



DEVOTIONS FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

Berkeley County Cluster of United Methodist Churches



This booklet of devotionals for the Season of Lent 2017 was created by clergy and lay disciples of Jesus Christ in the Berkeley County Cluster of United Methodist Churches

LENT 2017
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. if you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full".
-Matthew 6:1-2

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, which is a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) leading us to the celebration of Easter day. The word "Lent" come from the Anglo-Saxon word 'lencten' which means 'spring'. The Lenten season itself is a time of repentance and preparation for that grand and glorious day in which we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Sometime today, many of us will gather for a time of worship and use the imagery of ashes placed upon our foreheads as a sign of our own mortality and repentance. We we hear the words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the gospel."

Ash Wednesday emphasizes kind of a duel encounter: We confront our own mortality and we confess our sin before God within the community of faith. Through it all, we are also reminded of the love of a redeeming God who gave us the gift of Christ.

The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship. The Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful symbol of our own call to repentance and reconciliation. As we begin this journey together in our places of worship, may God's Spirit lead us to a closer relationship with Him and with one another.

Prayer: Mighty Lord, we confess that we are lost without you. So often we would go our own way, desiring only our own personal success and public glory. Forgive us, we pray. In our practice of the faith, may our right hand not be so concerned with what the left is doing. Over these days ahead, keep our hearts and focus on the cross of Christ, remembering that our hope rests in his death and resurrection. May our journey through this Lenten season be one of faith as we put our trust in you and follow where you lead. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

Rev. Mark C. Mooney
Otterbein United Methodist Church

Thursday, March 2, 2017

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

-Matthew 6:19-20

It is challenging for us to separate the economy of this world from the economy of God. As for this world, we have been taught, encourage, and motivated to secure things, property, goods, and money. It is our tendency to measure the worth of a person by how successful they have been in securing the things of this world. The more money one has, the greater we attribute success. Millionaires and billionaires have special status in our culture.

Not so in the economy of God. Value is not measured by what one possesses, how much money one has, or the size of one's investment portfolio. It is at the Sermon on the Mount, that moment when Jesus lays out the ways of the Kingdom of God, that we are taught the distinction of the economy of man and the economy of God. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth" because these things are transient—they do not last. Rather, Jesus teaches, concentrate on the things of God. Spiritual blessings last forever. Spiritual blessings are not subject to the whims of the economy. Spiritual blessings are not interested in the stock market. The economy of God is about sharing the blessing of the Gospel with one who has been rejected, or sharing one's resources with those who have none, or spending time with those who mourn, visiting those who are in prison, giving bread to the hungry and hope to those who feel lost.

The Holy Season of Lent is time to focus on the economy of God and to be less attentive to the economy of this world. The economy of God is where a lasting investment can be made.

Prayer: Holy God, who has established a Kingdom that last forever, remind us to invest in the works of your Kingdom and not the fragile, transient things of this world. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Friday, March 3, 2017

“Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love! Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion! Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin!”
Psalm 51:1-2 (CEB)

Recently I was standing in front of a mirror when I saw a stain that came from a bite of lunch that missed the mark and landed upon one of my favorite shirts that had just been washed. Even though I had to wash the stain away, I could still see the faint remnants of that stain. For my shirt to be clean again, it will take something beyond my abilities. The best that I could do was to hide the stain by wearing a necktie. However, even hidden, the stain still exists.

This reminds me of when my thoughts, words, and actions miss the mark of what God desires. The simple word that describes this is “sin”. Sin stains my soul and no matter how hard I attempt to clean myself up, I still can’t rid myself of that stain. Sure, I might be able to hide it from others through fancy words and bold actions, but it still exists. I simply need to rely upon someone stronger than myself to wipe away the stain of my sin. Fortunately, God is so merciful that he is willing to clean me of my sin, if I am willing to trust in his faithful love.

Loving God, wash the stain of my sin away so that I may be clean and improve my aim in pleasing you. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Walker
Trinity United Methodist Church

Saturday, March 4, 2017

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
11 Cast me not from your presence,
nor take your Holy Spirit from me.
Psalm 51:10-11

Psalm 51 is one of seven penitential psalms – psalms that show great sorrow for one’s sins.

Sin is one thing each of us has in common. Sin is like a disease that affects everyone. Individual “sins” such as lying, hatred, sexual immorality, theft, and so on, are symptoms of the larger disease of Sin.

Sins include anything we have thought, said, or done that have hurt us and others. Or maybe there are things we failed to do or say that we should have. Sin makes us less than we are meant to be. Because God cannot abide sin, sinful behavior also harms our relationship with God.

Psalm 51 was composed by King David. In the psalm David confessed that he had sinned. He was ashamed because of something he had done. David realized that his sin affected not only him, but also the people around him. He fears that he has distanced himself from God.

David didn’t just ask God to forgive his sin; he asked God to change him on the inside. He asked God to create a pure heart within him. David used the same word for “create” in Hebrew that is used in Genesis 1 when God created the world. It’s like David is asking God to remove his old heart and make a new one. He didn’t ask God to tinker with him a little, like a mechanic who tinkers with an automobile to make it run better. David is speaking of major heart surgery. David knows that the problem is deep inside him. He needs to become a new person.

We may think that if we do one or two things better, God will be completely happy with us. David realizes that this is not the case. He knows that his heart needs a total cleansing and transformation, and this wasn’t something he could do on his own. We can’t either. We need to be purified, renewed, remade, transformed into new creatures. By allowing God to remold and remake us, we become closer to the people God has made us to be.

Rev. John Yost
St. Luke’s United Methodist Church

Sunday, March 5, 2017

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, -2 Corinthians 6:3-4

The Season of Lent is a particular time of exercising spiritual disciplines that would bring us closer to God, deepen our prayer life, and enable us to have a closer relationship with Jesus. These are all good things, but they are also very private. These exercises and life choices are designed to enhance a deeper, more profound personal relations with God. This is a good thing.

However, the Apostle Paul is counseling us to be concerned about others as much as about ourselves. He counsels the early Christian community to live their lives in such a way that others may see the Gospel at work in them, He especially notes that Christians should not create barriers to the growth of others.

While this sounds simple enough, it is more challenging that we might think. Most folks agree that we need rules, guidelines, and boundaries. However, do we often use those tools to reject others, forbid others from the basic needs of life, or to protect our selfish interest? Do we use rules, guidelines and policies to create obstacles for others?

If our intent is to create obstacles or barriers for the spiritual growth of others, then the words of the Apostle Paul become a judgment upon us. Paul is reminding us that we must bend over backward to include all God's children. The model of Jesus who accepted children, women, the diseased, those of other religious and political views, and politicians is intended to illustrate what our model of life ought to be.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Monday, March 6, 2017

Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing

-Joel 2:12-13

I'm one of the lucky ones. I had a father who while very strict, exhibited compassion and forgiveness. As a child, around seven years of age, I ran away from home. Having packed a few meager things, crackers, a few cans of soda, some peanut butter, I traveled upon the mountain where I could look down on my home. When Dad found the note I left, I watched as he scurried about the village looking for me. However, when darkness began to fall, I decided it was time to go home. I realized that I would be punished when I arrived, however, I was wrong. When I came through the door, Dad hugged me and simply said, "Welcome home son". That was the last that he ever spoke of the incident.

Dad was a living representative in my life of the words of the prophet Joel. I think we all run away from home in some way during our life. Sometime we run from the church, from family, or from God. Joel reminds us that a loving God, who has always been looking for us, simply says "Welcome home!"

