

Devotions for Lent 2018



Berkeley County Cluster of United Methodist Churches
Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove, Editor

Introduction

For disciples of Jesus Christ, the Season of Lent is a holy time of preparation, repentance and reflection. It is characterized by the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, reading and reflection on holy scripture and holy reading. This Lenten Devotional for 2018 has been created by followers of Jesus in the United Methodist Churches of Berkeley County, West Virginia to provide a resource for these disciplines.

It is our prayer that the United Methodist Community, and all those who would chose to join with us, would use this Lenten Devotional 2018 to prepare ourselves for the glorious moment of the resurrection of our Lord.

May the scripture text, the personal reflections, and prayers of your United Methodist neighbors be a blessing for you as you proceed through the days of Lent, to the passion and finally at the resurrection.

Peace+
Ed

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February 14, 2018

Ash Wednesday

Blow the horn in Zion; give a shout on my holy mountain! Let all the people of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is near.
-- Joel 2:1

Ash Wednesday is one of the most interesting Christian holidays. We come together for this solemn occasion where ashes are placed on our forehead and our pastor reminds us that we're going to die someday: "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." And from there we enter into a period of fasting and meditation, a time where many "bury the Alleluia" as they refrain from singing songs with that say Alleluia until Easter. Ash Wednesday can be a start very somber season. But it is also the start to a joyful time as well. We as Christians know that, even though pain and suffering still exist in the world, even though Christ will suffer and die on that cross, that is not the end of the story. Christ will rise up, and through Him we will rise up as well. Jesus brings a hope, peace, and light that is greater than the darkness that surrounds us. So blow the horn, shout it on the mountaintops! Christ is coming and indeed has already come into our lives, let us praise God every day this Lenten season even while we set this time apart for prayer and fasting.

Prayer: Most holy God, I praise Your name! Be with me each day this lent as I ponder and reflect on the amazing sacrifice of your Son. And, amidst that, to praise your name every step of the way. Amen.

Rev. Danny Breidenbaugh
Bunker Hill UMC

February 15, 2018

The First Thursday of Lent

The LORD utters his voice at the head of his army; how vast is his host! Numberless are those who obey his command. Truly the day of the LORD is great; terrible indeed—who can endure it? -- Joel 2:11-12

Many times in our lives we tend to think that we can run the show on our own instead of turning to God in prayer and waiting on the leadership of the Holy Spirit to guide our paths. After we have made a mess of things we then decide to take it to God in prayer. When will we learn that “turning to God with all our hearts” is the first thing to do and not the last? When we turn to God first we make far less mistakes. We are also reminded in this scripture that God already knows what is in our hearts. God already knows if what we are doing is for our glory or for God’s glory. The show may impress others but God knows our intent before we even begin. So when we do what we do, it is important that the “doing” is for the right reason. It wouldn’t be good if we were called from this life while we were tooting our own horn. This line from the hymn “Trust and Obey” is right on, “Trust and obey for there is no other way to be to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” I encourage all of us to begin everyday with trusting our God to provide for all we do.

Pastor Lynn Wilson
Calvary UMC

February 16, 2018

The First Friday of Lent

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

Read the Scripture through again...and then one more time. It can be hard at times to humble ourselves before God like this Psalm is asking us to do. And yet, there is that reminder there that God is merciful, God is faithful, and God is love. Put your trust in this God of new beginnings who says that we don't have to be the same person today as we were yesterday. Receive this gift of forgiveness and purification this Lenten season, allow it to wash over you. Be transformed, so that we can live up to our communion covenant which says "that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood."

Prayer: Forgiving God, today we offer this Scripture as our prayer. Wash me, mold me, and guide me during these days of Lent so that I may become a new creation wholly serving you. Amen.

Rev. Danny Breidenbaugh
Bunker Hill UMC

February 17, 2018

The First Saturday of Lent

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. ¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

-- Psalm 51:15-17 (NRSV)

We have started our Lenten season reflecting on this Psalm where David with a repentant heart shared his heartfelt regret for his actions to the one and Holy God he knew and loved. Verses 15-17 point to the questions: What is considered an acceptable sacrifice by God? What are God's expectations from God's people in similar circumstances? The law required an offering or a ritual sacrifice to amend for the sins committed. David's response beautifully addresses this matter by pointing to the character of God; a gracious God who is merciful who embraces a humble and contrite heart. David was truthful and sincere about his transgression. He understood that they separated him from God and accepts full responsibility. A sincere confession and repentance provide what is needed to be free to declare God's praise and a renewed relationship with God. Paul in his letter to the Romans encourages us to offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice. In doing so, we are able to experience true inward transformation consistent with God's will for our lives in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to God.

If our present state have silenced our will to follow and to praise God, then it is only God who can open our lips. We cannot sacrifice our way out of the consequences of sin, because only a heart that has turned toward God in repentance and supplication is an acceptable offering.

PRAYER: Compassionate God, help us to honestly look at our individual and communal spiritual lives in the light of the sin that has separated us from your holy presence. Help us too, to lay that sin and pride on the altar of our worship, even as we thank you in anticipation of your mercy. Gracious God thank you for your Grace that is greater than all our sins. Amen.

Rev. Edgardo Rivera
Frederick District

February 18, 2018

The First Sunday of Lent

God said, “Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth.

-- Genesis 9: 12-13

We love rainbows! How often do we look for one after a rain storm? As the rain comes to an end and the sun shines again, our chances of seeing a rainbow are greater. A rainbow is caused by the *refraction and reflection* of the rays of the sun shining on falling rain. Refraction is the change in direction of the spread of the sun’s rays due to a change in its transmission medium. In the case of a rainbow, a change in the denseness of a medium (air to water), cause the light to bend as it slows down, yet its frequency remains constant. The passing of the light through the water droplets results in a spectrum of color.

God’s people are like a denser medium, challenging and slowing down his direction in our lives. We have God’s light shining toward us, guiding, providing, uplifting, encouraging, calming, embracing and loving. It’s a 24/7 covenant made with us in mind. Even in our darkest days, God spreads his ray of light and love into our lives. We might slow it down, but his light and love remain constant.

The rainbow is a symbol of God’s faithfulness and mercy. The beauty that is provided by the refraction of his light into our lives only can be seen by others if that light is dispersed and reflected.

So, when the rain storms come into our lives, remember that the light of God is there too. Just be patient and wait for his rainbow to appear and then, share his faithfulness and mercy with others.

PRAYER: O Lord, sometimes I’m rather “thick” and I just don’t get it! Please be patient with me. You have shaped your light and turned it into a beautiful rainbow promising always to love me. May I reflect your beauty and the light of *your* love toward those I love, as well as toward those I am indifferent to. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

February 19, 2018

The First Monday of Lent

Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth—teach it to me—because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long.
-- Psalm 25:4-5

Some use this season of lent as a time to take something out of their lives, to fast. Whether that be soda, chocolate, Facebook, bad habits, whatever it is. But the more important aspect of that fast is that we are to be replacing those items with things that will help draw us closer to God – Bible study, prayer, worship, service, etc. I can remember many times in my life asking that question, “God, where are you taking me,” or, “God, what is it you want me to do?” But if we’re not willing to put in the time to listen then how will we ever hear God’s response? God is ready to lead us to truth, to teach us, to make God’s ways known to us. All God asks is that we be willing to spend the time to listen and reflect on where we are being called to go and what we are called to do.

Prayer: God of all hope, guide and teach me each day. Give me an open heart and open mind to hear and discern your call on my life. Amen

Rev. Danny Breidenbaugh
Bunker Hill UMC

February 20, 2018

The First Tuesday of Lent

The Lord is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands. -- Psalm 25:8-10

In this season of Lent, as we ponder what Jesus' sacrifice means to us, we can reflect on these 3 verses, which define the true character of God. They tell us that God is good and faithful; that he does what is right and provides direction to those who go astray; and that his love is *unfailing* and *faithful* to those who keep his covenant and obey his demands. Does this mean that he will only be loving and faithful to those who are obedient? Of course not. This passage should be incredibly reassuring to all of us, because it tells us that, not only does God lead with "unfailing love and faithfulness *all who keep his covenant and obey his demands,*" but also, according to verse 8, "*he shows the proper path to those who go astray.*" He does this for us, because he loves us.

