, filled with love for his friends to the point of weeping. The Jews who were there for support also acknowledged Jesus' power to heal and questioned why he had not been there to heal Lazarus.

After exclaiming, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die," Jesus asks, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) Martha again asserts her faith in Jesus as the Christ but only seems to be thinking about the future hope of heaven. What Jesus is offering is more than a ticket to paradise. He is offering life; right here and now. Not a shadow of our heavenly selves but a life to the full, the image of God himself.

Jesus demonstrates this life-giving power by calling Lazarus out of the tomb and back to his earthly life. This miracle should be enough to convince anyone to believe the promises of Jesus as they glimpsed the glory of God. So when we read in the passage that many of these Jews who were comforting Mary and Martha saw what Jesus did and believed, we are not surprised. But Jesus is

telling us that believing is going beyond what we see and receiving the life that is being offered. Verse 46 tells us some of those who saw, chose to be skeptical; to see a threat instead of a gift. They went away with the intention of getting rid of the threat. Their belief in the power of Jesus extends as far as they have proof. When we see beyond that point, we are accepting the gift of life through faith.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." The glory of God is revealed to us every day if we are paying attention. The gift of life in Christ is offered to us freely through his crucifixion and resurrection. We can choose to believe and accept the gift that comes to us right now, not just at the last day; to live a life as God's image and to reveal him to the world and bring about his purposes.



Do you believe this?

SUNDAY, APRIL 6

By Bob Hughes

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
~Psalm 126:1*

Joy and dreams are often irrevocably linked together. And there is no joy like the joy one feels when their dreams or the dreams of those they most love were realized or manifested. This is especially true with milestones like graduations, getting a new job, receiving a positive medical diagnosis, seeing a project you first envisioned is finally completed.

Our struggle is often to find and realize joy, not just in days that are extraordinary but those that are mundane or challenging. Joy might not be apparent at times but taking time to step back and visualize or pray or dream is so often within our reach. And sometimes joy is indeed nearby as a later verse in Psalm 126 states *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

Psalm 126 is one of the Songs of Ascent. These are songs for family journeys to festivals in Jerusalem; songs for extraordinary days and songs worth revisiting on more ordinary days where dreams might need to be revisited and joy is closer than one might realize.

MONDAY, APRIL 7

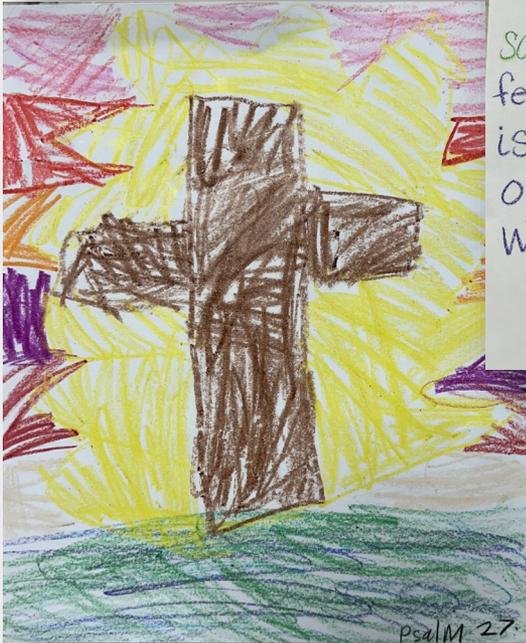
Artwork by Kindergarten-Third Grade Sunday School

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

~Psalm 27:1



The **Lord** is my
light and my
salvation; whom shall I
fear? The **Lord**
is my **stronghold**
of my life; of
whom shall I
be afraid.
Psalm 27:1



TUESDAY, APRIL 8

By Anne Overton

*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.
If what you heard from the beginning abides in you,
then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.
And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.
~1 John 2:24-25*

Abide - remain, lodge, sojourn, dwell, continue, await

The word abide seems to capture the very essence of the Lenten season. It is a time to intentionally focus on the life of Christ and our life in Him. I'm struck by the way that abide can have a connotation of rest, reflection, patience and slowing down, while also implying a sense of perseverance and pressing forward. These definitions feel contradictory in some ways, stopping while moving on? How is that possible? And yet God's desire to abide with His children forever was so great that He sent Jesus to live among us, to dwell on earth so that we would have an example of what it is to abide.