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

“Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and God will say, ‘I’m here.’ If you remove the yoke from among you, the finger-pointing, the wicked speech; if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon.”

Isaiah 58:9-10 (CEB)

I was recently in a darkened movie theatre when I wanted to see what time it was. I pushed the little button to illuminate my watch and that tiny light seemed to light up the entire theatre. A little later, I had the same urge to check the time. This time, however, I covered my watch so that I was the only one who could see its bluish glow. I’ve thought about the times when I have seen someone that is hungry, hurting, lonely, and homeless; but simply ignored them and walked by. It is like covering the light so that I’m the only person that can see it. Yet, there are those times when I respond with mercy and compassion that blesses someone in need. In those times, I have uncovered the light of Jesus Christ so that the world may see the light of Christ. I have found that as I have opened my heart to others, I am also blessed as well. The light that is revealed declares that God is present.

Prayer: Holy God, give me the courage to uncover the light of your love to all the world and not just myself. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Walker
Trinity United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over is truly happy! The one the LORD doesn't consider guilty—in whose spirit there is no dishonesty—that one is truly happy!
--Psalm 32:1-2: Common English Translation

People always seem to be searching to be happy. Many search in dangerous places like drugs, alcohol, risky adventures or relationships. Many just want to enjoy life simply with family and friends and meaningful work. Is there really anything wrong with wanting to be happy? Our passage today is affirming happiness is real and something to be valued. Ah, but the difficulty is true happiness. When I think of the times I am happy, it usually does not involve expensive things or exciting times. I have been supremely happy just petting my dog, taking a walk in the woods, talking to a good friend, even enjoying a good cup of coffee. During these times, all seems right with the world (whether it is or not!). At these times, there is an unbroken connection with nature, people, even food. Sin disconnects us from God. It's like the frustrating experience of a poor phone connection – you just can't hear right. With the broken connection, both are unsatisfied. Just like we can move around on our cell phones to get a better connection, we can adjust ourselves to God, to God's way of thinking. The more we adjust to God, the clearer the connection becomes. Adjusting to God's way involves knowing we need forgiveness and knowing God gives that forgiveness. God's forgiveness heals the disconnect – communication is restored.

Prayer: For all those who need to accept they are forgiven by God, so they can move on to true happiness. For all those who need to restore those broken connections with family, friends and God.

Dawn Reidy
Paynes Chapel United Methodist Church

Thursday, March 9, 2017

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

-Genesis 2:15-17

In the span of three verses, the writer of Genesis tells us an enormous amount of what God is expecting of us. First, note that God put us in the Garden to care for it. "Men" are specifically instructed to farm it and care for this Garden God has given us. This is a good passage for farmers who dedicate themselves to caring for the soil and producing food for families. It is instruction for all of us to take care of this world that God has lovingly created. Next, we note that we can eat of the fruit but there are boundaries. God gave a Garden where we "may" do specific things and where there are certain things we "may not" do. There are boundaries in God's world. There are expectations and prohibitions. We can till the soil and eat of the yield; but we are not to eat of a specific tree. God teaches us what we can and cannot do. That is the nature of all life, there are things we can do and things we ought not. It is God who sets those boundaries. Third, we discover that if we are disobedient, there are consequences—and they are severe.

In three short verses, God gives us a structure of life. He has given us a good garden in which to live and work; He has given us produce from the work of our hands; and He has set boundaries for living.

Prayer: Remind us O God that you have created the world and you have placed us in it. You have given us opportunity to toil, harvest, and live. Keep us faithful and obedient to your ways. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches

Friday, March 10, 2017

6 The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food and that the tree would provide wisdom, so she took some of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves. --Genesis 3:6-7 Common English Bible (CEB)

During the season of Lent, we often give up something that is not good for us – something that tempts us to spend time away from our spiritual practices of prayer, fasting and resting in God’s words. As the Genesis scripture tells us, Eve’s taking of the fruit (following through on the temptation) and then sharing it with Adam revealed something they’d rather not know about themselves. Humankind has struggled ever since. Did God mean for us to know everything? Is there a price to finding answers to all life’s difficult questions? Can we ever find our way back to a right relationship with God after yielding to temptations? For me, those answers are no, yes and yes...

God wants to be in relationship with us. He knows we’re flawed, so is never surprised when we stray. We’re the one’s who are surprised – we think we’re strong, we think we have solid relationships with God, we think nothing can separate us from Him and our quest to grow closer to Him. But, when we yield to temptation – get caught up in playing one more round of that video game, eating one more yummy cookie, watching one more episode of that show on TV, or whatever it is that has tempted us—we steal time that we could be spending with God in prayer, in Bible Study, in journaling, in fasting, in serving Him. Getting caught up in yielding to temptations reveals to us that we are no better than the average person, and we need to work on getting back into right relationship with God. He’s waiting with open arms and a loving, forgiving heart.

Prayer: Gracious and Loving Lord, When we stray, yank us back quickly. Remind us whose we are and the abundant love you have for us. Help us Lord, during this Season of Lent (and beyond), to stay focused on you and grow in your love to serve you all the days of our lives. Amen

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Saturday, March 11, 2017

Therefore, just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. - Romans 5:18-19

My oldest brother, Ronnie, was a mischievous fellow. He was quite notorious throughout the community for practical jokes and mischievous behavior. I need to be clear, he was never in trouble with the law, but he did frustrate neighbors and family on numerous occasions. I too was the brunt of many of his escapades, and on more than one occasion reported his teasing behavior to our parents. Yet there was one occasion where he changed roles. I accidentally broke a large limb from a neighbor's prize ornamental tree that decorated their front yard. It was clear that I was in trouble with the neighbor and with my parents. In what was totally out of character, Ronnie took the blame. When the neighbor reported the damage to his tree to my parent's Ronnie confessed that he was the culprit. To my shame, I let him take the fall and the consequence. I should point out that he never let me forget it either! The Apostle Paul wants his readers to understand that Jesus took the fall for all of us. He notes that it was Adam who started it all, and we humans fell into an inheritance of sin. Jesus rescued us from the consequence of our sinful nature. He paid the price, he took the fall and he paid the consequence. There is no doubt Ronnie that I owe you! There is also no doubt that we all owe Jesus our love, praise, and obedience for the enormous price he paid for our sins.

Prayer: We stand in amazement O God that your Son, Jesus Christ, would pay the price for our sins. Because of his sacrifice, we are free to enter your glory. Praise be to Jesus who died for us. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches

Sunday, March 12, 2017

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.”

Matthew 4:1-2

This is a test of strength not only obedience. For Matthew, Satan is the adversary who is always wanting to draw one away from God. Smooth words, enticing rewards, and offers of power and privilege are offered up. In each case Jesus is not drawn away from allegiance to God.

I suggest to you that the challenges faced by Jesus are ours as well. The Satan of this world constantly seeks to woo us away from our allegiance to God as Lord of our life. Smooth words of advertisers, marketers, and political leaders entice us to embrace the values of this world rather than the values of the Kingdom of God. The promise of illicit rewards that inflate bank accounts, portfolios or property are ever present. The gleam of gold often blinds us to that which is right in God’s Kingdom. The thirst for power, authority, or at the very least, status, seeks to drive us into behavior that is opposite the call for humility called for in the Kingdom of God.