Why does the Psalmist emphasize, in verse 10, the unfailing love and faithfulness that God will show to those who keep his covenant and obey him? Because God wants us to be obedient to him. It reminds me of the passage from John where Jesus reminds us to show our love for him by being obedient to him:

If you love me, you will obey what I command. *John 14:15*

God loves us even when we go astray. He proved his love for us, by sending his only Son to save us from our sins, because he *knew* we would go astray. But he wants us to be obedient to him because we love him; and, in return, he promises his unfailing love and faithfulness.

PRAYER: Lord God, I know that you are a loving and faithful God, and that you will love me and guide me, no matter how I may fail you. But because I love you Lord, I ask for your help in remaining obedient to you and your will for my life. Amen.

Tracey A. Rohrbaugh
St. Luke's UMC

February 21, 2018

The Second Wednesday of Lent

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,”

Peter 3:18

Visiting the shore has a special place in my heart and of all the shorelines I get to visit, the Outer Banks has some of the most interesting features I have ever experienced. Last Fall I was invited to go to Cape Hatteras with some friends to fish and enjoy the shore. We were up before dawn and because we had the permit and a four wheel drive truck we went all the way to the point. As we fished through the day (catching nothing) I took a walk across the small divide between the point and a newly created Shelly Island. There I found all kinds of shells of all shapes, sizes and condition. I even found many nearly perfect conch shells, a type of shell that is usually very difficult to find except for bits and pieces. Among all the shells, I picked 5 that really caught my eye. Each was unique; each had flaws, damage and imperfections from the journey up from the sea floor. Today's scripture notes that Christ suffered for our sins, our flaws and our damaged parts of our lives. He sees our beauty in the midst of our brokenness and for that, we can all be grateful.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for your love for each of us. We know that we are not perfect but that you see beauty in our brokenness, character in our damage and you are there for us every day and in every way. Amen.

Jim Holland
Calvary UMC

February 22, 2018

The Second Thursday of Lent

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

-- Mark 1: 9-11

Of the most beloved and treasured birds to the feeder area in our side yard, among the cardinals, yellow and red finches, and the occasional messy blue jay; are the mourning doves. Their long drawn out "whoo-oo-oo-oo" representing almost a lament, or sound of empathy to anyone listening, never cease to bring my heart joy and peace just knowing they are close by. The symbol of the dove in the Bible can be seen in much the same way, as the dove in the story of the flood when Noah sends out the dove to check for dry land, and she returns with the olive branch in her beak. (Genesis 8:11). Symbolically, the story of Noah's dove tells us that God declared peace with mankind after the flood had purged the earth of its wickedness. The dove represented His Spirit bringing the good news of the reconciliation of God and man. In the Gospel reading of Mark today, it is significant that the Holy Spirit was pictured as a dove at Jesus' baptism, thereby once again symbolizing peace with God as the gentle Savior ultimately brings eternal salvation to mankind through His sacrifice. My treasured cooing friends hold a high place of distinction, it turns out in regard to their frequent appearance in scripture. I am so grateful that they have chosen to take up residence at our home to remind me each time I hear the power of their song, of the compassion, suffering, and love of our Lord for each one of us.

PRAYER: How great is your love for us O Father, that you have set into place among us the wildlife, creatures of sea, air, and land; to remind us of your infinite presence and concern for us all each and every day throughout every moment of our life—all our life long. Amen.

Connie S. Grosjean
Greensburg UMC

February 23, 2018

The Second Friday of Lent

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him”. -- Mark 1:12-13

The Gospel writer Mark wants us to fully understand that this God-man Jesus, while fully divine, is profoundly and completely human. He is, like us, subject to the enormous temptations offered by the forces of evil in the world. This is the only way that Jesus could fully understand the challenges and reality of being completely human. If he did not totally take on all the characteristics of humanity, then he could not identify with our human condition. Otherwise, he would stand outside of our human reality, even sympathize with us; but he could not emphasize, fully understand and feel, the vulnerability of humanity.

One can imagine that Satan would see Jesus' giving in to temptation as a significant victory. If Jesus could be weakened, then all of humanity would easily fall prey to his suggestive temptations. If Jesus gave in to the temptations offered up by Satan, the divine work of salvation would have been over before Jesus began his ministry.

This is heady stuff. Mark, the Gospel writer, waste no time engaging us in the divine struggle. It is the first round of cosmic battle over the souls of humanity. Jesus, the God-man, is squared off against the powerful forces of sin that have enslaved men and women since the fall of Adam and Eve. As this holy battle rages, we see no winners. It is a draw. Jesus does not yield to temptation, and Satan lives to fight another day.

Mark hopes that his readers will understand the full impact of this holy fight. Jesus, the God-man, is sent into the desert to confront the worst of temptations imaginable, and he withstands the over-powering confrontation of Satan. Jesus emerges from this desert arena weary, tired and perhaps bruised. But he is not defeated. Notice the last phrase of verse 13: "...and the angels waited on him." Jesus would continue the fight that began in the desert, he will finish it on the cross.

PRAYER: Holy God, who sent your Son into the world to conquer sin. We praise you for caring so much for us that you would Jesus into battle for our salvation. We praise Jesus, your Son, who willing took on the role of humanity and fought for our redemption. We pray that you will strengthen us that we too would remain strong in the midst of temptation. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

February 24, 2018

The Second Saturday of Lent

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ “ -- Mark 1:14-15

As Mark reports the story, Jesus has returned from the wilderness temptation experience. We can only imagine the bruising and pain that he encountered there. Yet, he emerges from that experience ready to fully engage in the work that God had sent him to do. He now begins the battle for the souls of men and women and the defeat of Satan. While we are unsure of the exact physical location in the Judean wilderness where the temptations occurred, Mark wants us to understand it was a harsh, brutal, and challenging experience of Jesus. He now boldly emerges in Galilee where he will call his first disciples and begin his public ministry. His first public words, according to Mark, are *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news”*. Jesus, the preacher, provides his audience with his intent, mission, and expectation in the first sentence of his inaugural sermon. Having experienced the temptation, he publicly pronounces that the work of salvation has begun. God is ready, through the work of His Son, to redeem and restore the souls of men and women to righteousness and a place in the Kingdom of God. Jesus not only announces that the time is right, but there are requirements and expectations for those who wish to be a participant in this work of salvation. He announces two requirements that will be pronounced again and again throughout his ministry. They are the core values for all followers of Jesus. In order to be a participant in the work of salvation, one must repent and believe. The salvation work of Jesus is a new thing; therefore one must turn away from the culture of this world and commit to following the way defined by Jesus. Repent means to “turn around and to follow”. One must also believe, with heart, mind and soul, that Jesus is Son of God who leads us into the Kingdom of God. Belief is essential. Two, but challenging, concepts that Jesus announces at the outset of his ministry. They were true then and they are true now. May we have the will, commitment, courage and endurance to follow Jesus into the Kingdom of God.

PRAYER: O God, the words seem so simple, but they are life changing. May your Spirit guide and strengthen us as we seek to turn around from the sin of the world and faithfully follow you into your Kingdom. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt Wesley UMC

February 25, 2018

The Second Sunday of Lent

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am El-Shaddai – ‘God Almighty.’ Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. 2) I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants.” 3) At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, 4) “This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations!” (NLT)

--Genesis 17: 1-4

Lenten Season is a good time to regroup and prepare for the challenges of life. The challenges we face cause us to make decisions and the decisions we make often lead us to more challenges, and so the cycle continues. Nobody gets a free pass.

The consequences of our actions can create obstacles to our spiritual growth which often cause feelings of failure, overwhelming us at times to the point of feeling defeated. Not all obstacles we face are caused by our actions. Let's focus on the obstacles where we have done something to create, and pray that any habits we establish in the process might help us deal with those obstacles that are beyond our control.