In these verses we are reminded to cling to the basics of our faith. To let God's love dwell within our hearts, to glorify Him with our words and actions and to care for those around us so that they may see God's light. To remain in Christ, allowing Him to change and direct us, to make us more like Him. What a gift to be able to abide in the Son and in the Father, not just for today or tomorrow, but forever.

*Lord, help me not to overcomplicate things.
In this season, may I return to the basics,
slowing down to remember and reflect on your great love
and the life of Christ.
Search my heart, God,
and teach me to love and abide in You
with all my heart, soul and strength.
Amen*

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9

By Shannon Roller

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and He will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise again."

~Luke 18:31-33

We so often hear of the suffering that Jesus went through prior to his crucifixion as well as His disciples, early Christians and many others across time since then. When I hear about that suffering, it brings to mind the stories I have heard about my mother-in-law's great grandfather and his family. Emanuel Vanorden was born a Jew in the Netherlands who converted to Christianity in London, came to the U.S. during the Civil War, became a Presbyterian minister and was a missionary to thousands of immigrants in Chicago during his time in seminary. I often think about his life as compared to that of Paul because they seemed to have so much shared experiences as converted Jews and missionaries even though they lived 1700 years apart.

Emanuel and his bride, Bertha, were sent by the New York Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to Brazil as missionaries in 1872. Emanuel's accomplishments over his lifetime are truly amazing but the part of his story that really stands out to me is the amount of persecution that he and his family endured in Brazil. Protestant missionaries and their families suffered persecution from hard-line Catholics- including children resulting in the missionaries needing to starting their own international schools.

Emanuel and his family endured so much more because of their work to abolish slavery in Brazil which was still legal until 1888. Emanuel communicated with the Emperor of Brazil and diplomats of the U.S. as well as several European countries to urge them to stop transporting slaves on their ships between Brazilian ports. He even met with President Grant in Washington.

When he spoke in public, he needed to be guarded by the Chief of Police, the American consul and nine armed soldiers. His anti-slavery views were not shared by his colleagues who were Old School men from the South. He eventually lost the support of the church and his funding due to his views, forcing him find a way to make money as a writer, printer and publisher to support his continued ministry. Several members of the family carried on his legacy of evangelical work.

A quote from Emanuel's handwritten autobiography that speaks to me about their persecution:

"Sometimes there was absolute want of friends but the Lord has never forsaken his servants. Persecuted, attacked by the mob, ordered to stop preaching by foes and advised by friends, but my wife and I continued the work and never stopped, and it prospered."

I am so grateful that I don't live in a time and place
that I need to suffer for my Christian beliefs.

I admire the whole Vanorden family
as well as all those who have been persecuted for
their beliefs for their perseverance through difficult times—
staying true to their faith in God and doing
the hard right when they could have taken an easier path.

17234 1729

Emanuel Vanorden born in the Hague, Holland of his parents in 1839. Embraced Christianity in London in 1861. Employed in the S. until end of his life.



LEGACY

Emanuel Norman Van Noorden (Vanorden)
 Born-1839-The Hague, Netherlands
 Died-1917-Sao Paulo, Brazil

1868 and graduated in 1871. When there a ... note for the ... occasionally ... for. acted as Secretary for the ...

HERITAGE

- Jewish Convert to Christianity
- Presbyterian Minister
- Missionary in Brazil
- English and French Teacher
- Prolific writer and Translator of Christian works into Portuguese
- Publisher
- Political Activist
- Fighting Against Slavery in Brazil

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

By Tifny Mathena

*He had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
~Isaiah 53:2b-3*

I like to think of Jesus as the life of the party.

The corn hole champion that tells the best jokes. The guy that automatically draws a crowd. The beloved guest whose arrival you are most waiting for. He gives an amazing hug when you open the door and the kids all stumble down the stairs, racing to get to him. He likes my cooking and has seconds, gushing gratefulness for the meal. He's the storyteller that keeps us all at the table after dinner for hours. Nobody wants to leave or can think of anywhere else they'd rather be. Maybe he tries to sneak into the kitchen to do the dishes.

This is how I like to think of Jesus. This is the guy I know. Who knows me. And my husband. And my kids. He even likes my disobedient dog, who is curled up at his feet.

But if given the opportunity, would I have even seen him? Would I pass by this amazing man who quickly becomes the heart of any home?

Isaiah tells us:

He is one we overlook.

When scanning a crowd, our eyes would keep going.

