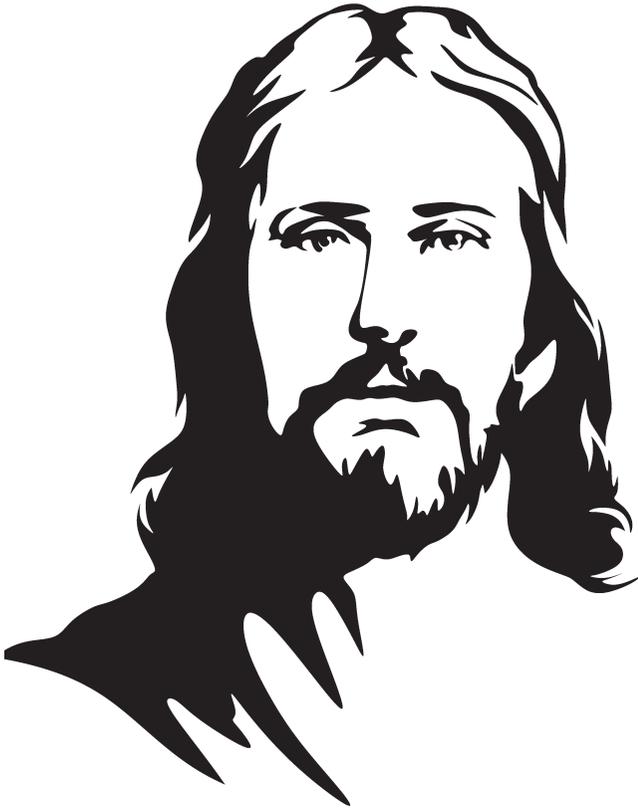


Jesus

Son of God
Son of Man



**Devotions for the 2023
Lenten Season**

New Philadelphia Moravian Church

Thanks...

To all of our young artists for sharing an aspect of their family trees;

To our writers for interpreting scripture passages so that we might all learn and be inspired together;

To Paula Chrysson, who has created graphic design for all of our Lenten Devotion Guides — this is our eleventh!



Jesus' last days on earth – the 47 that mark our Lenten season – are described concisely in the Gospel of Mark. In the 8th chapter, following the story of feeding thousands with a few fish and loaves of bread, comes the story that begins the final phase of His earthly ministry, the story of meeting a blind man at Bethsaida.

It's a story that begins with the man being brought to Jesus for healing. Perhaps Jesus has had enough of crowds because He leads the man outside of the village. We don't know if the two of them are alone, but there is no mention of disciples or others being present. What is memorable about the story is what happens when Jesus places his hands on the man's eyes. The healing doesn't "work;" it doesn't "take" the first time around. Jesus asks, "Do you see anything?" and the man (famously) replies, "I see men; but they look like trees, walking." So, Jesus places His hands on the man's eyes a second time, and we read that his vision was restored and he saw everything clearly.

This story can be troublesome with its miracle healing that took two tries. We wonder: **What am I supposed to learn from this story?**

Answers sometimes come slowly, because of our own cloudy vision. But eventually we realize that Jesus' first touch **did** heal the man; it just didn't guarantee that he could fully grasp the power that healed him. He needed a "little more of Jesus" to see clearly.

That's what this Season and this devotion guide are all about: A closer, more intentional walk with Jesus. Jesus the **Son of God**, who worked miracles and whose ministry showed us the Father. Jesus, the **Son of Man**, who walked the earth and lived among saints and sinners, just as we do.

In this Holy Season, why not find a quiet place each morning, or evening, to read the day's devotion. Before you begin, perhaps you'll close your eyes, and pray to be taken by the hand, and led out of the village, away from the noise. Feel His hands; hear His voice; consider His question: **Tell me, what do you see?**

The Pastoral Staff

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant." Luke 1:46-48

During this Lenten season, as we remember the events leading up to and including the death of Jesus, we must also remember his birth. These beautiful words from the Gospel of Luke are just the beginning of what is known as The Magnificat, or Mary's song. Mary speaks these joyous words upon meeting with Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, shortly after they realize they are both with child. In fact, Mary is so filled with joy that she bursts into song!

Singing the hymns of the season is one of my favorite activities of Christmastime. My heart feels full with the love and presence of our Lord, and I tend to sing louder and prouder than at most other times of the year (especially if said hymns are being sung at one of our Christmas lovefeasts). I suspect you know the feeling. I can only imagine that this feeling is a fraction of what Mary must have felt upon finding out that she was pregnant with the Son of God! She was a young and humble peasant girl who was chosen to be blessed among all people!

The words "soul" and "spirit" signify a part of us that is intangible. Mary isn't glorifying God only by her words and her works; she is magnifying Him and rejoicing in Him within and through the very essence of her being! Wow! While thinking about these verses, a familiar tune popped into my head. "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine...". Is this what was happening to Mary? The light of the Lord was so bright in her soul that she magnified Him by the very presence of its brilliance. His light within her was so bright that she couldn't help but rejoice and burst forth into song! No wonder the Magnificat has been referred to as "the first Christmas carol"!

These verses usually illuminated during the Advent season, can also send us a powerful message during Lent. In the midst of all her rejoicing, Mary still calls out to God her "Savior". It is in this one word that we are reminded of our need for salvation. In the joy of Jesus' birth, there still lies the purpose of redemption. Though we are undeserving (as Mary must have felt she was),

what a joy there is that He would send His only son as a sacrifice for our salvation!

Prayer: *Dear God, our Father, how grateful we are that you would grant to us, your lowly servants, our salvation through the sacrifice of your only son. Like Mary, let us magnify you in our words and deeds, and also through the radiance of our souls. Let your light shine through us so we may rejoice and glorify your holy name in all that we are. Amen.*

Tamara LaMontagne

Day 2

Thursday, February 23

Rescue us from the evil one. Matthew 6:13

Satan...the devil...the prince of darkness...Beelzebub...
Mephistopheles...the evil one.

Call it what you like; these words and phrases all describe the same thing. It is the force that comes between our Creator and us, and diverts us in our journey to living in the light of Christ. Given that the Apostle Paul calls this force the “prince of the power of the air,” signifying its authority over our world, do we even stand a chance over the allure of the temporal and the seduction of the “evil one”?

When it comes to earthly temptation and attacks from the devil, no one had it tougher than St. Anthony Abbot, a third century monk who embraced a life of sacrifice and ultimately became a hermit in the Egyptian desert. He is considered the founder of Christian monasticism.

Artistic depictions of St. Anthony and the temptations he famously suffered began in the tenth century. One unnamed Italian artist working in the 15th century painted eight panels about these temptations, each showing a different encounter with the “evil one” who appeared to the Saint as a beautiful woman. Each woman is, indeed, beautiful, but a closer look reveals a compromise. In one painting, for example, she has clawed feet; in another, she wears tiny horns; in a third, her angelic wings are pointed. These disturbing features are easy to miss if one looks only at the surface, but a second look exposes what lurks beneath. They remind us that the evil one is also called the deceiver.

So, how does the “evil one” visit us in contemporary America and what does it look like? While we each have our unique answers, I imagine that many people would say something about the bombardment of information and messages we face daily that make us examine the quality of our lives. It seems benign enough, until you attempt navigating the landscape towards becoming smarter, richer, more beautiful, more successful, more powerful, and more confident. And you wonder: ***Will life be better with a foreign car, straighter teeth, faster Internet and Botox?*** And if those assaults don’t have us questioning our lives enough, social media will remind us through snapshots of others’ lives that our own may be lacking or just adrift. Doubts soar; self-image plummets, as we constantly are forced to compare, and are left wanting.

Making correct decisions and using sound judgment in such a climate is daunting. Discernment has never been more important as we constantly weigh wide-ranging choices and opportunities. What is good, what is bad? What is right, what is wrong? What is holy? What is righteous? If only the answers were clear. Rescue me! And Jesus does, through His Word and its clear-as-a-bell truth. Here are two examples:

King David, no stranger to temptation and evil, asked of God: ***Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. (Psalm 51)*** The evil one can’t gain a foothold in a pure heart, but one that is compromised and unsettled may be an easy target.

And when trying to discern truth or make a decision, Paul offers an antidote to uncertainty, confliction, and confusion with this 8-way test found in Philippians 4:8. Ask yourself: ***Is it true? Honorable? Just? Pure? Pleasing? Commendable? Excellent? Praiseworthy?***

These guidelines help us detect our own vulnerability to the wily ways of the evil one. They empower us – yes, ***empower*** us! – to shake loose and turn away.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for the rescue that comes from Your Holy Word, and its solid foundation for building our lives.*

Clyde Manning

For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. I Corinthians 1:20 (NRSV updated)

Occasionally, we hear the invitation, "Can I hear an Amen?" in a sermon. An emphatic, enthusiastic "Yes!" is requested. In worship services, we pray through hymn and song and end with "Amen." We end our spoken prayers with "Amen," and a soft chorus of "amens" may follow, affirmations of yes.

Some of my first memories of church had to do with seating. Women sat on one side of the center aisle and men sat on the other side, gathered in a choir system similar to the Moravian one that we still use in our God's Acre to place graves of single women, married women, single men, married men, and children in sections, not by families. In the church where I grew up, the men's side included an "amen corner." When the preacher said something they strongly agreed with (or thought we all should), a chorus of "Amen" rippled through those rows in more of a joyous shout than the soft whispers sometimes shared at the ends of prayers.

Amen is an unusual word. Sometimes in American English, we pronounce it ah-men, and sometimes we say ey-men. It's similar in Hebrew, the language from which the word originates: *āmēn*, which means "certainty," "truth," and "verily." In Spanish, it's *amén*; in German, Amen; in Ukrainian, **амінь**; in Swahili, *amina* — you get the idea. The word is similar in many languages, and in all, it is an affirmation, a Yes! At least 30 instances of the use of "Amen" can be found in the Bible.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, the I Corinthians 1:20-22 passage is exuberant in its promise of God placing his Yes within us:

Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us. By his Spirit he has stamped us with his eternal pledge — a sure beginning of what he is destined to complete.