Our scripture is as applicable today, as it was in Abram's time. It can be a daunting thought to imagine living a blameless life. Think about it, blameless, as spotless or innocent. But, God promises us, if we serve Him faithfully, He will provide a blameless walk for us. This indicates the first step is ours. Trusting requires a relationship. Not everyone carries the same level of trust with God, or an ability to trust in certain situations. So, if you have established a trusting relationship with God, you have opportunities all around you to support others through areas of their life where the worldly walk they are on is not so smooth. God is calling you to make yourself available for a brother or sister in need. Don't be concerned about bringing words of wisdom. Bring a hug, establish some calm and feel the love of God at work.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we pray that you will use us as channels for your love. Help us to trust you more, so we might become more confident in our faith. We know you will not lead us into the wilderness and drop us off. We know you stand firm on your promises to hold us close as we serve others, and in the process serve you. As we invite you into our decision making processes, please use the obstacles in our lives to show us how such moments can help us grow spiritually. Please take our actions and produce good fruit. Learning to trust you more, as we grow in your grace, we will praise you every step of the way. Help us to appreciate what a blameless life with you feels like, as we continue on our obstacle course of life. In Jesus' precious name we pray, Amen.

Chet Cole
St. Luke's UMC

February 26, 2018

The Second Monday of Lent

You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

-- Psalms 22:23-24

February is considered the love month of the year. And the love of my life was born in February. She is now with the Lord and I cried out to the Lord and he heard me, through my family, friends, church family and my pastor. This is what we do as people of faith. We gather together passing the small light we have to those experiencing loss, need, sadness, sickness and pain. We remind one another that no matter how difficult our present circumstances, Christ is always near bringing light into our world. How can we brighten someone's day with God's love?

In Christian Love,

Ray Miller
Paynes Chapel UM

February 27, 2018

The Second Tuesday of Lent

“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”

--Psalm 22: 27-28 (NIV)

To me, these verses reflect David's trust in and joy about the day to come when God will rule the earth and all that is in it. However, for some reason, the "futuristic" tone got me to thinking. Being able to trust in our future is an awesome gift from God, but I also think we, at least I, have a need to ask, "What can I do now, this very day?"

Today's verses answer this for me. This very day (and continuing), we need to remember God, honor God and praise God. This very day (and continuing), we need to turn to God with humble hearts and ask for forgiveness, guidance and help. This very day (and continuing), we need to patiently trust God hears us and will respond in His time and in His way. This very day (and continuing), we need to submit our minds, hearts, souls and actions to the Lord. Our future is assured, but our work on our faith walk must begin in renewed earnest today.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being a constant in my life and in my future. Be with me, guide me and even correct me as I work toward a life fully consistent with your teaching and a life of obedience to you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Claudia Bentley
St. Luke's UMC

February 28, 2018

The Third Wednesday of Lent

“For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith”.
– Romans 4:13

The concept of entitlement is troubling. For those who work hard for what they need. It is disheartening, even angering, to see others have their needs met without effort because they act as though they are entitled. Entitlement comes in several forms. The very rich and those who believe they have a higher social status, often perceive themselves to be entitled to privileges not enjoyed by others. In the countries where monarchs reign, the royal family often feels entitled to a privileged way of life. In a more general area, there are those who habitually are supported by others, this could be family, perhaps government or even a charitable organization where they develop an idea they are entitled to resources that is offered them.

The Apostle Paul, addressing the Christian faith community of Rome, speaks boldly against religious entitlement. His message is clear, men and women do not enter the Kingdom of God because of their heritage, their family status, or their blood line. He points to Abraham, the father of the faith, who did not receive the gifts of God's grace because he was entitled. Paul wants his hearers to understand that no one enters the Kingdom of God because of status, family connections or perceived entitlement.

However, what is foundational for Paul is that Abraham received the grace of God, became the leader of God's people, and established the foundation for the Hebrew people because of his faith. He believed. He embraced the fullness of God's presence, energy, and love. He gave himself, mind, body and soul, over in complete belief that God is Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer. Abraham received a place in the Kingdom of God because he fully and completely believed in the love, support and grace offered by God. If this be true for Abraham, it is equally true for each of us. None of us are entitled to a place in the Kingdom of God, we are accepted into God's holy presence because we believe in Him and have a faith that will He will receive us in love.

PRAYER: God of all people, we open our hearts to receive your abundant blessings. We come before you knowing that we deserve nothing, but by your grace we are offered a place in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 1, 2018

The Third Thursday of Lent

It is said, “Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right.” But it’s not just Abraham; it’s also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. - Romans 4: 22-24 (*The Message*)

Abraham and Sarah, both quite elderly, accepted the fact that their bodies were “dead” to ever having children. However, despite this, Abraham never gave up hope and trusted in what God had promised to him; that he, Abraham, “would become the father of many nations.” As we know, God kept his promise. Sarah bore a son, Isaac.

Abraham refused to deny or even doubt God’s word. His faith was unshakable! His trust was steadfast! And so, it should be with us! Think about those times when you wondered “How will I ever get through this?” Well, you did! You’re reading this devotion right now and you made it through that dark, disparaging and painful time of tribulation.

Perhaps you’re going that a dark time right now, or you know someone who is. Abraham and Sarah can reach across the centuries to share their story. It’s difficult to “let go and let God,” but those who do find that feeling of calm and solace in their spirit that allows God to fulfill what is best for them. We are children of God, who are cherished, comforted and cared for, cheered on and overwhelmingly loved by him.

My bet is that each of us have met someone who’s relentless trust in God got them through challenging, painful or arduous times. May we follow in their example, as well.

PRAYER: O God of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac...O God of us all, may we find the courage and faith to trust that you will see us through those days, months, or perhaps years of consternation, for whatever the reason. Lift any doubt away so that our spirit will be open to you, so that we may embrace your will for us. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 2, 2018

The Third Friday of Lent

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”

-- Mark 8: 31

Being an individual who enjoys the challenge of a word search puzzle, brain teaser, or crossword puzzle to incorporate as much brain health and wholeness practices in their life as possible; it was only recently that I learned that there was an app for doing puzzles! Where is the challenge in that? Undaunted by the possibility of being caught in the net of conformity and laziness, I checked this resource out anyway, and as a result had my eyes opened to a startling reality. For example: the word **“rejection”** was alongside the words: “worthless”, “scum”, “trash” and “scrap” as similar or alternate words appropriate to use in place of the word “rejection”. As I replaced that word in Mark’s gospel with each of these; I was brought to a more likely awareness of what Jesus was made to feel like by these higher authorities that he was brought before. How often do we tone down the real suffering of Christ during this time by using phrases or expressions which glamorize the humiliation, scorn, and being cast off by the very people He was born to redeem? We indeed will never know such suffering. Jesus Christ was born to deliver us from that if we allow him to be the Lord and Savior of our lives who truly understands our trials and setbacks, yet remains faithful to call us to the higher purpose He has for us in this life; until He calls us to our eternal home.

PRAYER: Our Lord, you endured every form of human degradation that we could impose upon you, and yet you have told us that you will always receive us with welcoming and forgiveness if we truly repent of our sinful and hurtful ways to you and to others. We accept this life-saving opportunity in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Connie S. Grosjean
Greensburg UMC

March 3, 2018

The Third Saturday of Lent

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

-- Mark 8:34-35 (NIV)

In Mark 8: 34-35, Jesus warns His disciples to prepare for sufferings that would come by following Him. We should not mind the things of the world more than the things of God. Our own comfort, ease, and safety, more than the things of God, His glory and Kingdom, is a great sin, and the root of much sin, and very common among us, Christ's disciples. It will appear in suffering times, those times of temptation, when those in whom the things of the world have the most importance will cause us to be in danger of falling off. It seems that we tend to shun trouble and, therefore, we ignore our responsibilities to Christ. It is freshly wisdom (2 Corinthians 1:22) and it will be folly in the end.

Are we invited by the words and works of Christ to follow Him? Let us sit down, and count the cost, whether we can prefer our advantages by Christ before life itself, whether we can bear to think of losing our life for the sake of Christ and the gospel's. When the Devil is trying to draw us away, he conceals the worst of life without Christ. He tells us only of the pleasures, but says nothing of the peril.