Of course, obedience is always a challenging question. However, a larger question is do we have the spiritual strength to make a choice for righteous living. Are we anchored deeply in prayer and spiritual disciplines that fortifies our capacity to make the right choices? Are we spiritually strong enough to face challenges designed to separate us from God? The forty-day witness of Jesus in the wilderness should remind us that the forty days of our Lenten Season are designed to challenge us. In the end, will we be able to emerge for our wilderness journey in love with God.

Prayer: O Lord, we pray for strength as we journey through the wilderness of this world. Strengthen us that we would not become weary but stay strong in spirit to chose faithfulness and righteousness. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches

Monday, March 13, 2017

I will lift up my eyes to the hills --From whence comes my help?

My help comes from the Lord, who made Heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2 (NKJ Version)

Of all the Psalms, I never would have picked Psalm 121 as a favorite. However, this all changed in the year 1999. We had two weddings in the family. My nephew, Andrew, married in May and my oldest son, Geoff, married in July. My mother, Louise Siler, turned 87 that year and she planned to attend both. However, this did not happen. She seemed to start feeling "under the weather" in May. Mother never was sick a day in her adult life and never spent a day in the hospital except for giving birth to her children. So, this was unusual. Mother had been the center of our family for my whole life, and we were at a loss. After tests were performed, it appeared that there were spots seen on the liver. She went to be with the Lord on August 26, 1999. In her final month, she told my sister that she could no longer see the mountains. My sister asked our pastor about this because my mother read the Bible and prayed daily. He researched the Bible and found Psalm 121. This brought my attention to this scripture. I was devastated by my mother's death and somehow reading this Psalm helped. I have struggled with depression for years and my mother was a strong supporter. She told me that to lift others up in prayer, be more active in church, and think of others before myself. I will lift up my eyes unto the hills rings true. It reminds me that the Lord is in control and is my help in all my troubles. He is the maker of Heaven and earth. Let us all remember no matter how hard life gets, the Lord is with us. Amen.

Prayer: Lord, make us ever mindful of your undying love for us and your help in all our troubles. Amen.

Linda Carter
Greensburg United Methodist Church

Monday, March 14, 2017

I lift my eyes to the hills--- where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. -Psalm 121:1-2

I have had many difficult periods in my life. In the stillness of these times I find myself searching for answers in Gods natural world. I have always found that nature holds the key for me. Look at His creation, so wonderful and so perfect. It has always amazed me how everything works with a purpose.

I look at the planets that orbit the sun and the beauty of the night sky, and I see God. I see the trees that produce seeds and watch the wind scatter them to produce seedlings. In this way, He provides food for the birds and the animals from these trees and seeds.

Years ago when I was a young girl I can remember watching a flock of geese fly in a V formation. Of course, being young, I had no idea why they did this and had to find out why. It turns out that they take turns flying in front, each bird behind the one in front flies slightly above and it creates less wind resistance. This helps them to be able to fly long distances. God made them this way, its innate and its beautiful.

The funny thing is, I find in times of struggle when I do not know where to turn or what to do I look up and I see the perfect formation of geese flying and in that moment, I here God saying, "I love you and I am here". It happens all the time. It appears He may not always be answering my prayers or giving me an explanation, but he is always there.

We must realize that God has His own perfect plan. No matter what we are going through He is there, we can lean on Him and He will give us the strength we need to get through.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for you for being my rock. Help me to always remember that whatever I go through I can always depend on you for the strength I need.

Melanie Paulman
Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

'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.

-John 3:16-17

These are among the most recognized, memorized, and quoted verses in the New Testament. Yet I question if most realize the power, depth and breadth of these two verses. They represent in miniature the core of the Gospel message. It begins by telling us it is God's act. The Greater Creator God, the first person of the Trinity, initiated an intervention into our human existence paving the way for eternal companionship. These are verses about an extraordinary love that goes beyond the bounds of human understanding. God has a loving heart for us. We have not fully understood the depth of our sinful depravity which distanced us from realizing full companionship with God. We have not fully comprehended the depth of love and longing that God has in his own heart to be in full companionship with us. While not to minimize the courage, love and sacrifice of Jesus, we must consider the astonishing love of the Father to offer up his child for an earthly journey of rejection, pain, torture and death. The resulting pain and suffering of the Father, who witnessed the treatment of his son, must be fully understood if we are to grasp the depth and commitment paid for our place in the Kingdom of God.

This is a passage, where both verses should always be read together, about the incredible love God has for his created people. That love, and the extent to which God pursues it, sets the stage for our life with God. God has exhibited unbelievable energy and commitment to keep us in an eternal relationship with him.

Prayer: We praise you awesome God for your abiding love. We stand in humility as we seek to comprehend the price you paid for a companionship with us. We praise you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Thursday, March 16, 2017

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? -John 3:11-12

There was an incident in one of my college freshman English classes that has stood as an example of extreme arrogance. A member of the class was reading to the class-- we were all taking turns doing so-- from an English literature classic. My class mate mispronounced the word "sword" and was corrected by the professor. My arrogant classmate responded that the professor was wrong and he would pronounce it his own way. In the end the professor, who was the dispenser of grades, got the last laugh.

We do have difficulty accepting messages that are outside our frame of understanding, our world view, or our experience. Receiving concepts, ideas, and thoughts that are outside of typical framework of understanding can be difficult, challenging, and even angering.

Jesus found teaching the values of the Kingdom of God to be very difficult for many. His teaching was not normal; his teaching was outside their experience, and his teaching required a shift in their understanding of life, the world and the universe. He was often mocked by those who could not comprehend, or accept, his teaching.

May this Season of Lent find you to open to the radical teaching of Jesus that leads to an understating of life eternal.

Prayer: Great God who knows more than we can comprehend or understand, give us minds and hearts that are open to comprehend your holy truth. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Friday, March 17, 2017

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'
-Matthew 17:5

Here is a unique moment in the history of human-kind, not only is Jesus speaking, but the voice of God the Father comes booming in also. Clearly the disciples, who were the audience of the moment, took special attention to what is being said.

I remember one of the first times I stood in front of my school room class to make a report. I was very shy at the time and terribly anxious about embarrassing myself in front of my classmates. While I had worked hard on the report, my anxiety made my presentation awkward. The awkwardness of the report was met with my classmates giggling and my condition. However, the teacher stepped in, quieted the classroom giggles and required everyone to pay attention to my report. I was profoundly grateful to the teacher for her voice that quieted the classroom.

I doubt that Jesus needed a backup, but it is profoundly sobering to hear the authoritative voice of God saying "Listen to him, this is my Son". There are those times when we have read the message of Jesus so frequently that it is difficult to comprehend. In those moment when we have become callous, it is good to re-read this text and hear the authoritative Word of God say: "Listen to him, this is my beloved Son!"

Prayer: Give us fresh ears to hear O God. Give us open and attentive heart to receive your Words of Grace. Give us minds that are receptive to your direction for life. In all ways keep us focused on your holy voice that guides us on our journey of faith.
Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Saturday, March 18, 2017

Yahweh said to Abram, "Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing." Genesis 12:1-2

Leave your homeland. Leave behind everything but your family and patriarchal family members. Know not how long you will be traveling or where the final destination will be. Trust me and I will make your name famous and legendary. People, all over the world will know you, study you, and celebrate you.

God knows all: past, present and future. Abram trusted God and God knew what Abram, soon to be Abraham and his wife, Sarai, would do. So it has come true. Abraham is the Father of, not just one, but three nations. His name is as important to the Christians as it is to the Jews, and as it is to the Muslims. God's long ago plan. How we, Abraham's descendants, have brought disappointment to it and to God. Is it too late? I don't think so. We have a journey of opportunity ahead of us to make positive change through understanding, education, integrity, and honorable attitude, relationships with those who think differently than us, open-mindedness, and Christian love. Will we trust God on this journey?