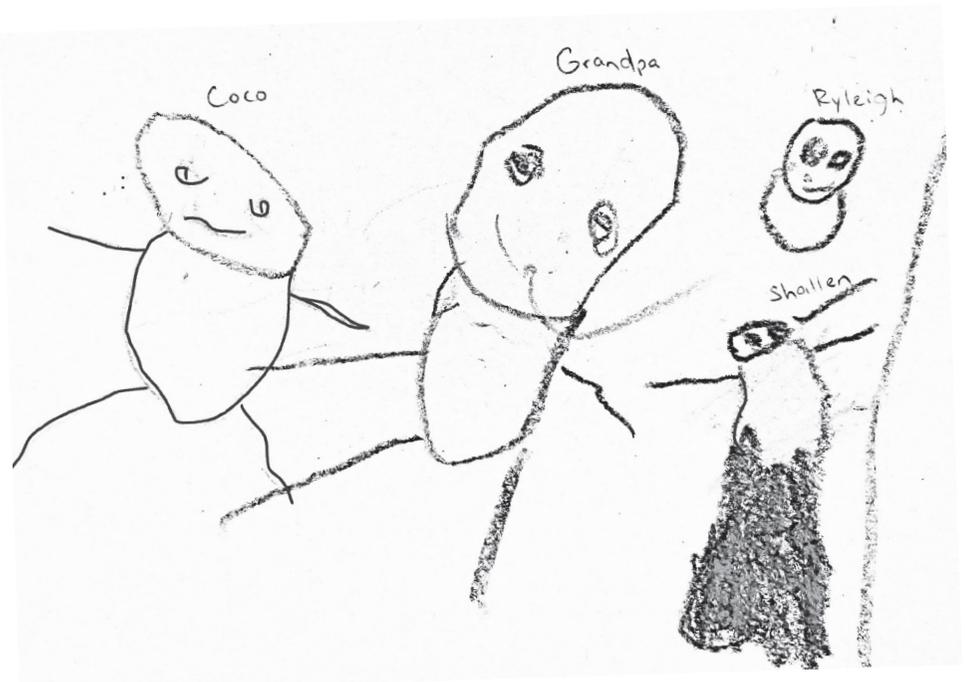
The watchword for this day, February 24, is from Isaiah 55:3: *I will make with you an everlasting covenant.* The doctrinal text from I Corinthians for today punctuates that covenant with “every one of God’s promises is a Yes!”

A covenant is between two who make a binding promise to each other. God promises to say Yes! to this promised relationship. Now, our part is to say Amen (Yes!) too.

Father Richard Rohr wrote a Christmas meditation about a “deep, loving ‘yes’ inherent within us. In Christian theology, this inner Presence would be described as the Holy Spirit. . .God as immanent, within, and even our deepest, truest self. God is the very ground of our Being,” Father Rohr said. This Yes! within us must be recognized, honored and drawn upon to accept that living covenant from God. To accept, we share our Amen, our Yes! by living, loving, and serving like Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear God, each day in this Lenten season offers us more minutes of light, more time to reflect and respond to your covenant. Help us to say Yes! to you as you have said Yes! to each of us. May we be your strong Yes! to those who need our help, those who need your mercy and justice and love. And so, in many languages, Amen!*

Kay Windsor



If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5

Is there someone that comes to your mind when you are facing a tough situation and feel you need advice? Most of us have a special person that we always turn to in times of indecision and struggle to ask what they would do. We call them up and say, “We need to talk. I’m not sure what to do.” We are afraid of making a wrong choice and need insight into the situation to avoid making a mistake.

The Lord wants us to trust Him enough to be our primary confidant! If we really trust and believe that He will give us wisdom, He will give generously. He does not hold our past foolish choices against us. He is not only a friend that we can turn to but the ultimate source of all wisdom. He wants to guide us in all the choices we have to make — all we have to do is ask!

Prayer: *Lord, teach us to trust that you will help us in all the choices we make every day. Help us to draw closer to you in prayer and through your Word so we learn how to depend more fully on you for all wisdom. Amen.*

Sandra Gray

*Jesus prayed: “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.”
John 17:15*

This verse is only part of a prayer that Jesus prayed. Actually, the entirety of chapter 17 is a prayer to His Father. One commentator refers to it as His Last Will and Testament.

Jesus prayed a heartfelt prayer to His Father because He knew that He would not be with His disciples too much longer. He knew how much His disciples loved Him and would miss Him. His disciples did not want to lose Him. But Jesus knew that very soon He would be betrayed and crucified. He prayed His prayer on the eve of His death.

Not only did Jesus pray for His disciples; He prayed for all believers. He prayed for us! He prayed for our protection from the evil one knowing that, as human beings, we would go through trials and suffering. But the good news is that Jesus is our protector. We can depend on Him through those trials and hardships because He is our refuge and strength.

Prayer: *Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me. Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings. Psalm 61:2-4*

Carol Graber



*The Lord is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.
Psalm 98:9*

*Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your judgments have been revealed.
Revelation 15:4*

Psalm 98 is one of those psalms that church musicians really like. I mean, it has it all:

O sing to the Lord a new song. (new compositions and singing)

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord...with lyre, melody,
trumpets, horn.* (Instrumental music)

*Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who live
in it.* (All nature participating in this symphony of praise)

...but then the Psalm ends with what might seem a solemn tone:

*“The Lord is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world
with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.”*

Timothy Dudley-Smith is a retired bishop of the Church of England, and has written over 400 hymn texts. One in our Moravian Book of Worship is based on Psalm 98, and in this verse Dudley-Smith turns around the order so that the new song is a response to the Lord’s judgment and justice:

Join with the hills and the sea
thunders of praise to prolong!
In judgment and justice he comes to the earth —
O sing to the Lord a new song (MBW 547)

When Moses led the Israelites through the sea and saw what had become of the soldiers who were chasing them, he broke into a song of praise about God’s deliverance. (Exodus 15)

Likewise, in Revelation chapter 15, John has just seen those who destroyed the beast, and so he wrote: “And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb...” which includes our doctrinal text in verse 4:

Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your judgments have been revealed.”

It is BECAUSE of God's justice that deliverance has been (and will be) granted; and bursting forth in song and with the music of instruments, as did Moses, the Psalmist, and the elect in the Revelation, seems like the natural way for us to respond.

Prayer Focus: *Worship by bursting forth in song and with the music of instruments.*

David Blum

Day 7

Tuesday, February 28

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Psalm 130:1-2

Many think Psalm 130 was written by David either when persecuted by Saul, and in great distress, and fearful he should perish by him; or else when in great distress of mind because of sin, after the affair with Bathsheba. Regardless of the circumstances I think we can all relate to David at some point in our lives. ‘Out of the depths’ is a powerful phrase and full of imagery. You’re as low as you can be, it feels like there’s no way out, and all you can do is pray with your last bit of strength.

During a recent worship service, a story was shared about a recipient of our Cancer Benevolence Ministry. The story ties in well with this piece of scripture. Here are the facts:

A man in his 60's was dealing with prostate cancer and unable to work because of the toll of the treatment. He applied for and received SSI income each month but it was a very small percentage of his typical income before the cancer treatments. He could not make ends meet.

He was in his house praying for God to help him find an answer. The man is sick, exasperated, and exhausted by fighting for his own health and well being while trying to keep a roof over his head. He was in the “depths,” asking the Lord to hear his voice. In the middle of his prayer the phone rang, and it was Cynthia Ferrington calling on behalf of New Philadelphia Moravian Church, committing to pay his power bill; furthermore, the Church would pay the bill for the duration of his treatment. The call came at just the right time.

When you think about the uniqueness of our Benevolence Ministry, the many life events that went into its creation, the generous giving of so many to fund the cause, and then add on the timing of our call to this man in need there is no other way to explain it than as a divine moment. New Philadelphia answered God’s call to help others hear His voice.

Through the best of times or the bleakest of times the light shines at 4440 Country Club Road. If we continue working together the light will shine even brighter in the months and years ahead.

Prayer Focus: *When we call from the “depths,” O Lord, please hear our voice. Amen*

Bob MacReynolds

Day 8

Wednesday, March 1

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Acts 26:27-28 (NIV)

I have enjoyed history since I was a child; I found the *Childhood of Famous Americans* series in the public library when I was a very young reader and have been hooked ever since. These books were stories, one of the most effective kinds of history — the word is even embedded in **history**.

In Acts, Luke is writing an account of the early church a few years after the events happened; we know the dates of a few of the events from contemporaneous secular accounts and can

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infer other dates from those markers. Since we know both the biographies of these participants and about the Roman and Jewish cultures of the time, we can use our imaginations to observe these events.

At this place in Luke's account, Paul has been an effective missionary to the lands around the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Not only have many of the converts to this new Way been Jews but also the tenets of this new faith are anathema to Jews who perceive themselves to be protecting their faith from this heresy. The Jewish establishment wants the new sect destroyed, or at least to have one of its chief spokesmen removed permanently, a man who had become a traitor to their cause after his conversion on the Damascus Road.

The original readers of this story would not have needed an explanation of which Herodian king was speaking, but we do. One problem with studying first century Palestine is that so many of the client kings subject to Roman oversight had the same or similar names. Herod was always a part of the name after the time of Herod the Great. Sometimes the Herod is left off, sometimes everything but Herod, and sometimes the suffix denoting place in order so here we have Agrippa instead of Herod Agrippa II. The first readers would have known that Herod Agrippa I had died some years before; Luke recounts his death in Acts 12 where he is referred to as Herod.

We can imagine what the scene might have been when Paul was before King Herod Agrippa II, his sister Bernice and the Roman official, Festus. Herod Agrippa II and his sister had been raised in Rome with the children of the Caesars as their friends. The Herodians traditionally made sure they maintained cordial relationships with the Jewish hierarchy by outwardly following the Jewish rules for daily living and speaking appropriately about Jewish history and culture. This façade of obedience to God was balanced with their understanding that their royal status was under the ultimate authority of the Roman state with which they strongly identified given their upbringing. Festus was a Roman official who ruled as Caesar's representative in northern Palestine, an area that at times had been part of the Herodian territory. Contemporary accounts report his being an effective and honest official.