Physical life may be saved by denying Jesus, but eternal life will be lost. Discipleship may cause suffering and death, but that loss is small compared to the life we will gain.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to keep our eyes on Jesus and His promises. Let us look away from earthly pleasures and follow Him. Help us to follow His Great Commandment to spread the gospel to all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost., teaching them to observe all things that He has commanded us. In Jesus's name, Amen

Linda L. Carter
Greensburg UMC

March 4, 2018

The Third Sunday of Lent

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. --Exodus 20:1-3

Options, options, options... Our world has an endless supply. Reading this passage reminds me of just how dizzying these countless options can be. My kids have always loved a Chinese buffet. I would tell you they loved a "good" Chinese buffet, but quality really didn't seem to matter. They just wanted all of those options that buffets offer!

I'll admit, I can be persuaded by this endless array of choices too. I mean, why settle for just one thing when there are so many others lined up for the tasting? I can become so intoxicated by options that many times I'm left unsatisfied. I've seen this creep into our spiritual lives too. We have so many things vying for our attention, for first place in our lives. From our families, our jobs, hobbies, social lives, etc, etc, etc. We can become so distracted and dizzied that even unintentionally, lesser things sometimes take the place of our Lord.

Prayer: Father, you are our everything! You deserve the highest place in our hearts and no person or thing is above you. Please forgive us for allowing anything to come before you. Purge our spirits of short attention spans and appetites for more, more and more. Thank you for loving us anyway. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Brooke Cantley
St. Luke's UMC

March 5, 2018

The Third Monday of Lent

⁴“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
– Exodus 20:4-6 NIV

In the day of The Exodus, the world was very polytheistic. Most people worshiped more than one “god” without seeing it as a problem. Having declared in verse 3 that the Israelites should have “*no other gods*”, God instructed them not to make idols. An idol is not only a totem or the representation of a false “god”; it also means an image of the One God. To attempt to make a physical representation of the invisible God is the mistaken attempt to reduce God to a size that one can manipulate and use. In forbidding the people to make idols, God declares that He is omnipotent and beyond manipulation. In our current day of self-absorption, it is well to be reminded that we are not gods, and that we are not in control. God alone is in charge and worthy of our worship and service.

PRAYER: Most Gracious God: You alone are God. Help us always to seek your face, and to worship and serve You alone; for You alone are holy. Amen.

John R. Yost
Retired Elder

March 6, 2018

The Third Tuesday of Lent

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. -- Exodus 20:8-10

An average day during my senior year in high school went something like this: Wake up, eight hours of school, quick dinner, four hours of homework, hang out with friends (if I was lucky), sleep, repeat.

Sound like your life? To keep from freaking out or getting sick, we have to find time to rest. God thinks rest is so important he wrote it into the fourth commandment.

A "Sabbath" is a time of rest. The words, "Remember the Sabbath day," point us back to the first Sabbath in history when, after He created everything in six days, God rested on the seventh day.

Now, let's be realistic: God's strength is unlimited. He created everything just by speaking. He's present everywhere. He's always available to talk to, and He doesn't get tired or worn out. So, why did God rest?

The Bible says that God "blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating what He had done". I think God set an example for us when He rested, and we can see that example in a very important word: holy. This verse says that God made his day of rest holy. God wants us to follow his example. He wants us to take time to rest, and He wants that rest time to be holy.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember to “rest” and take the time to be “holy” in your sight. Not by the world’s standards, but by yours. Grant us your peace and grace. In Your Son Jesus’ holy name, we pray. Amen.

Helen Lavigne
St. Luke’s UMC

March 7, 2018

The Fourth Wednesday of Lent

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” -- Exodus 20:12

First, we must hear this commandment in the context of migrant families, recently escaped from Egypt, roaming the wilderness of Sinai in pursuit of the Promised Land. In this ancient context, family structure was critical for survival and honoring parents was essential to their wellbeing. The Hebrew story is constructed on the role of parents. Reflect for a moment on the stories of Adam and Eve and their children, of Noah and his family, of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, of Isaac and his beloved Rebecca, of Jacob and his four wives and their extended family which gave order to the Hebrew Nation. Each of these stories engages, for good or for ill, the honored roll of father and mother. The standard, while not always respected, of honoring parents was consistently an integral part of the story. Honoring parents was rewarded. Dishonoring parents led to conflict. How do we bring the tradition of our Hebrew fathers and mothers into a current context of twenty-first century culture? For many complex reasons, our contemporary culture does not hold high value for honoring parents. I can site three reasons (I'm sure there are many more) that contribute to a dishonoring of parents in our current culture. One, is technology. In previous generations, the parent was the expert of his/her skill or trade. The rapid development of technology has left the expertise of skills/trades behind only to be replaced by a technology understood by youth rather than parents. Two, the increase in divorce. Children are frequently required by the circumstances to choose sides. One parent may be honored and the other not. Third, we live in a culture that places blame on everyone or everything other than ourselves. When life gets difficult, it becomes too easy to blame our parents for the problems.

With all that said, we cannot escape the divine word that commands, not request, that we honor our fathers and our mothers. Note too that this commandment comes with a promise. It states, “that your days may be long”. This commandment is tied to the very fabric of our future. Honoring father and mother sets the stage for what we are yet to become.

PRAYER: Keep us mindful O God of the gifts, graces and blessings of those who parented us. Open our hearts and minds to give them honor.
Amen

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 8, 2018

The Fourth Thursday of Lent

“You shall not murder.”

-- Exodus 20:13 NRSV

I chose this day because it is my mother’s birthday. I was surprised it was this short, terse verse. For a week plus, this Lenten devotional is focusing on the 10 Commandments. Most of us, can thankfully say, this is 1 command we have kept! Yet there is murder all around us. As a native of Maryland, and having a daughter who lived in Baltimore for more than 10 years, it pains me that Baltimore had their highest homicide rate in 2017. 343 folks were murdered, it’s 3rd year with more than 300 homicides.

In I John 3:11-16 we have a retelling of the Cain and Abel conflict which resulted in Cain murdering Abel. In this passage the author is correlating lack of love and in Cain’s case, resulted in murder. Verse 15 states: “all who hate a brother or sister are murderers.” Conversely, verse 14, states we pass from death to life, because we love each other.

We have the extremes: love versus hate and life versus death. Yet the dividing line between the two can be thin. Research seems to indicate the emotions of love and hate come from the same area of the brain. We are all capable of hate, though we may deny this. (Cain most likely did not wake up that morning planning to murder his brother!) Cain had a choice to make. We are told in Genesis 4:7: “sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Instead, he chose to let the anger and hate master him.

If the 6th command had been “do not let hate rule”, most of us would be quick to recognize our sin. As comforting as it would be to say we haven’t broken at least 1 commandment, can we really say that?

Prayer: Help us Lord to choose love instead of hate, life instead of death. Amen.

Pastor Dawn Reidy
Paynes Chapel UM

March 9, 2018

The Fourth Friday of Lent

“You shall not commit adultery.”

-- Exodus 20:14

A definition of adultery according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is: *“voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person’s current spouse or partner”*. I begin here because we often want to skirt the issue or water it down to make it less provocative. However the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has a lot to say about adultery. Here are only some citations from holy Scripture. The heart of Hebrew Law, the Ten Commandments states clearly: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Proverbs picks up the theme with: “But a man who commits adultery lacks judgement; whoever does so destroys himself” (Proverbs 6:32). The writer of Hebrews writes to the early church saying: “Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers” (Hebrews 13:4). Jesus goes beyond identifying adultery as a specific act and includes fantasy in his teaching: “You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit adultery’. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28).

These words challenge us in a culture where sex, sexual exploitation, and lust are available on TV, radio, bill boards, internet, magazines, and in daily conversation. Illicit sex is a common commodity for sale in our culture. Historically there has been an attitude of “it’s ok, everyone does it.” The recent “Me Too” campaign is challenging a small part of the sexually anything goes attitude of contemporary culture. There is much yet to be done by the disciples of Christ to hold sex and sexuality to the Biblical standard we have adopted as our guide.

At heart, adultery is breaking covenant. It is breaking the covenant of marriage and the commitment we have made to another. If we cannot keep the covenant of marriage, are we any more able to keep our covenant with God?