PRAYER: O great God of Abraham, our world is in chaos. Your children have turned away from You with ravenous appetites for cacophony, argument, judgment, and self importance, wealth, intolerance for those who are different liturgically or speak with foreign accent. Be patient with us as we learn and practice the ways of Your Son. Bless us; we beseech you, despite our faults. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches

Sunday, March 19, 2017

“So, God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them”. -Genesis 1:27

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.”

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John 3:1

“How are you today?” asked the store associate as I put my items on the counter. “I’m fine”, I reply. I know for a fact this is true because everyone says so. When I’m standing in the aisle of a superstore searching the shelves for what I want, I seem to always be in someone’s way. I’m there and another customer comes by. I move my cart so he or she will have room to get past. “I’m sorry”, I say as I move over. “No, you’re fine,” I’m told. When I get to the end of the aisle I always stop and look so someone coming by can move on. “I’m sorry”, I say as I wait my turn. “No, you’re fine”, I hear. When I’m checking out, I carefully put away my money and receipt. “I’m sorry”, I say to the next customer for taking extra time in line. “No, you’re fine” that persons says.

Webster’s Dictionary gives sixteen meanings for the word FINE. Some of these include: accomplished or beautiful (not me), overdressed or over decorated (not me), delicate, artful, or skillful (definitely not me). I don’t fit any of the other meanings for the word either, I ask how can I be Fine?

Then I remember the quote from the Bible. “So, God created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27); and “See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). And that is what we are! So, I’m much more than just fine! I’m a loved creation of God. I know this is true because...GOD said so!

Dian Watson
Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Monday, March 20, 2017

I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

-Exodus 17:6

It would not serve us well to miss the drama of this incredible event. The massive throng of Hebrew slaves who had escaped the bondage of the Egyptian pharaoh were now exhausted, hungry, and most of all thirsty. Moses was in a crisis of leadership. He had led them out of slavery with a promise that God would lead them, care for them, protect them, feed, them and provide for their needs. They were now hungry and thirsty and wondering where this God of promises might be. In human term, this is a crisis of great importance.

Yet, the Exodus story is filled with moments when the discomfort of the Hebrews is met with the incredible acts of God to provide care. A great sea blocked their escape route, but God showed them the way to escape; they were pursued by an army that could destroy them, but God gave them victory; they were hungry with not source of food, but God gave them manna to sustain them; they were hungry for meat, and God sent quail. Again and again, God was present with them in their difficult times, and each time provided for their need. Now, they are thirsty and God does it again.

How true this is of us as well. In the midst of our desperate need we forget that God has rescued us again and again. In the midst of our struggles we forget that God has always come through with a blessing that resolved the crisis of our life. God has always been present, God is present, and God will continue to be present to provide what we need.

Prayer: Glorious God, we stand before the rock wanting water. We are thirsty. In our thirst, we doubt you. Forgive us again for our failure to see that you always come through. Teach us to strike the rock in the faith that the waters of blessings will pour forth. Teach us to trust that you will always bring water forth to quince the thirst of our troubled souls. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
-Psalm 95:1-2

Each Sunday, the congregations of Greensburg and Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches enter into worship singing the following:

“Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living sanctuary for you.”

I’m unsure of the origin of the words and tune. I’m unsure when it began. All I know is that the congregations come together before God through music. Through these words the communities of faith offer up a musical confession. Lord, in humility, we enter your holy presence, we come in thanksgiving, and we offer ourselves to you.

I believe this is what the psalmist had in mind. Let us sing the praises of God. Let us sing our confession. Let us sing our commitment to be disciples. It matters not the quality of our music. It is of little consequence of the genre (classical, country, heavy metal, ballad, rock). It is a matter of the soul, of the spirit, and even of the gut. Deep within us, we bellow out our deepest emotions. We sing words that go beyond our capacity to fully explain. When we sing, we are on holy ground. We join with the choirs of the Book of Revelation offering praise to God in words and tunes that defy description.

It matters not whether you are a trained or gifted musical voice. Sing loudly God’s praise. It matters not if you are a member of the church choir. Sing loudly God’s praise. It matters not if you are off key or cannot read music. Sing loudly God’s praise. It matters not if your voice is a bit of distraction to those about you. Sing loudly God’s praise.

Prayer: Glorious God who finds joy in the music of your children, receive the gift of our music as signs and symbols of our praise and love for you. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
O that today you would listen to his voice!
-Psalm 95:6-7

Every farmer and 4-H'er knows that sheep are beautiful, gracious and loving creatures, but they are not very intelligent. It would seem that the psalmist, with tongue in cheek, identifies humans as sheep in the eyes of God. Clearly, we are the joy of his creation, but not very smart. Clearly, we are a joy in the eyes of God, but not spiritually intelligent. Therefore, it is important that we come before God in humility.

The words, bow down and kneel, suggest a position of humility. Spiritually, we are in the presence of the Great God who has created us, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who accepts us despite our weaknesses. The first verse of this text call us to a posture of humility.

The second verse indicates that we are in the holy presence of God, and we are accepted and received in the court of His holy presence. The created are present with the Creator. The humans are present with the all-powerful God. The sheep are present with the Shepherd. In other words, we are on holy ground.

How incredible is it that we, the created, humble sheep, are invited into the court of the most high God? We are invited to here to listen to his voice, his guidance, his instruction. Let us stand in humility and listen to His counsel.

Prayer: Most high God, we praise you for the invitation to stand in your holy court. In this place, we ask that you give us ears to hear and hearts to discern the wisdom of your counsel. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Thursday, March 23, 2017

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.”

Romans 5:1-2 (NLT)

A number of years ago, I bought a new mattress for my upstairs bedroom. After trying unsuccessfully to get the king-size mattress up the stairs, it eventually got stuck in the stairwell. No matter how hard I pulled, pushed, and planned it wouldn't budge. Eventually, I came to the difficult conclusion that I would have to ask for help. So, with all the humility that I could muster, I asked my neighbor for his help. And with his help, the mattress was finally free.

As a young teenager I thought salvation was something that I could obtain for myself, if I only attended church and did the right things. But something just didn't feel right. In time, I discovered that my faith was stuck, just like the mattress. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get deeper with God on my own. I had to acknowledge that the gift of salvation was outside of my control and I needed God's help. Today, as I stand in God's grace in Jesus Christ, I find the peace and joy of my salvation.

Prayer: God of salvation, help us to be humble and ask for your help when we are stuck. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Walker
Trinity United Methodist Church

Friday, March 24, 2017

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might dare to die.

-Romans 5:6-7

This passage makes me think of combat veterans. It brings to mind those courageous men and women who put themselves in harm's way for the sake of the country they love. They fought, were sometimes wounded, and often died for me---and they never knew my name. Our veterans placed themselves in great danger for those whose names they did not know.

This is central to understanding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He gave his all, in life and death, for those whose names he did not know. He died for the saint among us, and he died for the scoundrels among us. He died for saints and sinners, good and bad. Yet in the end, he arose from the dead for all of us.