Paul had been tried at the instigation of the Jewish hierarchy and had appealed to Caesar, using his right as a Roman citizen to demand a hearing before Caesar's court in Rome. This hearing before Herod Agrippa II, his sister, and Festus was to consider exactly how to proceed in this complicated case involving a Roman citizen and those in the local populace demanding Paul's death. Herod Agrippa II, Bernice and Festus would have been sitting on a dais arrayed in clothing, badges of rank and jewels to mark their exalted status. Paul the itinerant tent maker and teacher would have been on a lower level in modest clothing and possibly in actual shackles as he defended his faith by giving an account of his efforts to destroy the early followers of Christ before his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

After Paul's statement, Herod Agrippa II asks, perhaps rhetorically, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long — I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." (v. 29) Herod



Agrippa II, Bernice and Festus then adjourn without comment to consider Paul's legal situation, which actually demands that he be sent to Rome even though they agree among themselves that he has done nothing illegal.

One of the advantages of studying history is knowing the ultimate outcome when someone comes to a fork in their path requiring a decision with their not knowing what will happen—but we do. We know that this exchange between Herod Agrippa II and Paul effectively posed the most important question anyone can consider: ***Who is Jesus Christ?***

Herod Agrippa II did not give serious consideration to the question but continued with his business as a Roman client king, part of a structure that he expected to last far into the future. We know what happened: Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans in 70 A.D., about 10 years after this encounter with Paul. Paul went to Rome on a perilous journey taking many months; in Rome he was martyred after another two years or so.

In Rome today tourists look at the ruins of an Empire that has not existed for more than 1500 years. When the pope's participation in a World War II conference was proposed, Stalin supposedly asked, "How many divisions does he have?" That question exposes the same attitude that Herod Agrippa II held, not recognizing the spiritual power that triumphs over a purely secular worldview. A few weeks ago, Pope Francis was the celebrant at the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in the plaza in front of St. Peter's Basilica. Stalin is not only dead and reviled but his Soviet Union has imploded. The number of military divisions is not at all relevant.

Prayer Focus: *May we remember and pray the following as recognition of who was present and in control of that encounter in first century Palestine as well as before and after:*

God of grace and God of glory
On Thy people pour Thy power
Crown Thine ancient church's story
Bring her bud to glorious flower
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
For the facing of this hour
For the facing of this hour (MBW, #751, v. 1)

Mary Ruth McRae

The Lord said to Jacob, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. Genesis 28:15"

This passage does an excellent job of putting our lives in the perspective of a microscope. No matter how far we go or stray God is always going to bring us back to his kingdom where he intends for us to be. God can operate on us and execute his plan for us no matter where we are and no matter what we're doing. The things in our lives that seem so important or difficult are always in reality just a stepping-stone to prepare us for what He wants us to be. Nobody knows how long it takes for Him to "do what I have promised you..." I'd like to think that's a process that goes all the way until we die, leaving us with eternal life in Heaven as His final destination and promise for us.

Now in past years I've tried to center my devotion around a central theme or message that I'd like you, the reader, to leave with, but I think with this passage it's a little different because it is so up to interpretation. I'm sure we all could read this and interpret it completely differently, so rather than force my own interpretation or opinions on you I challenge you to get thinking a little bit, read the verse for yourself and think to yourself about what He's trying to do for you in your own life and maybe a time or two when you've strayed off a bit and He's brought you back."

Prayer: *Lord thank you for never allowing us to stray from Your Grace, though we so often try. Thank you for always keeping Your promises to us and for working on us constantly to create the best version of ourselves. Let us become that version and let your light shine through us every day of our lives until we, too, can be granted Your final promise to us and spend eternity with You in Heaven. Amen*

Ryan MacReynolds

You have set my feet in a broad place. Psalm 31:8

NEW YORK - Nik Wallenda says he "freaked" out when his balancing pole slipped during a high-wire walk with his sister above New York's Times Square. Nik and Lijana Wallenda spoke Monday on ABC's "Good Morning America," just hours after their harrowing feat.

Nik Wallenda said the scare occurred as his sister knelt so he could step over her while they crossed paths 25 stories above the pavement. "My pole started to slide down," he said, adding that he briefly lost his grip. "It freaked me out for a second."

I cannot imagine being Nik Wallenda. I find life difficult enough just walking on level ground. Attempting what they do high in the air, subject to updrafts, downdrafts, and battling other elements takes my breath away. I like as much control and certainty as possible. Life on a tightrope, for me, is no life at all.

King David had his own "high-wire" act, balancing times of great leadership and success with times of sinfulness and fleeing his enemies. Throughout Psalm 31, David describes his "tightrope." Enemies hunted him down relentlessly and set traps for him; they conspired against him and plotted to take his life. He never stopped looking over his shoulder. His life was filled with danger and was subject to constant change, with circumstances often being beyond his control. David would have understood the Wallendas.

There was another similarity between the Flying Wallendas and King David: Working without a net. The Wallenda's reputation was based on incredible skill and performing daring feats hundreds of feet in the air. With no net below, their deaths were certain if error occurred. For the Wallendas, it was a choice. David was equally skilled as a warrior and leader. He was brave beyond measure. But there are scores of incidents where his ego and other personal flaws were his guides and his choices resulted in actions that were clearly not mandated by God. On those occasions, without the certainty of God's guidance, David's endeavors were doomed until through confession and prayer, he could return to the safety of his relationship with God.

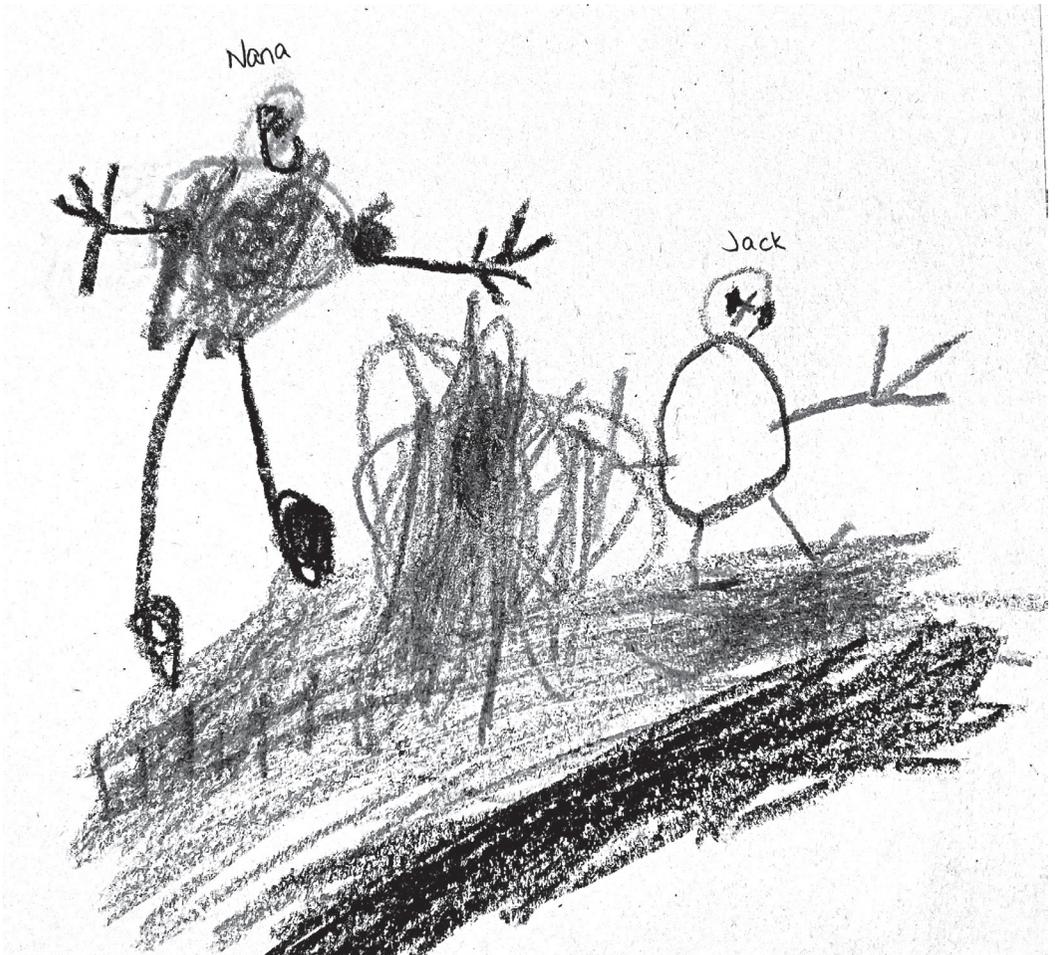
No wonder he praised God for his rescue. No wonder he felt relief for being set in **a broad place** where he could see the

landscape and there was no hiding place for his enemies. A broad place where pitfalls and potholes were evident and standing was sure.

Do you sometimes feel that you are walking a tightrope? Is the ground level or are you fighting just to keep your balance in your workplace, in your family dynamics, in your marriage or other relationships?

From King David we learn that God will deliver us – not once, or twice, but over and over again! When we feel backed into a tight space, that is the time to trust God, to ask for refuge and mercy, and to believe that He holds our lives in His hands.

Prayer: *May we hear the words of King David, who tells us to be strong and courageous, and to love the Lord who will protect us. Amen.*



*The words of the Lord are pure words, like the silver refined
in a furnace on the ground, purified Seven times.
Psalm 12:6*

Pure words – without any mixture of falsehood, impurities and error

Pure words – perfect

Pure words – authentic

Pure words – absolute / downright

Pure words – free from sin or guilt blameless

Pure words – flawless

Pure words – no updating, editing, or refining required

*“As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD
is flawless. He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.”
Psalm 18:30*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to accept every word. Give us a deeper love and appreciation for Your word. May we read and believe the Bible as if You were speaking directly to us. May we cling to the fact that the Bible is the most important book we will own. In the name of the One who is the WORD, Amen.