PRAYER: Holy and loving God who has established a covenant of love with us, give us the courage, discipline and grace to be faithful to our marriage partner and to you. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 10, 2018

The Fourth Saturday of Lent

"You shall not steal."

-Exodus 20:15

(The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version)

It is not necessary to write a definition of the word steal. The meaning is instilled in all of us from an early age. We use the word in various ways in our daily conversations. "Stealing second base" is a good thing. Buying an item at a "steal" makes us happy. Stealing from someone or having something stolen from us is completely different. Obviously, Christians should not steal, but how should we react when something is stolen from us? I am not referring to the theft of an object or money. When our rights as American citizens are threatened, we protest and revolt. When our religious beliefs are stolen, we should respond in a similar manner. The Bible gives us a moral compass for direction. The Ten Commandments don't deviate or have gray areas for debate. The secular world has been engaged in the act of stealing pieces of Christian doctrine for years. When and how do we react to this theft? Christians don't steal, but find an increasing number of their beliefs being stolen by those who don't share them. "Thou shall not steal" is a commandment that applies to everyone.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for showing us the path a Christian should follow. Help us to follow that path and not deviate from your truth.

Roger Engle
St. Luke's UMC

March 11, 2018

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” --Exodus 20:16 NIV

The initial statement of the ninth commandment is placed in a more ‘legal’ context. That is, in a court of law, we are told to speak truthfully about other people which the scripture refers to as “our neighbor.” However, most of us will never enter a court room and even fewer will be called on to testify concerning another person in such a court room. We need to avoid the temptation of seeing this as “Pharisees and teachers of the Law” perspective that “this only applies to a legal case.” There is a deeper and more profound teaching that lies at the root of this commandment. The last 6 of God’s charges to Moses up on Mount Horeb deal with our relation to other people. This commandment like the rest involves out we relate, or more correctly discuss others. More specifically it addresses “how” or “what” we say about “our neighbors.” We need to understand that what we say in public or in private has deep implications. The words we use or say about other person in public or private can cause devastating consequences no matter how innocent the comment may be. While we may say something about others we may ‘believe’ to be true, it can be grossly untrue and very hurtful and harmful to that person. While we may not mean any harm, when we talk about others, it can cause harm. This harm may not only affect the “neighbor” but may impact our own personal reputation. We become known as a ‘tale barer’ and undermine our own good reputation. During World War 2 war poster reminded people “loose lips sink ships” reminding everyone to be careful about what they say. Our words about other can sink others reputation and “good name” and ours as well. Proverbs reminds us “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” We have all been on the wrong side of things that people have said about or against us. The ninth commandment challenges us to be careful in what we say about others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be ever mindful and vigilant about the words that come out of my mouth. Help me to be conscience of the words I use and ever mindful of what I say. May I seek to use the tongue you gave me to be a blessing to all people. Convict me when I speak out of turn. Use me to be an ever-bold witness for your that my words would bring honor to all people no matter where I am and to whom I am speaking. AMEN

Rev. Dr. Dennis Jackman
Hedgesville UMC

March 12, 2018

The Fourth Monday of Lent

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”
--Exodus 20:17 NIV

I was standing at the pump on one of the coldest days of the New Year. The wind was blowing wildly and my breath could be seen escaping my body. Despite my best efforts to dress for the conditions, I stood at the side of the car shivering hoping the gas tank would fill quickly and the pump would click off. It was a newer pump with a television screen. My teeth chattered as I watched the screen offer a special on hot coffee. While not a coffee drinker, the initial thought of something warm was quite appealing and perhaps today would be that day that I again tried that hot beverage special. I then thought about how advertising had filled so much of our lives. Commercials on Television had always been a part of life. Now we have advertisement on bulletin boards almost anywhere we look, flags, banners, cars covered with ads, car windows peddling their goods, small signs along the road and our neighbors’ yards, pop-ups on computers and even grocery carts offering goods; all offering something more or better. The subtle promise of something for my benefit. The old testament word for covet means, “in bad sense of inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.” We all must confess that at some point we all have given in to the promise of some product or merchandise which promised to make our life better only to be disappointed. We spend the first 20 years trying to look older and the rest of our lives trying to hold aging at bay by looking younger. I have heard real estate agents talk about people who have bought “huge, beautiful homes” and “cannot afford to provide simple furnishings.” We so often look around us and look at what others have and ever so secretly desire the types of things our neighbor has. That stirring within our hearts and minds is one of being discontent with what we have and searching for something better. We sometimes try to justify what we want but it is still selfish when we look deep in our hearts. As we turn our hearts and minds over to God, we can gain a new perspective on what is really important in life and not all those things that belong to others or the false promises of advertising.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for all that you have trusted me with. Help me to gain a heart of being satisfied with what I have already. When I pause and think of how richly you have blessed me, I stand in awe. You have given me such a wonderful gift through the saving faith of Christ Jesus. Help me to learn to be content with what I have and understand that I am only a temporary caregiver for all things. AMEN

Rev. Dr. Dennis Jackman
Hedgesville UMC

March 13, 2018

The Fourth Tuesday of Lent

Just as Moses lifted up the snake, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

--John 3: 14-16 NIV

While wandering in the desert, the Israelites became disgruntled and rebellious and turned away from God and his word. God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for rebelling against Him. Many were bitten and died. God told Moses to raise a bronze snake upon a pole that anyone bitten could look at it and live. (Num. 21:8-9)

As we strain through our days in a world filled with unfathomable pain, suffering, fear, and despair, we become weary and distraught, wishing for relief. Our thinking is distracted, as was the thinking of the Israelites with Moses. They cried out in hopelessness and God, through Moses, gave them a way to redeem themselves just as he does us in our own personal struggles. Those who looked upon the snake were renewed and found refuge, safety, and hope to begin again.

God sent his Son to be crucified and reborn to save us from our own troubles and iniquities. Jesus was raised up on a cross to be seen, then raised again from the tomb. All who look to him will be saved from certain death and given the chance to begin again while gaining salvation that will last for all time. We must strive to look upon His face and allow him to transform us into what he wants us to be and what he makes us capable of being.

Jesus is raised up! Are we focusing on him and what he has in mind for us? Are we truly seeking his countenance and giving him our all?

In these days of Lent, we must work diligently to adhere to his principles, teachings, and claim his Salvation and Grace for our own. How are we doing on this?

His is lifted up!

Are we truly looking?

Prayer: Lord, help us to look up and focus on you, trusting and knowing that our upward gaze will help us to see your Grace and bring us into your safety.

Jeff Hollis
St. Luke's UMC

March 14, 2018

The Fifth Wednesday of Lent

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. -- John 3:17-18 NKJV

What do these bible verses mean to you? To me they bring a sense of peace, hope and comfort. Our society has changed considerably from what it was in my younger years. Sometimes I feel the things I was used to, are now topsy-turvy. Change is difficult to deal with, even small ones, but they must be dealt with. When I think back over the last 4-5 decades I wonder how they change so rapidly. We become engrossed in the everyday business of living and the stress angst and fear of our economy changing, political situations threatening. How do we handle our lives to find a semblance of quiet and peace and the comfort we need? The answer is Jesus. Talk to him. Let Him take away your troubles. He is always with us, waiting for us to call on Him so He can comfort us and give us courage to go on with all our daily tasks. He will guide us and support us so that we can let go of the problems. We carry on, leaning on Him and He is always with us right at our shoulders in the night, in the morning, whenever we feel we need Him Jesus listens to us when we ask for guidance no matter what the problem. We are told to be anxious for nothing, Jesus is here to comfort us and if we sincerely believe in Him, He will give us solace. Jesus truly loves us and wants to help give relief from all the anxiety. He has helped me many times. I trust Jesus will help me with all my worries, if I trust in Him I will have the promise o eternal lie with Him in His kingdom.

Daris Smith
Calvary UMC

March 15, 2018

The Fifth Thursday of Lent

“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

-- John 3:20-21

John, the Gospel writer, is obsessed with the theme of light and darkness. His concern is driven by his opposing the heresy of Gnosticism. Adherents of this first and second century unorthodox interpretation of Christian faith believed in a cosmic struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. For them, knowledge (“gnosis”) was the key for coming out of the darkness into the divine presence. For John, Jesus is the Word that brings light into a dark world.