Prayer: Remind us O God there are no limits to the bounds of your love. Let us love one another as you love us. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist

Saturday, March 25, 2017

“Yahweh guards you from harm, he guards your lives, he guards your leaving, coming back, now and for always.”
-Psalm 121: 7-8

Never is there a time when Ed leaves the house that I don't say to him “be safe” and whisper a quiet pray of traveling mercies for him. Perhaps it's my Roman Catholic upbringing. Most RC's are accustomed to think of St. Christopher when we hear the expression "patron saint of travel". This partly might be due to childhood memories of days when automobiles had metal dashboards and it seemed almost every other vehicle had a 4 inch plastic statute of St. Christopher magnetically held to the dashboard. As a child, whenever my family took a road trip, my Mom would invoke the name of St. Christopher and pray for a safe journey to wherever it was we were traveling to. Although today, the actual personhood of this “Christopher” is in question, the story behind why this man was proclaimed a patron saint of travel is fascinating.

In the 121st Psalm, the author invokes the name of Yahweh to keep the days and nights safe, no matter where he might be going. Although we know that God is omnipotent, often we look up toward the sky or in this case, the mountains. God never rests. God never takes a break. God constantly “has our back.” We are his “sparrows.” However, we are required to use common sense and be prepared whenever we venture out on the road, on the hiking trail, on the hunt or in a crowd. It is an awesome part of God's nature, to protect us from harm.

PRAYER: Omnipotent God, we ask for your undergirding love, guidance, care and protection as we greet each new day. We know that the responsibility of our actions belongs to us. Help us to understand the love and the care you have for our wellbeing as we travel along our life journey. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Sunday, March 26, 2017

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

-John 4:10

Often we are speaking with "angels of whom we are unaware". In the routine of life we often express our thoughts, counsel, opinions and concerns without fully comprehending the effect we are having on others. Sometimes this is good, but in other times it is damaging. A hurtful word spoken, which cannot be taken back, often has a lasting, damaging effect on the life of another. On the other side, a word of grace is often received, in ways that we did not know, to provide strength and direction for a troubled soul.

Our Lord often speaks to us through persons we did not anticipate. I think this is so for the "woman at well" as illustrated in the text. At first, she did not know the source of grace that was being offered to her. God's wondrous, redeeming work was emerging from a source she did not understand. It was no less powerful. It was not less real. It took a while for her to grasp that something beyond herself was emerging. She was experiencing grace.

How frequently do we discover God's grace from sources, or persons, that are beyond our understanding? How often do we pass by an opportunity of grace because we dismiss someone as being the "other"?

Prayer: Holy God, keep us sensitive to the ways, and with the persons, in which you make yourself known. Too often, our biases and prejudices block us from hearing and receiving your words of grace. Forgive us and give us discerning hearts to always hear your messages. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove

Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Monday, March 27, 2017

Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' -John 4:13-14

The community of Berkeley Springs, WV, is notorious for the quality of the water that emerges from the springs in the center of the town. It is reported that George Washington often came to Berkeley Springs, then known as Bath, to drink and bath in these remarkable waters. Several years back, a group of folks from Berkeley Springs initiated the International Water Festival. One might think that water is water, but not so for these folks. They raised the question of who has the best tasting water in the "world". Amazingly, there were entrants from all over the world. They came to Berkeley Springs to win the contest of the best water on the globe. It should be noted that Berkeley Springs water was often among the top winners, but not the best. That prize was taken from numerous places around the world.

The "woman at the well" thought her water was really the best, but Jesus changed the contest. Her water was not comparable with the holy water that he could provide. It should be noted that Jesus would win the Berkeley Springs water contest as well. His water runs deep in the Kingdom of God. This is water that comes from the holy rock of God. This is water that has a holy taste, a water that is profoundly pure, and a water that quenches the thirst of the soul. Drink deep!

Prayer: Holy God, give us water that satisfies the thirst of our soul. Let us never be content with water of this world, but rather drink deeply of the water that leads to everlasting life. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

-Psalm 23:1-3

Once again, the psalmist equates us to sheep. For him, God is the shepherd and we, humans, are sheep. This is not the most flattering image of humanity. Sheep are not very intelligent. However, let's work this image for a while. God is the Good Shepherd who looks after the needs of the sheep. He guides them to green pastures where there is abundant grass for nourishment and growth. He nudges them toward clean water where they can quince their thirst. He projects them from the dangers of predators. He rescues them when they become separated from the flock. God is their guide, their resource, and their protector.

Let's take this a step further. This is really not about sheep. It is about us. This is a story of God's profound care for us humans who are always in need of spiritual food, water and protection. This psalm is about how the Good Shepherd, God, is committed to the wellbeing of the sheep. He wants them to be nourished, to grow, and to be secure. This is a profoundly personal psalm. I suggest you re-read these verses but place your name in the place of the pronouns. It would go like this: "The Lord is *(your name)* shepherd, *(your name)* shall not want. He makes *(your name)* lie down in green pastures; he restores *(your name)* soul. He leads *(your name)* in right paths for his name's sake.

Prayer: Great Shepherd, I follow where you would lead me. I accept that the path you set for me is the right and holy path to travel. I pray that you nourish me for the road to be traveled. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

“Though I pass through a gloomy valley, I fear no harm.”
- Psalm 23: 4

The King James version of verse 4 of the 23rd Psalm reads: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;” The word “fear” conjures up all sorts of ideas. As a child, we may have been afraid of the dark, even though we knew the room or area very well. As adults, we tend to fear the “unknown.” Will I get into college? Will I get the job? Will my finances be enough to support a family? Will the surgery be successful? What does the future hold for me? Sound familiar?

Often, I’ve wondered how some folks get through the dark and gloomy valleys of life without a faith in a God that offers comfort, support, guidance, peace and love. To not believe in a Spiritual Being that is greater than us or to not believe in an eternal life, just seems very sad to me. It’s by my own personal faith that I cope and get through difficult, frightening, and sorrowful times. We know that bad things happen to good people. Bad things happen to all people! God does not allow bad things to happen out of punishment or vindictiveness. But God is there when they do happen. God will walk with us through those gloomy valleys where our life might take us; when we need Him and even when we think we don’t.

PRAYER: I’m frightened Lord God. The path ahead through the valley is very dark. The shadows loom over my very being and I feel so utterly alone. Help me to reach out to you, for I know that you’re there beside me. This I believe. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Thursday, March 30, 2017

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

-Psalm 23:5-6

It is one thing to sit at a meal among family and good friends. We are used to that. But to invited to a meal prepared and served by our enemies is beyond our comfort zone. Yet the message of the psalmist, and the model of Jesus, is to eat and fellowship with our enemies. The psalmist goes even further. The table set by the enemy is exhibited with extreme hospitality. The psalmist, and again modeled by Jesus, recognizes that meal time is intimate, personal and holy. It is a time reserved for those we love and trust. It is a place of comfort and trust. To share it with one's enemies is beyond what we expect.

Yet, the psalmist, and Jesus, teaches us that God's love and grace are so enormous, so limitless, so all-encompassing, that we can feel secure in every circumstance. This psalm is not only about God's love for us, but a witness to the extra-ordinary abundance of that love.

We can find comfort in the reality there is no limit to the love God has for us.

Prayer: Great Shepherd, we rejoice in the limitless love that you exhibit for each of us. We praise you for a love that embraces us in every circumstance. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove

Friday, March 31, 2017

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light - Ephesians 5:8

I hate to admit this but I have come to the point in life where I need to find good lighting to read. I remember my elders telling me, "Turn a light on so you can see what I am doing." At that point in life I could see what I was doing, but no longer can I see without a good light.