Nancy Renn

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm. Psalm 33:8-9*

In the Old Testament, starting in Genesis, God spoke into existence all of creation. Throughout the Old Testament whenever God spoke whether it was directly, through Angels, prophets, or other intermediates things happened accordingly: Destruction; Restoration; Sickness; Healing; Curses; Blessings; Famine; Feast. They all came about by His command at His appointed time. He also talks about Himself: *I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.*

I don't know about you, but to me God seemed so merciless and cruel at times! Yet, at other times He is encouraging and comforting. He even says He does what He pleases!

Now enter Jesus portraying God as kind and loving (which I know He is), even Fatherly. Has this caused us to be less respectful of Him as an Almighty, All Powerful God? I know it has me, since I prefer the Father image. But then I remember what God said about His word: "My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

Think about this, then check out what Jesus said about the End Times in Matthew 25:4-42. I know that part of these events have already taken place: the destruction of the temple, capture of Jerusalem and the persecution of the believers. However, the return of Jesus and the events surrounding it are still pending.

Jesus plainly said "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but ONLY THE FATHER KNOWS."

Lets don't forget just how Powerful and Almighty He is and give Him the honor He deserves! His words are still pending!!

Prayer: *Father God, You are my Heavenly Father, but First and foremost Almighty God, Yahweh, Jehovah, Alpha and Omega. Forgive me for not giving You the honor and respect You truly deserve.*

Darla Bonnett

Day 13

Monday, March 6

Thus said the Lord of hosts, “Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye.” Zechariah 2:8

Close your eyes for a moment, and in the quiet, say your name. Notice what feelings arise for you.

Each of us likely feels something different. How we perceive ourselves and our worth is dependent on many things, some of which are simply a part of who we are, deep inside, and some are learned through our experiences and relationships.

In the book of Zechariah, God is speaking to Zechariah in a dream in which the Jews are returning to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile, rebuilding their city and their temple.

Zechariah 2:8 says,

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye.’”

If we as Gentiles, by the free extension of God’s grace to us, are also among His chosen people, then we are also the apple of His eye...the Lord of the universe. Wow...

Now, with this in mind, close your eyes, and in the quiet, say your name.

You are chosen and loved by the one who created the stars, the mountains, the oceans and the galaxies. If we allow that knowledge and truth to seep into our cracked and weary hearts, it changes us, it changes our outlook and our potential.

In an earlier verse in the chapter, God tells Zechariah to rebuild Jerusalem without walls, because “I myself will be a wall of fire around it’ declares the Lord, and I will be its glory within.”

As you finish your devotion time, and go forward into your day or rest to ready for tomorrow, go in that knowledge. You are chosen and set aside as a child of God, and He will be a wall of

fire around you, and a flame within you. You are his.

Now one more time, close your eyes, and in the quiet, say your name.

Prayer: *Creator God, It is amazing and unfathomable that you call me your own, the apple of your eye. Help me today and always to believe that truth and to live into that promise. Strengthen me to walk into each day with the courage that I am living as one protected by a wall of fire. In the name of your precious Son, Amen.*

Evie Blum

Day 14

Tuesday, March 7

The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our ancestors; may he not leave us or abandon us. 1 Kings 8:57 (NRSV)

1 Kings is not a book of the Bible that I regularly read, so this was a good opportunity for me to learn more. In this specific chapter, Solomon is praying with hands stretched toward heaven; we're even told in the preceding verses that he is praying loudly. He initially blesses God, then gives thanks for kept promises. This serves as a good example for our prayers: acknowledging God as God and thanking Him for his generous protection and provision. Solomon asks God to be with us; we all want God's presence in our lives! During the week I am writing this entry, I am being very thankful God was with me when my car broke down on the side of the road in Greensboro. I was able to get it towed, and was only on the side of the road for 2 hours. Thank you, indeed for protection and safety!

The second phrase of this verse resonates with me. As I get older, my faith becomes more precious. As a pastor once stated from the pulpit, we know where we came from, and we know where we're going. The basis of my faith came from my ancestors: grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, pastors, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders who taught about God and modeled godly behaviors. The values they instilled were a sure foundation. What a challenge we all have to impart our faith to the next generations! It is a thrill when our grandchildren talk about baby Jesus and shepherds at Christmas — instead of having a sole

focus on Santa. And when we help them to understand that Easter is about Christ's powerful resurrection instead of a chocolate bunny. I am thankful to God that He was with my many ancestors, and trust that He will be with me until the end of my days on earth.

The third part of this wonderful verse is related to the first phrase, and is a prayer for God not to leave us or abandon us. What is the strongest desire of our hearts? Fame, fortune, house, work promotion? Let us still our hearts and turn to God instead. May we ask God for an awareness of His presence in our lives during this Lenten season, and give thanks that we are not alone in trials or as we celebrate successes. We can daily turn to God, acknowledge His vast power, give thanks and live with hope.

Prayer: *Heavenly father, thank you for being in our lives. Thank you for being constant, and not leaving us to our own devices. Help us to return fully to you during this time of Lent, and keep our eyes fixed on you.*

Mona Brown Ketner



*O land, land, land hear the word of the Lord!
Jeremiah 22:29*

Jeremiah spoke these words during the exile of the Israelites to Babylon. Those going into exile were the fortunate ones. The others were to die of famine, disease, and the sword. All this was happening because over decades Israel had abandoned the Lord in sin, ignoring His commandments and worshiping other gods. The plea in Jeremiah's words was for the exiles to repent in captivity, that God might restore a righteous people to the land He had chosen for them. These horrible events had long been known to Jeremiah by God's command to him not to marry and have a family because the entire generation would be decimated. Thus, Jeremiah spoke with great fervor: *Hear the word of the Lord; Hear the word of the Lord; Hear the word of the Lord!*

Jesus gave a similar message in today's New Testament text:

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roof. Matthew 10:27

He is giving instruction to his twelve disciples before sending them throughout Jerusalem to preach God's word to the "lost sheep of Israel." He gave them authority to drive out evil spirits, to heal the sick of every disease and sickness. Jesus clearly instructed about the dangers they would encounter and how to behave in every circumstance; imploring them to be fearless. But perhaps the most important instruction was listening to what He said to them in person and what they heard from Him in moments of prayer and contemplation with Him. Speak in conversation and preach boldly the word He gives them. This, too, is instruction for all believers, not just teachers, evangelists, and preachers. Hear the Word of the Lord and speak the Word of the Lord.

Prayer Focus: Get in the word and stay in the Word

As the program coordinator of the weekly men's breakfast at Reynolda Presbyterian Church for nearly fifteen years, it was my privilege to introduce my very good friend William Yates Rice (Bill) to share a scripture lesson after our prayer time. Bill stuck to a specific scripture of his choosing, sometimes following a

theme for several weeks and other times sticking to a single scripture. But, he always ended his talk with the admonition “Get in the word and stay in the word,” spoken in a voice that was more of a prayerful command than an offhand suggestion. He was sure to be heard. So, my prayer for you is “Get in the word and stay in the word.”

Lacy Bellomy

William Yates Rice (February 23, 1937 – January 30, 2021)

Day 16

Thursday, March 9

God, your God, has blessed you in everything you have done. He has guarded you in your travels through this immense wilderness. For forty years now, God, your God, has been right here with you. You haven't lacked one thing.
Deuteronomy 2:7 (The Message)

Do you ever feel you are walking through a wilderness? We probably all agree that life is filled with various wilderness times, and all of them, when we are in the midst of one, feel “immense.” The journey the Israelites took lasted 40 years but should have taken only 11 days. Sound familiar?

We can be like the Israelites walking through life often not trusting God's faithfulness. Our choices in life can create personal deserts or times of loneliness. However, there are choices we would never make that take us into a wilderness journey. We would not choose illness, grief, emotional distress or natural disasters. Yet they happen. The Israelites finally learned in those 40 years that God is a faithful, just and loving Father bringing them safely to their promised land. Just as the Israelites learned God's faithfulness in the wilderness, we, too, can learn from God as we spend time with Him in our wilderness experience.

Psalms 139, one of my favorite psalms, is a reminder of the many promises given throughout scripture. We can ask God, as David did, “Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” The resounding answer is there is no place we can go that God isn't already there waiting for us. He knows our journey, whether it is a joyous mountaintop or a valley of discouragement

and despair: God is there. He knows all about our wildernesses and He is waiting to be our Comforter.

Max Lucado writes in one of his meditations from the devotional *God Is With You Every Day*:

“You and I are in the hands of a living, loving God. Random collection of disconnected short stories? Far from it. Your life is a crafted narrative written by a good God, who is working toward your supreme good.”

And that good, that best, is the gift of salvation and hope through Christ’s wilderness as He endured death on a cross. God orchestrated the ultimate gift of sacrifice and salvation through Christ for you and me so that we can come into God’s presence cleansed and purified “whiter than snow.” What grace! What love!

When I picked up my Bible to read this scripture in Deuteronomy, a small card fell from it. The card reads, “Trust in God’s love and mercy.” Trust! So hard sometimes, but what an amazing gift offering hope as we trust Him for His best for us, no matter the journey. Deuteronomy 2:7 was intended for the Israelites’ encouragement and continues to be a powerful reminder of God’s faithfulness for us today. What a promise as we read and acknowledge God’s words to us, “For forty years now, God, your God, has been right here with you. You haven’t lacked one thing.”

Prayer Focus: *I offer as my **prayer** the words of this beautiful Lenten hymn:*

*What language shall I borrow, to thank you dearest Friend,
For all your dying sorrow, your mercy without end?
Grant me to lean unshaken, upon your faithfulness
till I from earth am taken, to see you face to face.*

Amen

Janet Williams

*Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.
1 Peter 5:7 KJV*

The fifth chapter of 1 Peter is not only an admonition to give God our cares, for He loves us, but it also reminds us that we are to be examples for the rest of the flock (v. 3). How do we do that? Well, Jesus sets the example for us.