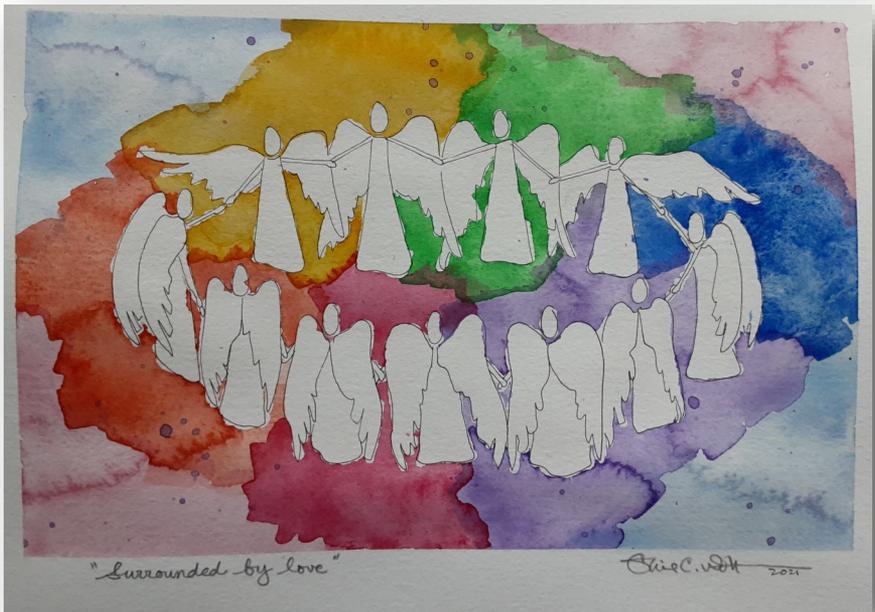
He appears "less" than many. Unenviable.

Maybe thin and dusty from long roads and longer days.

Easy to miss.

Carrying a world of grief that no one can see.

Lord, I pray that if I was given the chance,
I would not pass Him by.
That I would not forgo the joy that Jesus brings,
or withhold an invitation,
simply because
I do not see Him.
Amen



Artwork by Gail Wolz

FRIDAY, APRIL 11

By Frank & Gail Wolz

*For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.
~Isaiah 54:10*

These are difficult days in which we live. It is often hard to listen to the news, which is filled with stories of war, violence, displaced people, and injustice. It is no wonder we can feel anxious, worried, unsure of what is to come, and perhaps even angry at current events and our leaders.

Even with all that is going on around us and in us, we can find peace in knowing that our God is a loving and compassionate God who never abandons us. He is with us through the storms of life and faithfully guides our path. He made this world and everything in it and is in control of all things. He promises each of us His peace which exceeds our understanding. Let us remember daily these promises and surrender our worries to His faithful hands. Having received the blessings of God's presence and peace, let us also ask how we may share these blessings with our very troubled and hurting world.

And in this Lenten season, we rejoice in God's gift of his Son Jesus who is both the Prince of Peace and Immanuel – God with us.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12

By Pastor Scott Peterson

*Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread,
which is called the Passover, was near.
The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way
to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.
~Luke 22:1*

Why were the chief priests and scribes afraid of the people?

It seems that they should be afraid of Jesus, or God, or Pilate, or Rome. But no, they are afraid of the people. They must think that whatever power or influence that they have comes from the people.

The power they have goes in 2 ways: 1) they have power over the people, by the use of the laws and sacrificial system. And 2) by this power they gain the people's following and assent.

But what if the people don't follow? What if they follow someone else, like Jesus? If the people follow Jesus, that would be bad, or so they think. So they are afraid of the people. They have invested their whole life and identity in the system that will keep them in the place of power and influence. In some ways they are slaves to the system of sacrifice and obedience. Jesus wants to set them free! But to be free means that they must let go of all they know and all they are, because they have become a slave to those things.

What do you need to let go of? What are you afraid of?

Ask God to help you to not be afraid

so that you can be free to follow Jesus more closely.