The Apostle Paul reminds us not only that we need good light, but that we are the light in Christ. The thought that we were the darkness is a thought that makes me shudder when I think about my mindset on some issues in those earlier years of my life because I know it was true. But now, once surrendered to Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit in me has made me light. I now have become a new creation, righteous in God's eyes, knowledgeable in God's ways, and in step with God's will.

Our calling, in Christ, is then to live as children of the light- live in step with the Holy Spirit, live in obedience to God's word, live as role models for others to see Christ in us. The only way we can accomplish this task is by submitting to Jesus, our Savior and the light of the world.

What darkness is still in your life that only the light of Christ can clear up so you can see better?

Rev. Scott Summers
Bedlington United Methodist Church

Saturday, April 1, 2017

Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. Therefore, test everything to see what's pleasing to the Lord.

-Ephesians 5:9-10

I don't remember the term "fake news" being an actual thing before this year. I suppose the term reminds me of the National Enquirer reporting on "Bat Boy." I think we used to call those things unsubstantiated reports - or in other words "gossip." It seems even the major news outlets these days have fallen prey to reporting unsubstantiated stories in their headlines only to print retractions on page 17 the next week. Most of us don't have the time to do the investigative journalists jobs for them and that leaves us with the problem of having to examine with a critical eye every story is that reported on these days.

As followers of Christ we realize from scripture that there is much deception in our world and an adversary who is the ruler of this world promoting that deception. So, the Apostle Paul reminds us to test everything. He also includes the standard for measuring everything. The question to ask is as follows: "Does this please the Lord?"

So, does the news you report please the Lord? Does what you say line up with the truth of scripture? Do your critiques of others help realign others with God's kingdom in loving ways? Since surrendering to Christ makes you a light in this dark world, you are a role model for someone. So, test everything that comes into your life because you don't want to be labeled a "fake news" outlet when it comes to representing Christ.

Rev. Scott Summers
Bedlington United Methodist Church

Sunday, April 2, 2017

The Man Born Blind

In the gospel of Saint John, at chapter 9 verse 25, we hear the man born blind say, "Whether he (Jesus) is a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (KJV)

After being heckled by the Pharisees asking how his sight was restored, the formerly blind man answered them: "He is a prophet, He made clay, I washed my eyes, and now I see. The Pharisees condemned Jesus for working (healing) on the Sabbath, and called Jesus a sinner. The formerly blind man said whether He is a sinner, I don't know. But I know that I was blind and now I see. Thus is giving praise to Jesus for the healing. And thankfulness is also implied.

We might not ever experience the level of healing as the man born blind, but can we not thank God, and Jesus, for all the healing we do receive. Shouldn't we thank God, and Jesus, for the love and care we receive?

Thanks be to God.

Rev. John Brooks
Friendship & Berkeley Place United Methodist Churches

Monday, April 3, 2017

If you never overlooked our sins, Yahweh, Lord, could anyone survive?
But you do forgive us: and for that we revere you. Psalm 130:2-4

Does God keep records of our wrongdoings? If so, what sort of Judge would we want Him to be? We don't need to wonder, because we know that God has this remarkable inclination toward forgiveness. God's own Son was heard saying before he died, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

We've all heard stories of forgiveness by family members whose loved one had been killed by another. Many of us look with questioning amazement or even admiration toward those who reach so deeply into their own spirituality that forgiveness isn't questioned. How do we overlook the rage, sorrow and grief that bear down on us when criminal, unethical, immoral wrongdoing and injustice slams into our world? How do we exhibit the mercy and grace that saved us when we were lost? We are human after all!

They say that "time heals" and forgiveness will come with time. I believe that it takes more than time. It takes faith. It takes respectability. It takes patience. It takes empathy. It takes love.

PRAYER: Blessed God, how much I appreciate the forgiveness that you've shown me so many, many times in my lifetime. I haven't always treated your people with the respect You require. I haven't always treated the earth with the care You charged me with. I haven't tried to see You in all living things or in all people. But you are there. Forgive me for my pride and conceit in sometimes forgetting just how omnipotent and awesome you are. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Churches

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

“...my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.”
-Psalm 130:6-7

There are two themes in these verses. One is patience and the other is hope. The theme of “patience” challenges us at the core of our beliefs. We live in an instant gratification society. We do not like to wait. A computer that is micro-seconds slow frustrate us. Waiting in line at a fast food restaurant disturbs us. Those who are not “on time” bother us.” We are a people obsessed with calendars, clocks and watches. Our time is important to us. Yet the psalmist reminds us that God’s time is unique. It is not like our own. God’s time is not reliant on calendars, clocks and watches. It is uniquely God’s time that is not understood by humanity. The palmist calls the faithful to adopt God’s time. This means patience. Wait until God is ready.

The verses take another direction as well. It is hope. Even when we become impatient, lose direction or lose focus, we must acknowledge that God is in control and God has a direction. Therefore,
in our impatience, maintain hope in a future guided by God’s grace.

Prayer: Great God of time and space, your ways are beyond our ways. We do not comprehend the vastness of your understanding or the limits of your power. Teach us humility as we stand before your awesome presence, teach us your ways, and give us understanding hearts. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

“The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace.” Romans 8:6 (CEB)

I was on the road to visit some friends when my GPS conflicted with my memory of how to get to my destination. I arrived at a crossroad and my GPS told me to turn left, but my memory said to turn right. I chose to follow my memory’s directions and made that right-hand turn. I chose poorly. Instead of heading to my destination, my memory guided me to take a roughly six-mile detour to get me back to that same intersection where everything went wrong. Instead of choosing the correct direction, I chose the wrong one. I have discovered that many, if not most, of my decisions have that same kind of outcome. Either I choose correctly or I choose poorly. My poor decisions generally come from my humanity where I rely more upon myself than others, including God. In reality, I am often standing at a crossroad, where I can choose the path that leads to life or the one that leads to death. In the end, I must rely upon the Holy Spirit to help me choose the correct path that leads to life in Jesus Christ, rather than the path to destruction and spiritual death.

Prayer: Gracious God, help me choose life over death in all of my decisions.
Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Walker
Trinity United Methodist Church

Thursday, April 6, 2017

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. -Romans 8:11

For me, one of the most verses in the Bible is found in the second creation narrative of Genesis. It is: "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). Without this verse, I am just another part of the creation story. However, with this verse, I am a unique part of God. His breath is in me. He has given me not just life, but His life. I am who I am because God breathed in me.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul picks up this theme in greater measure. He notes that the very Spirit of God which breathed life into Jesus is in you also. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus. God, the Father, has breathed life into all of us. Therefore, says Paul, this breath of God, this Spirit will continue to give you life, and life abundant.

The passages from Genesis and from Romans should give us great reason to live in abundant assurance, hope and peace.

Prayer: Holy God, how blessed we are to know that you have given us life. We offer to you our thanksgiving and praise for breathing into us your Spirit. We ask that you continue to work in us to perfect your will and purpose that we bless your world and your people.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Friday, April 7th, 2017

“Hear the Word of the LORD”

Ezekiel 37:3-5

³ He asked me, **“Son of man, can these bones live?”**

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, **“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’** ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. (NIV)

In my first years of ministry, my family was uneasy about where we were to live and what we were going to be doing, but I was scared! Here I was as the new Pastor in town, with a declining congregation and expanding debt. They were once a very active and living congregation, but that had been many years earlier.