As Christians we have made a promise to follow in His footsteps. He shows us how to live in love (difficult, indeed), but it is up to each of us to make the decision to live like Jesus. We honor that commitment each time we declare our Christian beliefs by reciting our various litanies, creeds and prayers. Don't be like the little boy who was overheard saying his prayer before bed. "Lord if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am." No, we *want* to be better and follow Jesus.

It's easy to make excuses for failing to love as we should: *I didn't know; I couldn't help it; It wasn't my fault.* Yet, each day we start afresh, we can begin again. When we do it "right," we can win others to Him. How? As Madeline L'Engle wrote in her book "Walking on Water," *by showing them a light so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it*".

I like asking myself daily, *Do I live like God is my Father?*

"If we trust God with our eternity then we can trust Him with our now."

I read that statement somewhere and it is a good reminder to me that I am always God's child. As I was reminded growing up, don't forget who you are. I appreciate the saying, *Faith is not about everything turning out okay. Faith is about being okay no matter how things turn out.*

I know that God has a plan for me. I will pray for direction to follow it, patience to wait on it and knowledge to know when it comes.

Prayer: *My prayer is a favorite passage from Teresa of Avila:*

*Let nothing disturb you
All things are passing
God alone never changes
Patience gains all things
If you have God you will want for nothing
God alone suffices.
God is truly our refuge and strength.*

Linda Jones

Day 18

Saturday, March 11

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. John 15:10

This verse focuses on developing a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ as we make decisions related to the highs and lows of daily living. The more that we work towards an ongoing relationship of prayer and worship with Jesus the more we will feel the comfort of his love and grace through times of crisis and prosperity in our lives.

Abiding in God's love means keeping his commandments, submitting to his will, and growing in spiritual abundance. Jesus' command to us is to love one another in the same way that he loves us. The Greek word for love as a noun is "agape" which means "selfless love". Jesus tells believers to remain in his agape love.

Prayer: *Dear Father, Thank you for being with us during the highs and lows of daily living. Help us to make choices that keep your commandments and follow your will. Amen.*

Toni Bigham

Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors. . .
Deuteronomy 30:9 (The NIV Study Bible)

I had a friend from Malaysia, a former Buddhist, who became a Christian. My friend said that the Bible is a book of instructions on how to live life.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses commands the Jews, the people of Israel, to listen and follow the statutes and rules that God commanded him so that they may live, go in to the land that God is giving them, follow those commandments, and take possession of the land. Moses reminds them of what they witnessed when God destroyed those of them who chose to follow the Baal of Peor and that those who held fast to God had their lives spared. Moses further declares that by keeping and following God's commandments, they will be recognized as a great nation of wise and understanding people with a god so near them, who is devoted to loving and blessing them, and is there for them when called upon.

In Deuteronomy 30:9 "prosperous" means being "blessed by God." Moses sends forth a call to obedience to God and to establish a relationship with God, which will result in a life full of blessings, which is more abundant than a life of prosperity filled with precious treasures and luxury. By obeying, relying on, depending on, trusting in, and acknowledging God, a choice is made for God's delivery of a blessed life and a sense of well-being. God's presence and blessings are all around us. All we have to do is open our eyes to see them and live, as He desires us to live.

How lost we can become if we choose to live our lives independent from what God wants from us. By doing that, we miss out on the rich and abundant life through Christ Jesus. Holding fast to God and walking in faith allows us to experience and appreciate knowing God and what he wants for us and from us. God's

promise of prosperous blessings is part of a lifetime journey of constantly choosing God over those things that threaten to draw us away from God. It is a lifelong commitment made and carried out by Christians to embrace a relationship with God through Christ Jesus. Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we experience the wonderful blessings from our loving God. This is the journey of the Christian life. Choosing God means choosing life, and what an incredible, abundant life it is.

God gave the Jewish people of Moses' time a clear choice with corresponding outcomes. He wants all of us to see that there are cause-and-effect outcomes in all decisions in this day and age as well. God wants us to understand that he is pleading with everyone to do what is necessary to be blessed and to choose life.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for your love for us, being faithful to us, guiding us, and for your "book of instructions" for living a life as devoted children to you. Please forgive us when we fall short of or drift away from following and doing what you want from us. We continue to keep our line of communication open to you through prayer and continue to trust in you and to strive to improve our lives to better serve you. Amen.*

Laurie Renner

Day 20

Monday, March 13

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Acts 17:30

Paul has been travelling and evangelizing by proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah in various provinces in Asia Minor. He preached in synagogues in such cities as Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. On these travels he joined Barnabas, Timothy, Silas and Luke, and they planted many churches among the Jews, Greeks and some gentiles. He was not always accepted but he kept on persuading all those who were willing to listen and discuss the new message he was delivering.

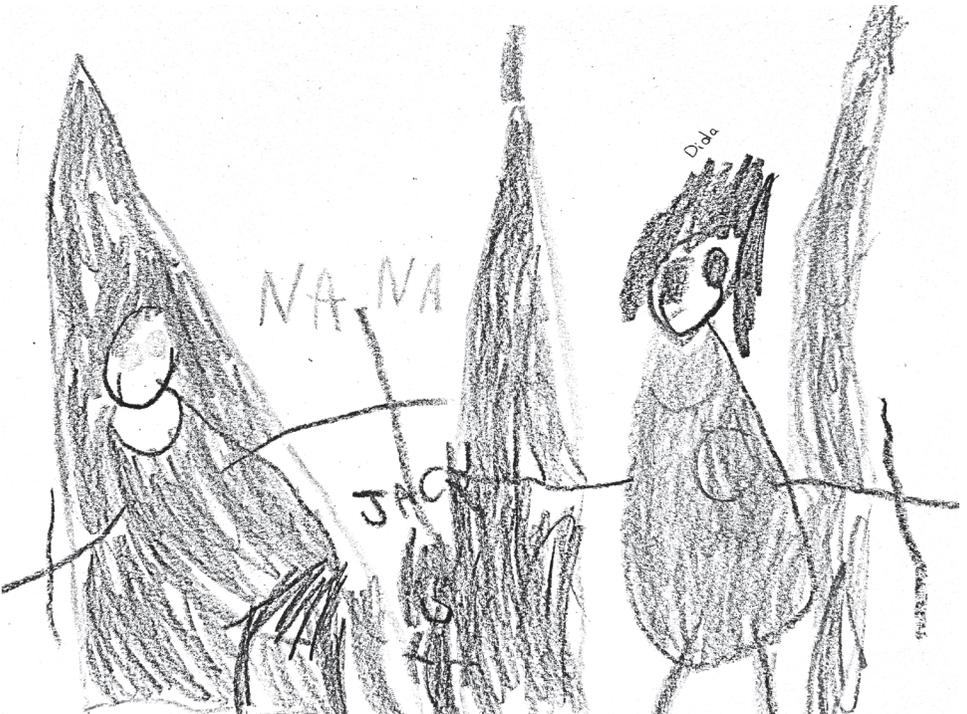
His message of Jesus, the Messiah, who would suffer, die and be resurrected was not readily received by many of those who debated him. In Athens there was much spirituality since there was much idol worshiping, including to an unknown god.

However, Paul tried to convince them that there was only one God, the one Jesus the Messiah represented. Jesus was here for their salvation. Now that they know, they should repent and become followers of Jesus Christ; in the past, God overlooked their beliefs and practices because they were ignorant.

In the same way, missionaries take the gospel to unreached and to unchurched people throughout the world. Many profess to be spiritual and others are hedonistic but if the gospel is shared with them and they continue to indulge in sinful practices, and have the same beliefs, then the Lord requires repentance. Now that they are aware of the God who is their creator and savior, they must repent and follow the Messiah, Jesus. Their ignorance is not an excuse anymore; they should come to the cross and gain a new life and be blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: *May the words of the Lord Reign over us all and may the light of the Lord shine in the darkness of this world. May Peace and love permeate our lives. Amen*

Carol Crooks



*God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.
2 Corinthians 4:6*

Have you ever binge watched a series on TV? Netflix has *Bridgerton*, HBO had *Game of Thrones*, Paramount has *Yellowstone*, and if you are a bit older, you might remember *Dallas* and the famous JR Ewing from the 70s and 80s. According to researchers, binge watching causes our brains to produce a chemical called dopamine that gives us a natural, internal reward of pleasure, and the more we watch, the better it makes us feel. Our brains say, this feels good, so we keep doing it.

If we think of the Bible as a series, there would definitely be many seasons: the first season would feature creation; the fall of man; and God's covenant with Abraham to set a foundation for the series. Future seasons might feature action-adventure stories of the kings, the drama of exile, and the cries of the prophets. The story would pick up with the New Testament and the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus; followed by the journey and trials of the Apostles along with the rise of the early church. Like binge watching a series, the more we read our Bibles and experience God's presence, the better it makes us feel, and we want to keep doing it.

A good series plants clues along the way that lead up to a big season finale and sometimes a cliff hanger that leaves us hungering for more. Our Bible story features lots of clues that lead us to this scripture. The Bible is filled with references to light. All the way back in Genesis, God said, "Let there be light." That was physical light. In Isaiah we hear the prophecy about the people who walked in darkness seeing a great light. A few weeks ago we held beeswax candles and sang about the birth of Jesus using phrases like "ere thou came'st how dark earth's night", "thy glory bright far excels the sun's clear light", "my soul's true light" and a desire to "fill my heart with light divine."

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, John tells us that Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

We are now in the season of Lent and we know how this season ends. There is a triumphant entry into Jerusalem and a swift change of events that ends up with Jesus dying on a cross to atone for our sins. That single act fulfilled the prophecy and explains today's scripture. Jesus is the light shining out of the darkness. When we know Him, that light shines in our hearts and we see God's glory in the form of a man, on the face of His son, Jesus.