Many of our world cultures, including our own, have developed a belief that dark, or perhaps night, represents evil and light, or day, represents enlightenment. In a folksy way my grandmother supported this view when she noted that we should “close the windows at night because night air is bad for you.” The film series Star Wars supported the idea with the phrase “coming over to the dark side.” The Gospel writer continues this theme by pointing out that those evil likes to reside in the dark and hates the light. He is more pointed when he notes that those who do good in the light are close to the Kingdom of God.

For us, as disciples of Christ, we are called in every age and every culture to live as children of the light. We want others to see the joy that Christ brings into our life. We want to witness to the redeeming power of Christ in our world. We want the light of the world, Jesus, our Lord and Savior to be seen, honored and glorified. That cannot be accomplished in the dark. We are a people of light!

PRAYER: God of light, reveal to us your holy presence. Illuminate our daily path that we might walk with you in faith, charity, peace and love. Amen.

Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 16, 2018

The Fifth Friday of Lent

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’”

--1 Cor 1:18-19

In another Lenten Devotion, I have noted a visit to Cape Hatteras. We went early in the morning before sunrise to the furthest point where there is a new Island that has appeared from the ocean currents and is cut off from the Outer Banks by a narrow strip of tidal water that is deep or shallow depending on the tide. We saw trucks out on the very end of this new Island but couldn't tell how they got over there. We checked out the obvious route but that path was very soft sand and all the tracks and ruts showed that people had been stuck or turned around to go some other way. It was a few hours later when the tide was lowering that we noticed that a guy was walking through waist deep water from the main island to a halfway point on the other island. The truck he was with drove out into the deep waters trusting him to lead them safely across. We were amazed that the truck got across and didn't get stuck or stall out part way.

We know that Jesus leads each of us through deep and uncertain waters. Life is not always easy and the correct path may seem foolish just as today's scripture notes that the message of the Cross is foolishness. No matter what deep water you face today look to Jesus to lead you. He will help get you through.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for going to the cross for me. In the midst of all your betrayal and suffering I was on your mind knowing how lost I am. Teach me to follow you where ever you lead. Amen.

Jim Holland
Calvary UMC

March 17, 2018

The Fifth Saturday of Lent

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength --I Corinthians 1:25 NRSV

John Wesley famously said, "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man and then I will show you a man that can comprehend God." As I read this scripture I am reminded that it is so difficult to understand how God works. Philosophers and scholars try to make sense of God and His seemingly foolish message, Christ crucified. His message is simple, Christ died on the cross for us. As humans we cannot understand that salvation does not require extreme measures. God is powerful and wise. He created the heavens and earth, but to save us He sent His son, Jesus to die for us. When I am struggling with a decision or having a difficult time I call out for a powerful sign that God is present and will help. But I know that He is always here, and powerful signs are not needed. He is beside me in the good times and the bad and does not need to show Himself in a majestic or powerful way. Paul says the people are weak and foolish; we try to rely on our strength and wisdom to guide us. We wander from Christ and ultimately make weak and foolish decisions. We need to remember that the cross gives us power and that our strength is found in Christ. Jesus was crucified on the cross, paying the price for all our weakness and foolishness.

Prayer: Wise Father, I thank you for showing us your strength and wisdom through the cross. Help me to be reminded that your love for me is more important than any struggle or doubt I may face. Help me to trust your ways even when I do not understand. Amen

Samantha Albright
St. Luke's UMC

March 18, 2018

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

“For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel.’”
-- Jeremiah 31:7

Chapters 30-33 of Jeremiah are referred to as “a song of hope”. For the most part, the prophetic word of Jeremiah is depressing, disheartening and discouraging. His words are pronounced against the background of the coming exile, and a realization of God’s punishment for disobedience. However, in the midst of the depressing prophecy, the “song of hope” is offered. The reader is reminded that while God will punish his people for disobedience, he does not abandon them. In every circumstance, there is hope and promise for a new day.

These chapters, set in the middle of the prophetic writing of Jeremiah, reminds me of negro spirituals. They too were songs of hope and anticipation. Some folks called them the sorrow songs - eventually, they would come to be known as spirituals. They were the soul-cry of the black slave, longing for freedom. Most of the time they had their start in the heat of a backwoods religious meeting. Slaves gathered secretly to encourage one another and to cry out to God for freedom. This activity was against the law, and they knew that a severe beating or even death could face them if they were caught. But the joy and peace that they received from heaven in these meetings made it worth the risk they faced here on earth

The prophet Jeremiah, while clear about God’s punishment for disobedience, would not let us forget God’s mercy, presence and grace. He offers us a profound word that we are never abandoned, and there is always reason to sing a song of hope.

PRAYER: Great God of us all, remind us that your love and grace is always present with us. When we become depressed or discouraged, lift our spirit to feel your redeeming and restoring blessing. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 19, 2018

The Fifth Monday of Lent

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

--Jeremiah 31:33

Have you ever noticed that life is full of challenges? Have you noticed that sooner or later, all of us are going to face challenges and have mountains to climb in life?

I heard the story about a woman named Jill who had a very unreliable car. She would call her friend Mary for a ride every time her car broke down. One day Mary got yet another one of those calls.

"What happened this time," she asked.

"My brakes went out," Jill said. "Can you come and get me?"

"Where?"

"I'm in the drugstore," Jill told her.

"And where's the car?" Mary wanted to know.

Jill replied, "It's in here with me."

That's life. Sometimes you're the bug, and sometimes you're the windshield. But life is one set of challenges after another.

Some of these challenges are routine everyday headaches and irritations. The car breaks down, so you're late for work. The heavens unleash rain on your daughter's wedding day. You have lunch with someone you want to impress, and afterwards you discover that you had a piece of spinach firmly entrenched in your front teeth the whole time you were sitting there with that person.

There are other more heart-wrenching challenges and tragedies we also face in life. The death of someone we love. A serious diagnosis from the doctor's office. The loss of a job, or the breakup of a family.

Some of the challenges we encounter can be handled quite easily, while there are others that threaten our very being.

And so we come to our scripture reading for this day with these wonderful words of promise from our Lord as we face the everyday challenges of life:

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

The beginning of a new year is always such a period of refreshment and renewal. No matter how many bad things which may have come our way last year – no matter how many problems, how much illness, how many difficulties we may have had to face, this new year has given us a fresh new start which is full of promise.

God's promise to us is one of covenant. It was important for the people of Israel to understand that their new beginning was not produced by their own efforts; it was a gift of God's grace – unmerited, undeserved, flowing out of divine love.

Now that promise, that covenant, has been passed on to us, as we as Christians see ourselves as a people who are also in a covenant relationship with God.

John Wesley believed that Christians should reaffirm that covenant with God annually, a practice which I have shared with churches I have served throughout my 35 years of ministry. As we get closer to Holy Week and to the celebration of the new life Easter brings, let us join together in this covenant prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition:

PRAYER: *I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee, or brought low by thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

Rev. Mark C. Mooney
Otterbein UMC

March 20, 2018

The Fifth Tuesday of Lent

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
-- Psalm 119: 9-10

We are living in a world of evil and temptations. It is so tempting to be drawn into the webs of evil desires. We must seek the LORD for strength and wisdom by reading God's word and doing what it says. Let me not wander from Your commandments. Your words I have hidden in my heart and seek not to sin against you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, whether we feel strong or weak in our faith, we know that you are always there for us. Let us search your word daily and take heed in what it says. Let Your Spirit control our thinking and our actions, so we do not wander from your commandments. Amen.

Donna Barbour
St. Luke's UMC

March 21, 2018

The Sixth Wednesday of Lent

“I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. “

-- Psalm 119:15-16

Meditation, quiet reflection and introspection are challenging concepts in our busy, demanding world. For many, silence is a troubling experience. We are so use to constant noise that silence makes us uncomfortable.