My wife and our three children moved into our home on Monday during the day while I was attending school. By the time I reached our home most of the heavy work was done, I spent that evening helping my wife arrange the furniture and our family explored the church next to the parsonage (house). The next day while I was back at school my wife along with three children explored the community, finding the grocery store, schools and the other two churches on the charge. So, when I got in from school they took me out and quickly showed me around the town and the other two churches where we would be in ministry together. This is how the first week went, but when the weekend came the church people began to come to welcome the Pastoral family to the community.

At each of the three churches on Sunday morning the family was introduced and I began to share the Gospel to the people God had given me the responsibility to prophesy too. Not knowing how or what to say to the people that would make or bring about change in their situation I just shared the message of Good News! Over the next four years, I did what God had said for Job to do, I **“Prophecy to the bones and said to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’**

After four years with these people their bones were rattling and new life had come and it was time for us to move on to another valley of dry bones to, **“Prophecy to those bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’**

Prayer: Lord, I ask that you help us always to proclaim your Word so that our families, friends, and the entire world would receive the new life that comes in Christ, in the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen

Rev. C, Wayne Frum

Saturday, April 8, 2017

Martha said, "I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said: "I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

-John 11: 25-26

Jesus responds to Martha's sorrowful resignation of her brother, Lazarus' death. She tells Jesus that she knows that if he had come sooner, her brother would not have died. Jesus tells her that Lazarus will be raised up. With conviction, Martha replies that her brother will be raised in the resurrection at the end of time. "I'm here Martha!" Jesus tells her. This new life that she believes will happen is available to her now! Life and resurrection negate death. Jesus, his teachings, word, message, grace and love give to her and others who believe that life everlasting. Let those who have ears, hear and rejoice!

Jesus gives such an amazing and comforting message. Yet, do we really understand what he means? How can a person die yet still live? How does a person "never die?" Perhaps the resurrection that Jesus offers is a rebirth of the whole person or restoration of one's self esteem. Perhaps it is a resurgence of courage and determination or a revitalization of one's spirit. Jesus gives us a chance to "feel alive again!" Jesus has asked us, "Do you believe this? Do you believe in me?"

PRAYER: O Lord Jesus, I am compelled to reach out to your love and promise. May I seek out your comfort, guidance and grace. May your spirit ignite mine to where I become re-energized, revitalized, and restored through your word. May I live prepared to die believing that I continue to live through your resurrection. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

Matthew 21:4-5

A simple donkey. And yet, one of the main characters in this scripture. The tale of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus as their Messiah, the King sent by God to bring freedom to His people.

So, what did the donkey do that day? He carried the King of Kings into Jerusalem. He introduced Jesus Christ as the Messiah to the people. We are called to do this same thing. Like the donkey, we are called to exalt Christ as King of Kings in the earth and to introduce His rule and reign to other people.

An ordinary donkey. In fact, it was less than ordinary. It was not even a full-grown donkey. This donkey had never even been ridden before. Not only had he never carried a king, it had never carried anyone. Insignificant seems a perfect word to describe this donkey.

Sometimes, we may feel like this donkey. We may feel we are insignificant; that there is nothing special about us. However, in those moments, we must realize that, like the donkey, our significance is found in the fact that Jesus Christ had called us. That He has said to each of us, "The Lord needs you."

1 Peter 2:9 states, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light."

Just as the donkey was called by the master to exalt Him, so you have been called out of darkness and been given a new significance as chosen, royal, holy and belonging to God for the purpose of exalting Christ.

In fact, we learn a few verses later that hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Zechariah had already spoken of this donkey. Before this donkey was ever born or even thought of.

The donkey's days were ordained, just as our days are ordained. Some people may think that luck, whether good or bad, has brought them to where they are in life. Some

think that their own hard work, or maybe lack of hard work, has brought them to where they are in life. But, the Bible reveals instead, that when we walk with God, God has placed us where we are and He has done so for a specific purpose.

You may go for years of your life not knowing or understanding what their purpose might be. But, somewhere, someday, God has a purpose for you. He has a plan that has been ordained for you. So, you need to be ready for the day when Jesus comes to you and says: "I have a need of you." You must always be attuned and listening to the Spirit of God, so you will know when He says, "You have been placed here for such a time as this."

We must also be careful that when we accomplish something for God, it does not become a source of pride for us. So that we do not become so good at glorifying Jesus that we end up glorifying ourselves and not Jesus at all.

Like John the Baptist, we must say: "He must become greater; I must become less."
(John 3:30)

When God calls us to fulfill our holy destiny; when we are called to exalt Jesus Christ and introduce His reign in to the lives of others, it may be uncomfortable for us. Especially if we have never evangelized before or have little experience. We may have to come out of our comfort zones to do so. In order to fulfill our destinies we, like the donkey, must endure new experiences and go through hardships.

John 14:16-18: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever: the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

The word advocate can also be translated as counselor or comforter. Jesus has promised His own presence in the person of the Holy Spirit.

God has such an incredible destiny in store for you that He doesn't expect you to go it alone. He offers to send the Holy Spirit with you to comfort you and empower you!

Rev. Charles Henry
Inwood United Methodist Church

Monday, April 10, 2017 (Holy Week)

“They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!”

Matthew 27: 28-29 (NIV)

The human head is renowned for being the most “noble” attributes of the anatomy, and in this time in Biblical history, the male’s stature was recognized foremost by their head as a wise ruler or leader. A “crown” bestowed to someone marked an identity to the value of their life.

Following hours of torture, as a last act of humiliation, the Roman officers twisted a crown of thorns and placed it on Jesus’ head.

The crown was not just a twisted garland of prickly barbs, like that of a blackberry bush. It is said to be made from the branches of a Jujube tree, a deciduous tree found near Jerusalem, with thorns measuring an inch long or more. And with each blow to the head, the thorns were driven into his flesh with excruciating pain.

And yet, though Jesus suffered immeasurably throughout this time, his death and resurrection paved the way for those that believe on him to be set free from the power of sin. At his ascension, Jesus took his place, seated at the right hand of God. The Roman soldiers may have inaugurated him in mockery, but Jesus truly was a King. On the day of his return, he will not be wearing a crown of thorns; but will be crowned with glory and honor, gathering to himself those who suffered with him.

PRAYER: O suffering and crucified Christ, we long to be a part of your Kingdom. To know suffering is to be joined alongside you and heirs to the crown of LIFE. A-men.

Connie Grosjean
Greensburg United Methodist Church

Tuesday, April 11, 2017 (Holy Week)

“As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. (NRSV).” Matthew 27:32.

This verse in all three gospel accounts begins the crucifixion narrative.

What initially struck me was the word cross which took my thoughts to the hymn in the UMC hymnal #415, “Take Up Thy Cross”.)

Here is a man who was on his way in from the country who probably had no knowledge of the man, whose cross he was about to carry. Yet in the midst of angry mobs, crowded streets, people shouting, people weeping, this man is pulled from the crowd and forced to carry the cross. I like Luke's account: “As they led him away, they 'seized' Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus” (NIV).

Did you notice the words “carry it behind Jesus”?

This draws my attention to some of the many times Jesus said to someone follow me.

Matthew 16:24 :

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Mark 10:17-27 The Rich Young Man who could not take up the cross by surrendering all his wealth, to follow Jesus.

Luke 9:57-62 tells of three individuals who were asked to follow him and yet offered up three excuses why they could not. There is a cost to following Jesus.

Simon had no choice but to pick up the cross and follow Jesus. Do you think perhaps while he carries Jesus's cross, Simon's thoughts were about this man who was about to be crucified? Did he develop sympathy for Jesus? Was he carrying the cross out of fear that initially caused him to obey? We don't hear any more about him, yet his small part, in salvation's story, speaks to us over the ages.