In a really good story, the hero either doesn't die, or comes back in future episodes. Spoiler alert: In the next season our hero, Jesus, rises from the grave and comes back to life. Paul will continue the story of light when he is commanded by God to carry the message to both Jews and Gentiles and "open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins." So keep watching and reading, it will make you feel good!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to see and remember that you have a master plan, not just for the whole world, but for each one of us. Help us to recognize the clues and the messages you send to us, listen to your voice, keep the light shining in our hearts, and display the face of Christ in our words and deeds. Amen.*

Nancy Leonard



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

In the time of Paul, Corinth was one of the wealthiest cities in all of Greece. Being a port city, it was a melting pot of worldly cultures. The city's riches encouraged corruption and immorality. However, Paul knew if his message could be successful in Corinth, it was reasonable to believe it could have similar results in other places.

Sadly, the church in Corinth had been struggling with a number of problems resulting in divisions among the membership and putting the church in peril. When learning of this, Paul wrote a "severe" and "painful" letter to the church to address these issues. In 2 Corinthians 2:4, we learn how Paul felt when he wrote this letter, "For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you." Paul's love for the church tore at his heart not knowing how the letter was received or if the church had successfully dealt with these problems.

While Paul was in Macedonia, Titus brought him both the joyful news that God had used his letter to bring about the repentance of most of the members and the church was active. However, his happiness was tempered when Titus told him there was still a small number that rejected Paul's authority.

2 Corinthians is Paul's letter in response to this news. After his greeting, Paul begins the letter with praise to God and then with words to the church in Corinth on where to turn for comfort after their struggles. Paul told the church that God is the source of compassion, mercy, and comfort during these stressful times. During his ministry, Paul had suffered lashings, imprisonment, stoning, beatings, hunger, fatigue, shipwrecks, and attacks from both Gentiles and Jews. So, who better than Paul to give guidance on how to deal with struggles and suffering.

If the man who went through all of that says God is the source of his comfort, then I'm ready to believe him. This type of comfort

was not the soothing comfort provided by relaxing music, but the comfort that strengthens or make us stronger. One of the reasons that God comforts us in this manner is so we in turn can provide similar comfort to others when they are facing troubles. God may choose to provide us comfort either directly or through someone else. God used Barnabas, Titus, Timothy, Luke, Silas, Mark, and many more to provide Paul comfort during his ministry. It is important that we remain vigilant and aware that God may use others as conduits of comfort during our time of suffering, stress, or struggles. If we don't, then we may not receive the comfort God wants us to have.

Prayer of Comfort: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

God, help me not to lose heart, even when it feels like I'm wasting away. Remind me that inwardly I'm being renewed day by day. Show me how my troubles are achieving for me an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Fix my eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Smitty Welborn

Day 23

Thursday, March 16

And we have known and believed the love that God hath in us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 1 John 4:16

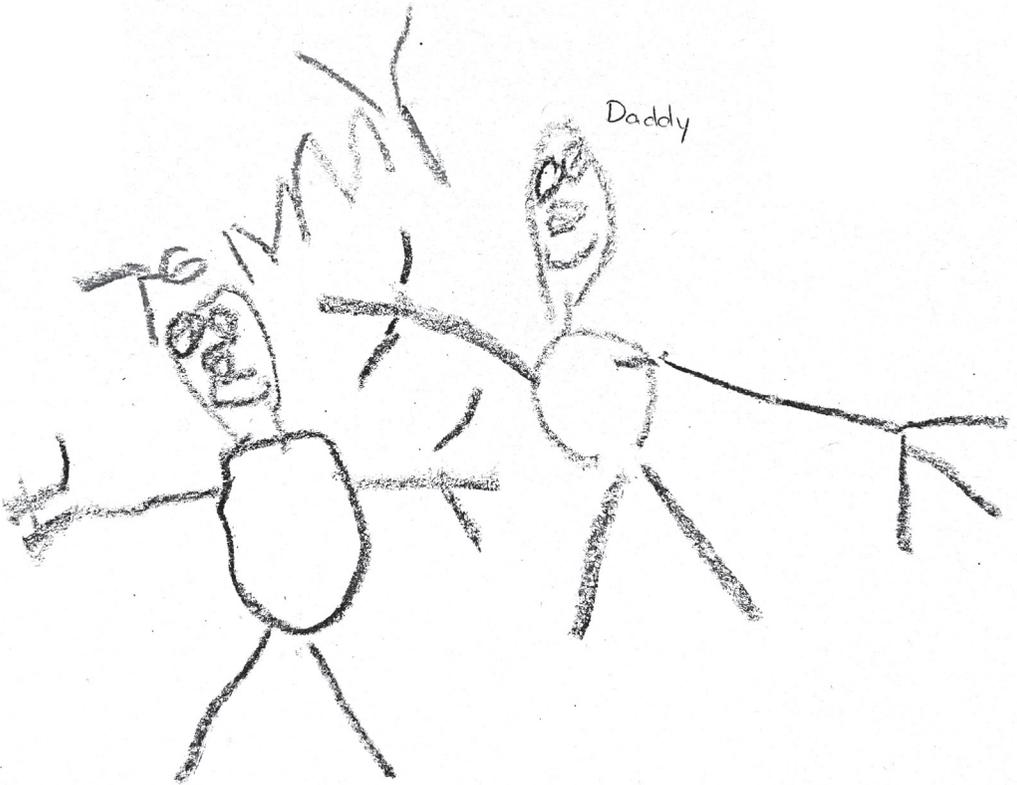
These words clearly state that both knowing and believing are important. There have been times when believing has been emphasized; apart from knowing God, this can sometimes lead people to accept Jesus, yet not live in Him. As a result, people may be “born of God” but show no signs of “abiding” in Him. Emphasizing knowing God, whether through worship experiences or service to others, yet failing to emphasize salvation, may not provide a real relationship with Christ, since believing is based on human feelings.

Both “to know and to believe” are essential in the life of Christian believers, but we must believe in who Christ really is, for salvation. We must “know” Him through obedience and fellowship, to be accepted in our actions, and to be blessed by Him.

In the second part of that verse John added, *God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* Someone who continues to love others is also continuing in love with God. In other words, love of God and others is the way to remain growing in the Lord. Those who do so have God abiding or living in them. Godly love is a powerful sign that a person is a genuine believer in Christ. It can also be said that living according to God's love takes away our fear of judgement. And if one claims to love God, but hate others, you would be hypocritical in your faith. So, as believers who love God, we should love all our brothers and sisters. If you are asking what to do for Lent, why not take on this: Love all others the way God loves you.

Prayer: *Lord, teach us how to be sincere in our love for you, and all our brothers and sisters! In your name we pray. Amen*

Evon Crooks



Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. Luke 16:10

The Rewards of Trust!

The concept of trust is a real head scratcher these days. All we have to do is turn on our televisions or stream our favorite newscasts. Even though we have disagreements on positions, we can agree there is a trust deficit wherever we look. We all know the greatest source of trust is your mother. To quote my loving mother — “Protect your name because it is the only thing of value you really have.” The simplicity of that statement needs no explanation. We can control trust with our actions.

Luke takes the concept of trust to a much higher level. What is the dividing line between little and much? One commentary describes “little” as all things that happen in this earthly life. It is true we have highs and lows based on our personal experiences but these events pale in comparison to the “much” that we will receive with our heavenly Father. Those are the highs we are aiming for as we venture through this earthly life.

We have to be ever vigilant to guard our trust because we want to make sure we do not let the little things shut us out of the life to come.

Prayer: *Our trusting Father, sometimes we are overwhelmed by the little things facing us. Help us to see the big picture so we can weather our storms and grow into the trust that will allow us to share your gift of life. Amen.*

David Stanfield

Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:14

The Gate to Life!

We are called to confess our sins to God and declare our belief in Jesus Christ. The gift of eternal life comes only through Christ to all of us who believe. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Through our lives we often find the better things are harder to attain and we have to work toward those goals. How we relate to our neighbors and friends is a reflection of our beliefs.

I often exercise by walking the streets of South Fork. During these walks I have a few favorite podcasts I like to listen to while walking. When I want to escape for a few minutes I listen to the foolishness of Steve Harvey. Surprisingly, he always starts his show with a devotional and the subject of "tudes" comes up from time to time. He speaks of the relationship of gratitude, attitude and altitude and where one leads to the next.

As we proceed through the Lenten season, may we show gratitude to God, improve our attitude to our fellow citizens and reach the altitude that God has promised and with confidence go through that narrow gate to life eternal.

Prayer: *Our gracious Father, lead us along the difficult path and show us the way through that narrow gate so we may enjoy the promise of life eternal. Amen.*

David Stanfield

No one is as holy as the Lord! There is no other God, nor any Rock like our God. 1 Samuel 2:2

In the scripture verse above, Hannah, mother of Samuel, lifts up a prayer of praise and thanks to God for answering her prayer for a son. In this scripture she reminds us of the importance of remembering to give thanks and praise to God for all of his many blessings! Her prayer reflects her confidence in God's holiness and sovereignty ("*No one is as holy...there is no other God*"). She also recognizes God as her "Rock".

When Hannah describes God as her "Rock", we know that her description symbolizes steadfastness and trustworthiness; an unfailing and ongoing source of strength; an unmoving, firm foundation upon which one can trust and securely stand. (Sound familiar? "*On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand...*"). Through Hannah's prayer we are reminded that our God is also our Rock. We can trust and rely on Him...always.

Recently I read about how, in the opinion of some historians, geology (rocks) played a major role in the success of the D-Day landing in Normandy. It was in January 1944 that some British divers risked their lives to secretly collect rock samples from select sites from the Nazi occupied Normandy beaches. The importance of getting these rock samples was so geologists could then determine if these sandy shores would be firm enough for the heavy equipment and tanks that were going to be needed for the invasion. If the beaches were not made of a firm foundation, the heavy equipment and soldiers would get stuck and sink in the sand. A firm foundation was needed in order for the soldiers to achieve their goal.

This part of the planning for D-Day was something I had never thought about. As history has shown us, the foundation upon which the soldiers had to rely on to drive the tanks and other heavy equipment was firm enough to successfully complete their mission. But...we know that overtime the sandy shores could shift. The foundation could change due to the constant pounding of the waves, the ebb and flow of the tides, the change of the currents and the gusty, stormy sea winds. And, isn't that a lot like life? There are things and/or people we think we can rely

on but things will break and people will let us down. That's life... circumstances and relationships are always changing or shifting. Such changing and shifting of possessions and personal relationships may cause us to stumble or make us lose our footing if we are not standing on solid ground.