The psalmist is calling us into an uncomfortable but rewarding experience. While I understand that it is not everyone's preference, personally, I like quiet and silence. From time to time, I go on a silent retreat to Holy Cross Abby, a Trappist Monastery, near Berryville, Virginia. While there are a few words spoken for directions by the staff, all participants spend the time in silence. It is not a time for socializing, chatting, or visiting with the other guest. It is a time to read, pray, worship and reflect. It is a wonderfully spiritual and refreshing time.

The psalmist is counseling us to nurture our spiritual life by taking time to be quiet, read the holy scriptures and reflect on what God is saying to our minds, hearts and lives. May one of the disciplines of this Season of Lent be times of quiet, reading of scripture and reflection.

PRAYER: Great and holy God, quiet our minds and hearts that we might hear your still small voice. May we discover the power and richness of your grace as we take time to truly listen and reflect on your word. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 22, 2018

The Sixth Thursday of Lent

Jesus replied that the time had come for him to return to his glory in heaven, and that "I must fall and die like a kernel of wheat that falls into the furrows of the earth. Unless I die I will be alone --- a single seed. But my death will produce many new wheat kernels --- a plentiful harvest of new lives." -- John 12: 23-24 (The Living Bible)

Springtime is my favorite season. The earth bursts forth with beauty following a dormant winter. My husband and I choose our flower and vegetable seeds and begin to envision our summer garden. As we drop each "dead" seed into the soil, we have faith that it will produce a lovely flower or delicious vegetable. Christ accepted the time of his death was near. His analogy of that purpose in this scripture was a seed of wheat remains dead until it is planted. Then it will produce new wheat. As with our faith, God wants us to be sowers of the seeds of His word and "harvest" new gardens of believers. We can be assured of the promise of our eternal lives as a result of the sacrifice of our Risen Christ!

Prayer: God of all seasons, we thank you for the promise of renewal you have given us through the life, death and resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Gula Engle
St. Luke's UMC

March 23, 2018

The Sixth Friday of Lent

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

--John 12:27-28

Novelist Tom Robbins, from his book “Even Cowgirls get the Blues”, writes: “Cries for help are frequently inaudible.” Think of those times when you have been to a place of crying out for help; but either felt unworthy to express your state of despair, or felt that no one was listening anyway, and so those cries were kept silent; just within yourself. Each of us may relate to this experience, or know of a loved one or family member who struggles with this feeling of being alone, with no one to listen or care anyway. In the Gospel reading of John today, our Lord Jesus, in his humanness, was compelled to cry out to the Father, to be “saved from this hour”. He knew that his Father God was listening and would hear him. Perhaps just this act of submission alone was enough to allow him to utter his next statement, “No, it was for this reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” As he and the crowds around him, hear the thunderous reply from the heavens, there is no question that indeed his cries had been heard. Even in our darkest of times, when the elements of life seem stacked against us, and we can’t see a bright spot at all, we have a heavenly Father who does hear, and who does care, and longs for the brokenness that we feel to be made whole again.

PRAYER: Dearest Lord Jesus, we come to you on our knees, in humility, and though in the midst of disarray, or confusion, we believe that you hear us and can mend our hearts and spirits once again. Amen.

Connie S. Grosjean
Greensburg U.M. Church

March 24, 2018

The Sixth Saturday of Lent

But God, who is rich in memory, because of His love with which He loved us. Even when we were dead in trespasses made us alive together with Christ (by Grace you have been saved).

--Ephesians 2: 4-5 (NKJV)

God Himself is the author of His Great love. His love is the cause because He resolved to show mercy. Love is His inclination to do us good considered simply as his creation. Observe, God's eternal love or goodwill towards us is the foundation, whence all His mercies vouch-safe to us proceed; and God's love is great, His mercy is great and rich.

We have not deserved His mercy by our actions. We are sinful and not worthy. So then by Grace, we are saved and by Grace are we saved through faith-it is the gift of God.

Prayer: Dear Father, be with us and bless us although we are not worthy of your love and mercy. Help us to remember it is through faith and grace in you that we are saved. Amen.

Linda Carter
Greensburg UMC

March 25, 2018

Palm/Passion Sunday

“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’”

-- Mark 11:8-18

There are two themes for our attention today. One is joyful and filled with celebration. The other is one of despair. The day begins, as will we in this devotion, with the joy and celebration.

Those who jubilantly lined the parade route with Jesus on Palm Sunday were filled with expectation and the hope of a new day. They were a people who lived in bondage to the Roman government, whose daily lives were abused by Roman soldiers and government officials, and who looked forward to the promised one who would deliver them from their oppression. For them, this was an announcement of liberation, and soon the yoke of oppression would be lifted from their backs. For them it was a political moment, a military moment, a moment that announced their freedom

There is no doubt that Jesus entered the City of Jerusalem on this day to announce that their slavery was ended. However, for Jesus, it was an announcement that went beyond political and military strategies. For him, it was the announcement that the forces of sin would soon be defeated, and that everyone who stood along the parade route could now enter in the Kingdom of God. His battle was spiritual, not political. His fight was against sin, brokenness, and despair, not the Roman military. His fight was for the souls of men and women along the parade route, and for all of history.

Later in the day the battle will become more intense and despair will be recognized by many. Jesus, alone will be arrested, tortured and ultimately crucified in his fight to overcome evil. Clearly this is a day of mixed emotions. The complex and confusing themes will not be fully understood until Easter morning.

PRAYER: Holy, gracious and loving God, give us such an abundance of faith that we will hold on to your promises in every circumstance. Let us rejoice with you along the parade route, and stand with you at the cross. May we trust you in every moment. Amen.

Rev. Dr. G. Edward Grove
Greensburg and Mt. Wesley UMC

March 26, 2018

Monday of Holy Week

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.
-- John 12:16 (NRSV)

How easy it is for us to read this passage, get on our spiritual high horses, and wonder how it was that the disciples didn't understand – that they didn't get it. After all, they were there with Jesus day in and day out. They got to hear him speak. They were there for his teachings. They watched him heal the sick. They were there when he was challenged, rejected. They were there when he showed us what love is, how to love. But they didn't understand.

How easy it is to forget that we have God's word, available in multiple versions for our reading ease. We forget that we can read and reread just in case we aren't sure of the point being made. We get to experience the whole story without waiting for the future to unfold. We get to mull over passages to see them from different perspectives. We forget that we have pastors, sermons, Bible study, teachers, commentators to provide interpretations – just in case we don't get it. We can read, study, review, and talk about Jesus' teaching until we do get it.

But then we leave the church. At the end of the sermon we step outside to go home or out to lunch. Bible study comes to an end. We say a prayer to close our Bible study sessions. Often, we ask God to guide us to lives that incorporate the lessons we've learned. Then we go back out into the chaos of our daily lives. Do we remember what Jesus has done for us? What he has taught us? That in Jesus is our hope and our salvation? When we encounter our neighbors, do we remember who Jesus said our neighbors are? And to love them? Do we get it?

PRAYER: Gracious and loving God, we thank you for your word. We ask for your help to keep your word alive in us. Amen.

Clifford R. Huie
Greensburg UMC

March 27, 2018

Tuesday of Holy Week

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Let the congregation of Israel repeat: "His faithful love endures forever." --Psalm 118:1-2

Forever. Seems like a very long time, doesn't it? What is forever anyway? Permanent, unending, ceaseless, everlasting, eternal. Forever is hard for us to comprehend. It doesn't seem like anything lasts forever nowadays. We live in the temporary, in the moment. Relationships, families, marriages, promises, commitments. Nothing lasts forever, right? Wrong.

Just as God loved Israel through it all – and there was a lot of "all" -- we have that same promise. No matter what we've done, said, or thought; where we've gone, or should not have gone; no matter what we've fallen off of, or onto; no matter what we've stepped off of, or into, his love endures forever!

Actually, there is nothing more permanent than God's love for us. How do we know this? Because he tells us over and over again. He heals, comforts, restores and mends. His goodness, His righteous, His mercy, His grace are who He is. God is love. Before we were in this world, we were in His heart. He chose us! He knew us forever, before we existed and despite knowing us, his love endures.

In the midst of our sin, our deceit, our dishonesty, our irreverence, our everyday messed up lives, He is faithful. He loved us so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will have forever life. Not because we are good, but because He is good. Not because of what we've done, but because of who He is.