What should we take away from the account of Simon, simply that Jesus bore the cross not only for Simon, but for all human kind.

Rev. Gary Sieglein
Gerrardstown United Methodist Church

Wednesday, April 12, 2017 (Holy Week)

“I take refuge in you, LORD. Please never let me be put to shame. Rescue me by your righteousness! Listen closely to me! Deliver me quickly; be a rock that protects me; be a strong fortress that saves me!” Psalms 31:1-2 (CEB)

I was walking along the boardwalk in Ocean City and watching the waves lap up on the beach. I was thinking about how peaceful it seemed as I heard the waves continuing to roll in. As I continued to walk along the boardwalk I noticed one of the businesses that closed for the winter, had sandbags stacked up along its doorway. The sandbags were carefully stacked to keep water from entering the business during storms and rising tides. Should water seep into the building, it could ruin the precious contents inside.

Storms that arise in life that can cause great damage. Some of those storms are the results of my own doing and some arise from events outside of my control such as disease, accidents, and the such. Like seeping water, if it enters my life, damage may result not only upon my physical and emotional wellbeing, but also upon my spiritual life. Like the sandbags, God’s righteousness protects against the negative effects of life that seek to destroy me. God will build the fortress that protect and save me, if I only allow him to do so.

Prayer: Loving God, surround me and protect me from the floods of life that seek to destroy me. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ken Walker
Trinity United Methodist Church

Holy Thursday, April 13, 2017 (Holy Week)

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

-1 Corinthian 11:23-26

The Sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Eucharist in some traditions, is central to our faith. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, desired to take sacrament daily. This became a problem when circuit riders began to roam the countryside in England and the early colonies of the United States. Because a pastor would only be present occasionally, the sacrament (along with weddings and funerals) were offered less frequently. Many colonial Methodist classes, desiring a more frequent sacrament, developed the Love Feast. While it was not truly a sacrament, having bread and water together, reminded the gathered Christians of Jesus' unique presence with them.

I for one, siding with John Wesley, continue to believe that the Eucharist is central to our faith and should be celebrated as often as possible. This our moment to be a meal with Jesus. It is our moment when we experience again his pronouncement that he is offering up his body and blood for each of us. It is our moment to hear him ask of us to do this and to keep him in our hearts. This is our moment to be present with our Lord as he goes forth to offer up himself for us and to show us that death is not the end—it is a beginning.

Of all days, Christian disciples ought to be at the Lord's Table on this day when we remember in a special way the gift of the Eucharist—Holy Communion.

Prayer: Gather us at your Holy Table O Lord and feed us the bread of life and the cup of salvation. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg/Mt. Wesley United Methodist Church

Good Friday, April 14, 2017 (Holy Week)

“When they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place, they gave Jesus wine mixed with vinegar to drink. But after tasting it, he didn’t want to drink it.”
-Matthew 27:33-34 (Common English Bible)

I grew up singing “‘Are ye able,’ said the Master, ‘to be crucified with me?’” the very question Jesus asked Zebedee’s sons, who, in chapter 20, had their mother ask Jesus if her boys could sit at the places of highest honor in his Kingdom. Scripture phrases it differently: “Can you drink from the cup that I am about to drink?” And with the same reckless abandon, the old hymn echoes James’ and John’s response: “Lord, we are able!” I sang the hymn as a child, but as a pastor I never include it in worship. Why? Because, in truth, none of us is able.

On the night before he died, Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” He didn’t want to drink it, but he did. For your sake. For mine. For love of his father’s world. In response to his thirst, Jesus was offered sour wine; as we look upon his suffering—as we look upon our salvation—may we in humility and gratitude offer ourselves in discipleship and servanthood: not in empty, boastful words, but in prayerful submission to God’s will.

Prayer: Lord, make us able. Give us grace to place our spirits into your hands, that you might reshape us into your image. On this holy and horrible day, we see the depth of your love. As Christ died for us, help us to live for him, for he is our strength; he is our savior, and we pray to you in his name. Amen.

Rev. Terri Cofiell
Harmony United Methodist Church

Saturday, April 15, 2017 (Holy Week)

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate thereupon ordered it to be handed over. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. - Matthew 27: 58-60

Taking care of final arrangements for a loved one who has passed away often is done with love and a stoic manner. We need to take care of business. Grief has to be put "on hold" for a while. Here, in Matthew's gospel, is Joseph of Arimathea, a man who may be facing death in the very near future himself. For why would he have just completed preparing for his own burial by having this tomb hewn out of rock? We may never know. What we do know is that Joseph took a risk by asking for the body of Jesus. He wrapped the Lord's body in clean linens and he lovingly and gently carried him to be laid in a new tomb.

"Carry Him gently. Carry Him far from suffering.
Let Him rest, let him rest for a while."

PRAYER: I cannot imagine the suffering of your death Lord. I cannot imagine the anguish that rejection of your message must have had on you. I cannot imagine the love that Joseph of Arimathea had for you at such a tumultuous and risky time. I pray, that I always will remember that I carry you and your love in my heart. May I always remember to carry it lovingly and gently and may I share this love without trepidation. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg/Mt.Wesley United Methodist Churches

When the Resurrection Becomes Real

They saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed all in white. They were completely taken aback, astonished. He said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer."
-Mark 16: 5-7a (The Message)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary and Mary were weighed down with worry. The sun had arisen in the skies, yet Mary and Mary walked as if they were still covered in darkness. As they approached the tomb, they worried who would roll back the stone for them? Who would help them gain entry to anoint Jesus's body? They were so bound by their worries and doubt that they did not notice the miracle. As they approached, there was a man waiting to alleviate their concern. He said to them, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer." With these words the women should have rejoiced. With this proclamation they should have lifted their hands and hearts in praise. And yet, even though their prayers had been answered, they remained in bondage. They did not share the good news; they did not tell the story. No one heard about the resurrection.

The greatest curse on the human life isn't sin; its fear. Fear paralyzes, represses, and constrains our lives. Fear is the great albatross that hangs around our necks. Fear is the common denominator that stresses our psyches and shrouds our souls. Fear robs us of our joy. Fear too often looms over us, blocking the Son:

Fear of failure

Fear of success

Fear of betrayal

Fear of embarrassment

Fear of the past

Fear of the future

Fear of ridicule

Fear of letting go

Fear of dying

Fear of living – FEAR!

Life begins when we realize that by removing the fear of death, Christ has given us permission to live. Permission to fully embrace our lives. Permission to soar. No excuses. No holding back. Freedom from fear is the ultimate message of the resurrection. As Rev. Peter Gomes stated, "It is not death that lurks in the background, it is the fear of death, and to diminish those fears is to gain life everlasting."

When does the resurrection become real? When we learn to walk free of fear and trust God to keep God's promises. One of our beloved hymns of the church proclaims, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives all fear is gone, because I know who holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives." Jesus has been loosed from the tomb, but Mary and Mary were imprisoned in a tomb of fear. What blessings are you blind to because of fear? What miracles are you missing because still you're walking in darkness? The stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Jesus lives! The resurrection becomes real when we leave the tomb of fear and dare to live.

Prayer: Life-giving God, as the stones of death are rolled away in our lives over and over again, may we leave the tomb of worry, doubt, and despair, and walk in your marvelous, beautiful light. May the resurrection become real for us as we earnestly learn to live.

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
Baltimore Washington Conference
The United Methodist Church