Just as those soldiers needed a firm foundation in order to succeed at their mission, don't we also need a firm foundation on which to rely? How can we succeed at our "mission" unless we stand on a firm foundation? Fortunately, when we stumble and fall or our circumstances become overwhelming or when our lives unexpectedly shift in the blink of an eye, or the pull of the tides seems extra strong, our foundation, our Rock, does not change.

As Hannah reassures us in her prayer of thanks and praise... our God is a Rock. Our God is unchanging, unmovable, never shifting, always present during the turbulence and the calm. We can stand on a firm foundation and reach our goal because He is our Rock! He is faithful. He keeps his promises.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for Hannah's words and witness. Please help us to be brave and bold in sharing the good news of how great thou art! Help us to keep our focus on you, our Rock and our Redeemer. We know that in you alone we are saved and we can stand firm because of your promises and presence in our lives. Oh, Lord our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Amen.*

Marie Rodden

Day 27

Monday, March 20

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 NIV

The words "light" and "darkness" appear hundreds of times in Scripture (the exact numbers varying widely, depending on the translation). Light symbolizes holiness, goodness, knowledge, wisdom, grace, hope, God's presence and favor. It dispels fear (Ps. 27:1) and imparts understanding (Ps. 119:130). Light illuminates and guides, enabling us to find the way. Think wise men following the light of a star or the children of Israel following the pillar of

fire through the wilderness. Darkness conversely denotes sin, despair, evil, and death. Misdeeds are often accomplished under the cover of darkness.

Let's consider the nature of physical light (warning: science content). Electromagnetic energy spans a broad spectrum from very long radio waves to very short gamma rays. The longest radio waves have wavelengths of up to 100,000 kilometers (around 62,000 miles) and gamma ray wavelength is a fraction of an atomic nucleus at approximately one picometer (one-trillionth of a meter or 0.0000000001 inches). Very strange, mysterious, hard to comprehend stuff. In between these extremes are microwaves, infrared, visible light (the tiny band of the spectrum detectable by the human visual system), ultraviolet, and X-rays. We can feel the heat of infrared, and ultraviolet can sterilize surfaces and give us a sunburn. We can warm our leftovers with microwaves, and see our bones with X-rays. Light from the sun warms our planet (from 93,000,000 miles away) and, via photosynthesis, allows for life to flourish. Again, scientific concepts grasped only by old professors writing out long equations on chalkboards.

What does this have to do with Jesus? Hang on, we'll get there. We at least have the illusion of knowledge of a very small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum because we can see it, but the rest of it we know only indirectly through its effects. While Jesus was on the Earth, He was the light (John 12:35). The majority of the electromagnetic spectrum can represent God the Father and the Holy Spirit, invisible and incomprehensible, known only indirectly through the effects of His work around us. Jesus is visible light, sent to allow us to see enough of God to illuminate our path. It is possible to only know OF God, to reason that a creative force must be at work in the universe, but Jesus among us made God accessible, a God we can know, one who walks along beside us, who makes clear that He knows us through His human suffering and temptation.

Here is a challenging responsibility Jesus left for us, recorded in Matthew 5:14-16. "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven."

Prayer: *God of light and life, we know that we live in a dark and dying world without your presence. Place in our paths opportunities to dispel that darkness and bring glory to your name by being the salt and light you have called us to be. Amen.*

Van Teague

Day 28

Tuesday, March 21

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6:68

Powerless. Downtrodden. Betrayed. Alone. Depressed. How often has each of us felt these? Especially in times of lack, sickness, grief, or loss. The human condition oscillates between opposites: the good and the bad. When we are in the lowest times (the valley of the shadow of death) we yearn for immediate deliverance from our pain. Why can we not live in bliss, happiness, and joy all the time?

Experience begets understanding. . . . could we know real joy never having known despair? Can one truly be happy without having suffered? Can forgiveness happen without sin? How would you know actual redemption without having failed? It has been said, “if you want to fill your bottle up with lightening, you’re going to have to stand in the rain”.

No one wants to weather a storm, but the power to steer through the storms of life is our gift from God, to whom we can go, no matter the time or the season. We can always find words of guidance, and comfort. Reading and meditating on these eternal words, take us directly into the mystery of God. The Divine source of all life, our spark that transcends all, even the darkest moments. Those words of eternal life bring back redemption for every moment — past, present, and future.

Prayer Focus: *In this holy Lenten season, may we experience the peace and harmony of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Dawn Green-Rogers

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Luke 15:6 (NRSV)

From the Parable of the Lost Sheep

Have you ever been lost? There have been a few times that I have been lost. Now that most of us have GPS, it is much easier to find our way.

Have you found something you thought you lost or you forgot where you put it? How did you feel when you found that object?

All of us can relate to these situations.

In this parable Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who has lost a sheep and found the sheep. He brings the sheep home and gathers his friends and neighbors. He rejoices with them in finding the lost sheep.

What a wonder that our Lord and Savior, Jesus, rejoices when just one of us comes to trust in his saving grace.

Hallelujah - Jesus came for not just one but all of us!

Prayer: *Our Most Gracious Father in Heaven, Thank you for loving and caring not only for all, but for just one. We thank you for your love and saving grace. Amen*

Katherine Teague

“the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.”

Luke 1:73-75, NRSV

A common trap for many Divinity school students is to treat their classes as a replacement for spiritual formation and church. As I prepared for Divinity School, friends and mentors encouraged me to find a spiritual practice that would be just my own and completely independent from my academic work. One mentor encouraged me to consider taking up the ancient practice of silent, contemplative meditation and prayer. I was taken aback. In the era of commercialized self-care, sitting silently felt a little too “woo woo” for me. Moreover, my anxiety-riddled brain was more prone to ruminating on my to-do list than wondering about the expanses of God’s grace. I decided to give it a shot, though quietly I was convinced that this practice would fizzle out in a few weeks.

I started slowly with three-minute meditations and worked my way up to twenty minutes. What I found in this practice was that silent meditation is a bit of a misnomer. Nothing is silent, not even me. I can hear things like my own breath, the air conditioning, and traffic outside. The discipline of remaining silent in the midst of the cacophony of life around me gave me needed time to discern where I am, who I am among, and how the Spirit might be moving through and around me.

Today’s scripture is an excerpt from the larger story of Zechariah’s prophecy at the end of Luke chapter 1 (67-80). For months, Zechariah had been rendered mute by Gabriel, Angel of the Lord, because Zechariah doubted the announcement that he and his wife Elizabeth were to bear a son—John the Baptist. As soon as he recovered from his condition, Zechariah begins his prophecy with recalling the past goodness of God.

Zechariah was not the first Jewish prophet to utilize a recollection of the past goodness of God as a prelude to his prophecy. This is a standard motif in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. But it is interesting that this specific recollection comes after

months of divine-mandated vocal restraint. Imagine all that Zechariah must have seen in these months and could not say a word about it: He could not comment on how Elizabeth was glowing during pregnancy; he could not preach at the temple; he could not comment on the socioeconomic and political challenges for his community. His life was changing, and he could not vocalize his excitement, anger, fear, or questions. It is interesting to me that in his recollection, Zechariah perceives God's fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as not just a story of rescue. Instead, it further endows Abraham's posterity with the holy mission of serving God. Furthermore, I do not think it is a coincidence that his beautiful prophecy about the life and ministry of his son, John the Baptist, comes after having to be quiet for months. His silence gave him the ability to hear God and see the world anew.

During this Lenten season, take a moment — maybe just three minutes — to sit quietly and listen to what is around you. Where are you? Who are you among? And, how might the Spirit be already working through and around you?

Prayer: *Loving, ever-present God. Help me find you in the quiet. Amen.*

Emily Farnell

Day 31

Friday, March 24

The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed. So they do not drink wine to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. But I have spoken to you again and again; yet you have not listened to me.

Jeremiah 35:14

This passage must be considered in the total context of Jeremiah 35. Jonadab is not a character that we hear of often; in fact, I had never heard of him at all. I have pondered this passage for several weeks and I studied Jonadab, the son of Rechab, and his descendants. Now I see more clearly. This chapter describes obedience that is so complete that it is not considered obedience at all. It becomes lifestyle, nature, and character.

Drinking wine was not the only restriction placed on the descendants of Jonadab. They had to live in tents, and could not “have vineyard, or field or seed”. There is little explanation as to why Jonadab put these demands on his descendants, but he did and they became known for their commitment to these commands. When Jeremiah was told by God to bring them into the house of the Lord and give them wine to drink, surely God knew that they would say “thanks, but no thanks.” So what was the point?

Many of the verses in Jeremiah 35 provide information about Jonadab. But there is a clear message from God in the story. He was being ignored and was using Jonadab and his descendants as examples to follow. God instructed Jeremiah to say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “Will you not receive instruction by listening to My words?” (v.13). “But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not listened to Me” (v.14). “I have sent my servants, the prophets...again and again... but you have not inclined your ear or listened to Me” (v.15). God makes the comparison, “the sons of Jonadab...have observed the command of their father...but this people has not listened to Me” (v.16) and “I spoke to them but they did not listen and I have called them but they did not answer” (v.17).

That’s the point. The sons of Jonadab had listened intently to the commands of their father and had acted on them. By the time we read Jeremiah 35, their acts of obedience had actually become defining elements of their character. **WOW!** Their acts of obedience had actually become defining elements of their character. Read that again three more times and ask yourself this question: what would happen if you and I practiced that same degree of devotion to our Heavenly Father?

Prayer: *Father, I confess that I do not listen to You with my whole heart. Keep before me Your word to Jeremiah: “Call to Me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.” Help me to listen and obey.*

Trudy Farnell

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons(children) of God. Matthew 5:9

This verse is a familiar one for many of us. I remember learning the Beatitudes as a child in the Junior Department at Kernersville Moravian Church. In this passage, Jesus is sitting with his disciples on a hillside, teaching them (and us) how to behave as his followers. So why is it important for us to be peacemakers?