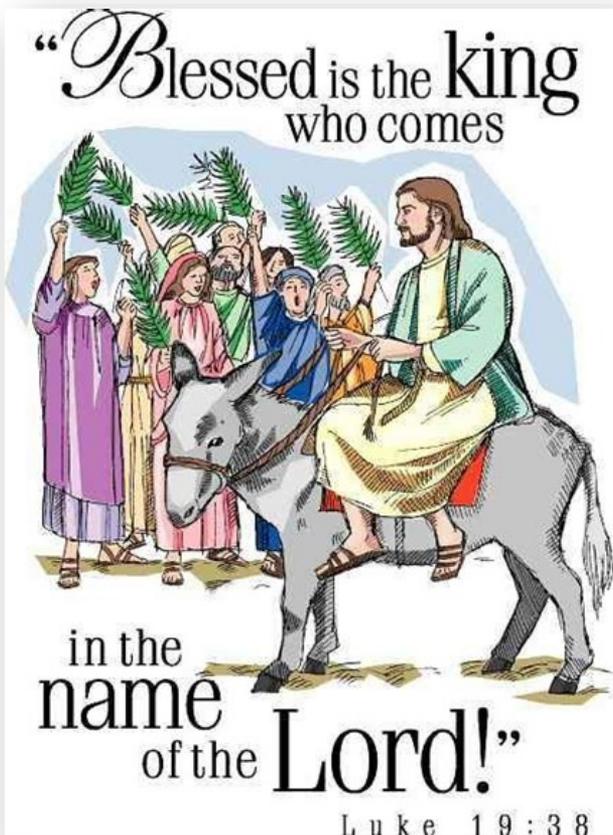
PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13

By Connie Warner

*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!
~Luke 19:38*

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending Jesus into our world. I am grateful for Jesus' sacrifice for my sin and saving me. Continue to show me your truth through worship, prayer, services and reading the Bible. Help me to shine the light of Jesus and convey the love, peace and hope of Jesus to those I encounter. Amen.



MONDAY, APRIL 14

By Alexa White

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
~Isaiah 42:1*

When I first picked this chosen Scripture for today a lot of different images came to my mind: After Jesus gets baptized in the river, a dove representing the Holy Spirit comes down (Matthew 3:16), Jesus and his love for the little children, who in his time were the least important on society's hierarchy, and Jesus' desire to bringing justice to every child for every nation.

I prayed about how these images fit together and I saw this image which I drew and colored below. While I was coloring, I remembered this song I love called "Do Something" by Matthew West. When I looked up the lyrics I read the behind the song story (featured below after the song) and knew why these images in my head connected to this song. I hope we all are inspired to "do something" - no matter how big or small.



Do Something by Matthew West

"I woke up this morning
Saw a world full of trouble now
Thought, how'd we ever get so far down
How's it ever gonna turn around

So I turned my eyes to Heaven
I thought, "God, why don't You do something?"
Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of
People living in poverty
Children sold into slavery
The thought disgusted me
So, I shook my fist at Heaven
Said, "God, why don't You do something?"
He said, "I did, I created you"

If not us, then who
If not me and you
Right now, it's time for us to do something
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain
It's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to do something

I'm so tired of talking
About how we are God's hands and feet
But it's easier to say than to be
Live like angels of apathy who tell ourselves
It's alright, "somebody else will do something"
Well, I don't know about you
But I'm sick and tired of life with no desire
I don't want a flame, I want a fire
I wanna be the one who stands up and says,
"I'm gonna do something"

We are the salt of the earth
We are a city on a hill
But we're never gonna change the world
By standing still
No we won't stand still. No we won't stand still. No we won't stand still."

Behind the Song:

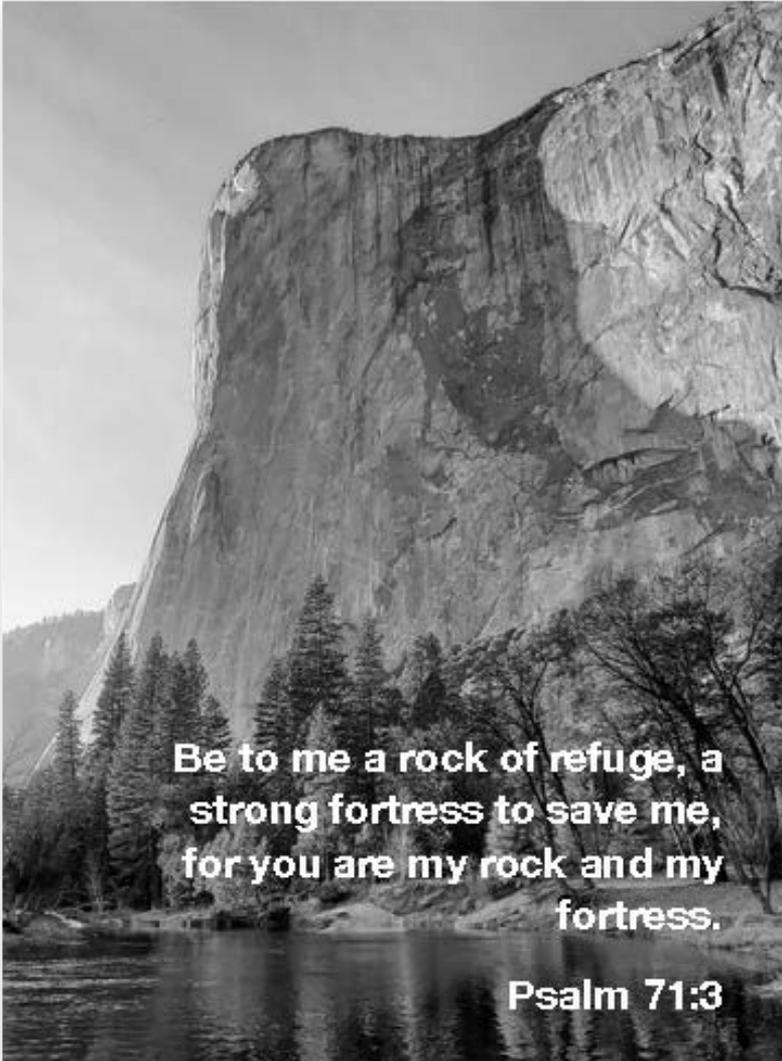
Andrea was a 20 year old college student from Denver who went to Uganda to study for a semester. While there, God broke her heart for the plight of some children being badly abused and neglected in an orphanage. She refused to come home until something was done for these kids. Somehow, she convinced the government to shut down the orphanage and hand over the children to her. Today, Musana is an orphanage housing close to 200 children! Andrea didn't know what to do, but she knew she had to do something. God honored her willingness and lives are being saved as a result. A powerful story the world needs to hear!
~Matthew West

TUESDAY, APRIL 15

By Steve Prastka

*Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.*

~Psalm 71:3



**Be to me a rock of refuge, a
strong fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my
fortress.**

Psalm 71:3

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

By Dana Pyatt

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

~Hebrews 12:1

My first memories in life are athletic activities: playing frisbee with Dad, swimming in the lake with Grandma, biking with Mom, climbing trees with my brother. As I grew older the activities changed -- passing the baton to teammates, waterskiing with my husband, dodgeball with family, cutting firewood with neighbors -- but the basics remained the same: adventures with people whom I respect and from whom I receive encouragement. Though these people teach me and serve as examples in my life, often times I find myself thinking, "Yes. I already know! You do not have to tell me again." These thoughts lead to frustration and conflict, which quickly turn our fun into hurt feelings and anger.

As Paul says in Galatians 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" The answer is our sinful self.

Like in January when we bundle up to walk outside, we realize that we have attempted to protect ourselves by layering on things our "sinful self" wants. The sinful self wants what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against the sinful self." (Galatians 5:16-17)

A hood to protect my ears from hearing what others have to say. A scarf that muffles the mean words coming out of my mouth. A puffy jacket that shields me from contact with others. Mittens that help hide my balled-up fists. And boots that keep me walking away.



I look at my watch under the layers and realize it is time for my daily jog. The hood prevents me from hearing words of inspiration from people around me. The scarf stifles my cheering of fellow runners. The puffy jacket restricts my ability to give a high five. Mittens make it impossible to signal a peace sign to others. And boots weigh down my every step. I am hindered from reaching my full potential.



Instead of relying on myself and the protective layers that I create, I need to remember the cloud of witnesses that surround me. They have been where I am. They learned. They understand. They help strip off the cold, damp, sweaty clothes that entangled me while I tried to go it alone. God has put these people in my life with a purpose, and I need them more than I need myself. Through kindness and patience and love and grace, they unburden me and cheer me on. With their coaching, I can now run the race that has been set out before me, free of my sinful self, and am able to persevere.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

Artwork by Middle School Youth Group

Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel that was tied around him.

~John 13:5



The humbleness of Jesus. Jesus always is fair and treats others fairly.



Then Jesus
Poured Water Into
The basin to wash
The disciples' feet & to
Wipe them with the
towel that was tied
around him.
-John 13:5

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 18

By Jeff Haagenon

*When Jesus had received the wound, he said, "It is finished."
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
~John 19:30*

This ancient text beautifully describes the sacrifice, sorrow, and weight of the events of the day we call Good Friday. I will let the words speak for themselves, but what is especially meaningful to me occurs in the first four lines of the second verse.

Attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, 1091-1153

O sacred head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down;
now scornfully surrounded
with thorns, thine only crown;
O sacred head, what glory,
what bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered
was all for sinners' gain:
mine, mine was the transgression,
but thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve thy place;
look on me with thy favor,
and grant to me thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow,
thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever;
and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
outlive my love to thee.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19

By Bea Ritter

*In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.*

~Psalm 31:1

Reading passages from Psalms has always given me comfort, hope, and a sense of finding refuge in our Lord Jesus Christ. A number of years ago, I was faced with two many changes all at once: divorce, changing my teaching position, selling my home, moving to a new neighborhood, and attending a new church, Columbia Presbyterian. I was blessed with the love and support of many family members, friends, and a Stephen Minister, but at times I felt overwhelmed with grief, worry and anxiety. I found comfort by reading many passages in Psalms, like the verse above, and the Twenty-third Psalm. Growing up on a farm, I could easily picture myself lying down in green pastures and walking beside still waters. As I walked each day, I would repeat the verses to myself, finding renewed strength and comfort.

In recent years, I've experienced worries about family members and the grief of losing a brother-in-law, a sister, a brother, and many friends. I continue to turn to God in prayer and read my favorite passages from Psalms and Philippians, and share comfort with others. For the last 16 years I have been a member of the Prayer Shawl ministry and have knitted and crocheted many shawls, then presented them to members of the church, my family and many friends.

I look forward to celebrating our risen Lord on Easter.



EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 20

By Pastor Matt Overton

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

~Luke 24:1-8

When we read about the resurrection we are invited to read about a story that defies all norms of both the modern and ancient world. Even then they knew that people did not and should not come back from the dead. And so, when the women and the disciples found the tomb they experienced all kinds of emotions and had all kinds of questions as we do.

But the most powerful words in Luke's telling of the story come when the two mysterious men say to them, "Why do you look for the living amongst the dead?" The New Testament affirms that Jesus has risen and that everything has changed. Including us. Most of what follows this resurrection story in the New Testament is everyone trying to sort out what had happened and *why* it mattered. Basically they came to one key conclusion: Just like Jesus we are invited to die to ourselves so that we to might be raised to a new kind of fully alive life.

Part of the point of Easter is very simply really. Are we still looking for ourselves in the wrong places? Are we still trying to look in the mirror or at our peers to figure out who we are? Or are we looking at Jesus? Are we peering into dead spaces trying to find life? It's Jesus who gives us life if we respond to him and adopt his ways (mercy, kindness, truth telling, love, compassion, healing, etc.). C.S. Lewis once said this about resurrection, "It is no good trying to be 'myself' without Him. The more I try to resist Him and live on my

own the more often I become dominated by my own past, upbringing, and desires." Lewis knew that if we really want to find our true and alive selves at Easter, we ought to stop searching in empty tombs and old pathways. We come alive when we search for Christ out in the lanes, the harvest fields, and in the eyes of our neighbors and strangers alike. He is always in their faces and spaces. And if he is there we will find our alive self there with little searching. The more we look for Him this Easter, the less we will need to search for us.

So, this morning, turn away from the tombs and go and find him. You will come alive in that pursuit.



Artwork by Gail Wolz

A very sincere thank you
to all who contributed to the
Columbia Presbyterian 2025 Lenten Devotional

Leah Bisch	Reed Ovall
Stephanie Bisch	Wendy Ovall
Sabine Carlson	Anne Overton
Sajan Carlson	Clara Overton
Jaxon Egger	Maggie Overton
Olivia Egger	Scott Peterson
Laralyn Ellsworth	Steve Prastka
Erin Endreson	Dana Pyatt
Laura Ericcsen	Luis Mis Ramirez
Kirsten French	Bea Ritter
Claudia Gonzalez	Shannon Roller
Audrey Grice	Shari Ridgway-Sanders
David Grice	Tonia Schroder
Rachel Grice	Mary Sisson
Anna Haagenson	Sally Stalnaker
Jeff Haagenson	Daisy Stegemiller
Chunghah Hoffman	Joy Stegemiller
Elise Hoffman	Bryan Strickland
Bob Hughes	Kayla Teng
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Luke Klump	Pat Wheeler
Steve Klump	Alexa White
Callan Lambley	Mary Lou Williams
Erin Lambley	Tricia Williamson
Tifny Mathena	Frank & Gail Wolz
	Dan Zeamer