God's love is forever, no matter what, and that is more than enough, more than we deserve, more than we could ever fathom, more than we could ever think to ask or imagine. Because His love endures forever, we never have to fear that He will say "I never knew you." What wondrous love is this?

God's forever love is ours for the taking. Let all of God's Chosen People shout: "His love endures forever!"

PRAYER: God of Forever, we praise you for your never give up kind of love. May that kind of love grip our hearts. Amen.

Beth LeMaster
St. Luke's UMC

March 28,2018

Wednesday of Holy Week

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”
-- John 13:1(NIV)

Thus begins what we know as Jesus' example of true servanthood, when he washed the disciples feet, showing his love in every possible way.

He loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, loved them fully, to the end, to the last, utterly and completely.

Jesus who was the model servant, showed his servant attitude to his disciples.

This servanthood model of Christ, leads us to a humble and selfless life style.

If even God in the flesh is willing to serve, we his followers must also be servants, willing to serve in any capacity that glorifies God.

Are you willing to follow Christ's example of serving? When and where can you serve him today?

Pastor Gary Sieglein
Gerrardstown UMC

March 29, 2018

Thursday of Holy Week

When evening came, he arrived with the twelve. While they were at table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me, one of you eating with me." And as they were eating he took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. "Take, eat, this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, and he said, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many."

- Mark 14: 17-19, 22-24

Remember Your Lord, With Love
song written and composed by Marybeth S. Grove

1. Unaware that this would be their last time spent together,
the chosen twelve sat with their Lord, at the Passover supper.
One by one he washed their feet to show how much he loved them,
while well aware that the time drew near when he would bleed and suffer.

2. He knew his plight, he knew that Judas planned for his betrayal.
Then, looking into Peter's eyes, he foretold of three denials.
Yet he carried out the blessing, altho' his heart sadly was broken.
When Jesus turned to each one there, the twelve heard these words spoken:

"Take and eat, for this is my body.
Take and eat, for this is my blood.
Whoever you shall do this.....remember me with love."
"Remember your Lord.....with love."

PRAYER: Lord, what it must have been like at that first and final communion with your apostles! As we hear your words on this day, "Take and eat. This is my body, this is my blood," we will remember. Yes Lord, you bled and your body was broken, for us. Should we have that kind of courage when our faith is challenged! Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Greensburg UMC

March 30, 2018

Friday of Holy Week

“When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there and the two criminals also. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.” Then they cast lots to share out his clothing. The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him.”

-- Luke 23: 33-35

They Know Not What They Do

composed and written by Marybeth S. Grove

About the man from Galilee, I've heard some different things,
Some say he is a fisherman, some say he is a king.

He doesn't look like royalty hanging up there on that cross.
So defeated, bruised, so weak...His life and kingdom lost.

As people gather round to stare, I hear their laughter and their jeers
while soldiers cast their lots to win the clothing this man wears.

It breaks my heart to see his pain, as tears run down his cheeks
and as the sky turns strangely dark, earth trembles at our feet.

And...those who laughed, they ran away, ashamed now of their doubt.
And yet, even tho' in pain, through tears the crucified cried out.....
“Father, Father, forgive them. Father, Father, they know not what they do.”
I can't explain what happened next, but I know that I must tell
all about the change in me and those feelings that I felt.

Now since his death on Calvary, I've become alive, renewed.....
Just by hearing his forgiving words cried out for me and you.
“Father, Father, forgive them. Father, Father, they know not what they do.”

PRAYER: Forgiven! Redeemed! Absolved! Pardoned by your suffering and death. I am released from that which weighs me down, brings me low, makes me ashamed and fills my heart and soul with guilt. Such profound love you have shown for me. I am unworthy, yet you have brought healing to my being. Thank you, Lord. Thank you. Amen

Marybeth S. Grove
Mt. Wesley UMC

March 31, 2018

Saturday of Holy Week

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

--Matthew 27:57-60

I think of Jesus' many disappointed and frustrated friends. Confused and bewildered, they did not have the hindsight that we do. They did not know the unspeakable joy and wonder to come within a few hours. They were hurt and grieving, and life as they had known it was over.

We should sit with these disciples of Jesus on Holy Saturday in empathy and compassion. Perhaps on our darkest days, when everything has come apart, we can empathize best. If you dare, flip back through the pages of your life to those most disturbing moments; the surprises of tragedy and disaster. It could be diagnoses or deaths that moved in uninvited. Our closest friends could have fled and left us to the hounds too. When we are feeling, maybe saying it out loud, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Maybe those days get us closest to what was hanging in the air that weekend.

That weekend, Joseph the Arimathea courageously kept attending Jesus. When members of his "church" and council had publicly abandoned Jesus, Joseph steps out to make a request in the governor's office, publicly caring for and honoring Jesus. When his closest friends had fled Jesus to save their hides, Joseph brings his Lord home, to his place, and gives him his own; gives Jesus his best. And all of this without knowing "the rest of the story."

This weekend, this day, we might think about the future a bit. There will be those who look back at our situations with the advantage of hindsight, knowing the rest of our stories too. They'll know our "professions of faith" and all we claimed to believe, but also they will most clearly be able to recount our actions. They will see our situation and our reactions in it all, and they will tell that story.

Today, Joseph makes me think about giving the Lord our best in spite of what the crowd around us is doing; in spite of the deep disappointments and frustrations that come at us... to give him our all, to attend his interests rather than our own. This is faith, participating and trusting even when we can't see "the rest of the story." Some will say this is simply going through the motions, but we Wesleyans have a deep sense that the motions matter. The motions can become "means of grace" that help us walk in the darkness.

Prayer: "Maker of heaven and earth, you are God alone. You made the earth and set us all in motion for your work and will and Way. When the stars fall and the sun refuses to shine in my life and in my neighborhood, guide us with your Spirit, give us the diligence, strength and courage to attend to you and honor you. Help us keep up your Way, just like this One who revealed it to us, your Son, Jesus. Amen."

Rev. Mike Cantley
St Luke's UMC

Easter
Sunday, April 1, 2018

And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices that they might come and anoint Him.

And very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun has risen.

And they said among themselves, "*Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*"

And when they looked up, they saw that the stone – which was very large – had been rolled away.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

And he said to them, "*Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell his disciples – and Peter – that He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him just as He told you.*"

And they went out and started running from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them.

And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

(Mark 16:1-8)

Easter day is such an easy day to celebrate. It's such a happy day. We have passed through Holy Week with all of the sadness and injustice, and now we look forward to the message of the resurrected Lord in His victory over sin and death.

In the Gospel of Mark, which many Biblical scholars believe to be the first written Gospel, we find the response of the three women who were first told the good news:

"And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (Mark 16:8)

As we celebrate this day, we are called to share the good news with others. The Easter story is not one we should just put away on the shelf after giving it a yearly reading. It is good news to be shared and celebrated not only on Easter Sunday, but every day of our lives.

Indeed, this good news affects far more than just our individual lives. The hope brought into the world by the resurrection touches every aspect of human

life. God's power is the real power – the power over evil, and the power for good.

As followers of Christ, the Easter story now becomes our story as well, as we affirm the great gift God has given us in the new life we have received through Christ. It is through this experience that we can affirm God's goodness and grace, even during those times in our lives when we have to face the worst that life can give us.

Many of us will gather today in Christian worship services and join together in the singing of one of the great hymns of our faith:

*“Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!”* (Charles Wesley, 1739)

Whether we come to church every week, or only twice a year, let us commit ourselves to the One whose good news we proclaim – to Jesus Christ, our resurrected Lord!

May His story be our story.

That through joy, sorrow, suffering, and even death, we have the good news of a Risen Lord who is always with us. And that's good news, indeed.

Christ is Risen! – Christ is Risen, indeed!
And there's nothing 'April Fool' about that!

Prayer: O God of new life, we come before you with hearts filled with gratitude and praise. We praise you for your power over death. We thank you for the newness of spring that surrounds us, lifting our spirits. And above all, we thank you for the new life you have given us in Christ. Show us how to live as Easter people, not only just for today, but every day, that as disciples of Christ we would share that good news with others. In His name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Mark C. Mooney
Otterbein UMC