I think it's safe to say that we all want peace in our lives. We like to escape to peaceful places. Perhaps your peaceful place is the beach or maybe the mountains. We enjoy those quiet and restful experiences that calm our spirit. But enjoying peace is often a passive sort of activity. In order to be a *peace maker*, we must engage in the experience of LIFE. Jesus calls us to get involved with those around us, to make a difference by demonstrating how our love for Him determines our behavior in uncomfortable situations. We cannot be peacemakers by being conflict avoiders. The great peacemakers of our time put themselves in the center of social conflict and fought for justice in a peaceable manner.

If we are to be seen as Jesus's disciples, we must be seen by the world as people who work for peace and justice. Jesus came to this world as the Prince of Peace. He sent out his twelve disciples to be peacemakers. He sends all of us out into the world to be peacemakers. If we don't do it, who will? During this season of Lent, how can we act as peacemakers?

Prayer: *(from The Prayer of St. Francis):*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

Amy Guthrie

But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built. I King 8:27 (NIV)

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:18 (NIV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. John 1:1 (NIV)

David wanted to build a magnificent Temple, a House in the Name of the Lord, but God told him to wait, and have his son, Solomon, build it. In this Temple God could dwell forever. But Solomon knew that God ruled the Heavens and earth, and questioned whether or not he would ever consider living on earth. While not in the Temple, God, Jesus Christ, did live on earth for 33 years. During this span of years, he grew to maturity and then spent his remaining years spreading the word, the glory and the love of the Lord and the promise of Salvation to all who believed. In the end, he was crucified; he was resurrected and has brought everlasting life to all who believed.

As Christians, we confess our belief in the sameness of the Father and the Son every time we recite the Apostles or Nicene Creeds. That we believe in the Trinity: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons in one. When I was young, the Trinity was a very difficult concept for me to understand. Since God is Jesus's father, how could they be the same? Then, during my youth, the third element of the Trinity was the Holy Ghost, not Spirit. I considered Ghosts part of Halloween, not the Bible.

Over time, through study, the help of good pastors and Sunday school teachers, I came to understand. This revelation not only helped my understanding, but also strengthened my faith and made me a better and more informed Christian.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and please continue to guide us in our Faith as we go through our daily lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Bob Rustad

Jesus

As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the end of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness.

Psalm 48:10

Jesus said, As you go, proclaim the good news, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 10:7

Jesus sent his twelve disciples out with the following instructions:

- Go find the lost sheep.
- Proclaim the message, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”
- Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons.
- Freely you have received-freely give.
- Take no wealth with you in your belts.

Therefore, Christ is the right hand of God; He is the right hand of God’s righteousness by which he upholds his people. We are today’s disciples and should follow these instructions to provide righteousness to the people and pave the way for all believers to reach the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer: *Jesus, you have given us clear instructions and we trust you to provide the opportunities for proclaiming your Word. Now, please give us the courage, the wisdom, and the persistence to truly be your disciples. Amen*

Steve Jones

...for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:14

The first time I really heard a sermon about this verse of scripture was during a Sunday worship service held during the Scottish Highland Games at Grandfather Mountain. Following some lovely tunes played on the bagpipes, a kilted man with white hair and a beard took the podium in a pavilion of sorts. He reminded us that it is a very good thing that God remembers our fallibility, or weaknesses, and our sin-prone nature. Here we were, amongst men who throw giant wooden beams in the caber toss, listening to a sermon about human weakness.

Like a good father, God remembers that we crawl before we walk. He remembers that we try to run too fast for our little toddler legs and fall. He remembers that we forget the pain of falling and do it over and over and over again. He knows that we are all in a process of becoming and each of us have a journey. Ultimately, the end goal is the same for us all, to become like Christ. Though we are spotless lambs in His sight because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, He still remembers. On our journey towards sanctification, God is aware of our humanity.

I take great comfort in knowing that God sees me for who I am. It is a beautiful thing to be known and yet, loved. It is humbling and awe-inspiring to look at a fistful of dirt and know that I exist because God breathed life into me. I know I am dust, but I also know that on this journey, God is with me, holding my hand like a gentle father and with life-giving breath, whispering words of encouragement to my soul.

Though we are weak, formed from the dust, and full of the bumps and bruises of life, we can do great things! Like those men tossing cabers, we each have our own challenges and burdens to bear, but He remembers. He provides us with the strength we need for our journey and is full of loving-kindness towards us.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we all have "cabers" in our life. We all have hard trials. Thank you for knowing us, for remembering our frailty. Thank you for the sacrifice of Christ that both makes us Holy at once, able to stand in your fierce presence and yet at the*

same time, moves us towards our journey to be like Him, loving others with a servant heart. Without your breath of life, we are but dust, a fistful of dirt. But with you, we can do all things, through Christ, who gives us our strength.

Hollie Gomez

Day 36

Wednesday, March 29

...both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. Acts 2:11

The above verse takes place during the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, when devout Jews from many nations are in Jerusalem for the holiday. The apostles were all gathered in one place on Pentecost. A sound like a violent wind came from heaven and filled the place they were sitting. They saw divided tongues as of fire over their heads that came to rest on them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in other tongues.

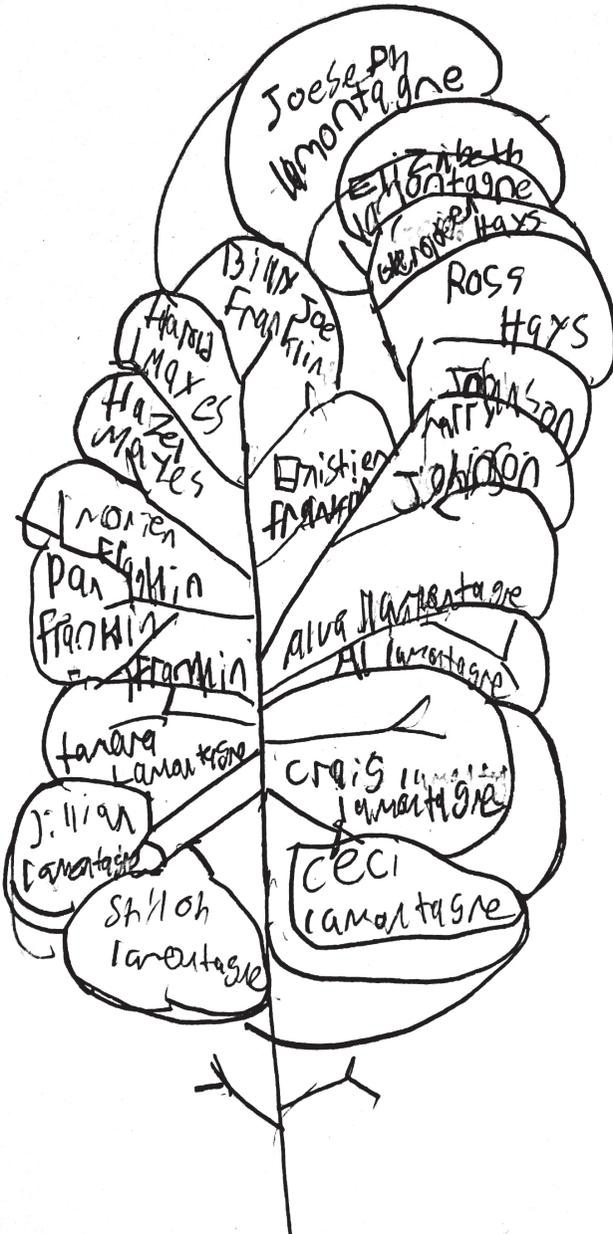
Throughout scripture, fire represented the presence and power of God. In this instance, tongues is the same word for languages. The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to be understood by all the people gathered at Pentecost.

In Genesis 11, the whole earth had one language. Because the people had sinned against God by building the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves, God confused their language and dispersed them over the face of the earth. God divided the language at Babel, but in Acts 2 He undoes that division, bringing unity by the Holy Spirit.

During this Lenten season, let's be thankful for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comforts us, convicts us of sin, sanctifies us, and guarantees our salvation. He distinguishes us as children of God. As followers of Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, we can all know God and understand His word, which brings unity to His church. His word is a roadmap for our lives. It gives hope and promise if we stay kingdom focused and are daily in His word.

Prayer: Precious Father, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to hunger for Your word each day. Help us grow in our personal relationship with you. Reveal yourself to us and guide us each day. Help us to live in this world, but to stay kingdom focused because it's all about You. Amen

Susan Stockwell



*There is a time for every activity under the heavens.
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Ecclesiastes 3 has always been one of my favorite chapters in the Old Testament. To fully understand this chapter it is important to recognize the sovereignty of God, for without this understanding all the moments in time mentioned will be without value and significance. The strength and hope we need in all the seasons of our life is knowing the source of our strength can be found in God's Word. In 1 Chronicles 29: 11-12 we read: " Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for all that is the heavens and the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor comes from you, and you rule over all. In your hands are strength and power, to exalt and to give strength to all."

In our Christian walk we experience many seasons. Some are wonderful and beautiful and full of joy. But some are difficult as when we experience illness, sadness, or loss. None of the times and seasons, both good and bad, that we may experience are wasted. God can use everything we experience, and make it beautiful and good and bring us closer to Him and glorify his kingdom. You may not know how or when but you can count on it! So pray for it to happen and fully put your faith and trust in God. You must prepare your heart to receive whatever comes your way so that your faith may not be shaken. In these times we must remember his promise which scripture declares: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight* (Proverbs 3:5-6). You do not face trials and fears alone because our Sovereign God is with us and he is in control.

Jesus set a good example for us. Jesus lived his life knowing that God is sovereign over everything. Even in the Garden we see Christ pouring out his heart to the Father proclaiming his commitment to and confidence in God. He marched with resolve to Calvary without being afraid of men or circumstances. Why? Because he knew that God is sovereign. In Jeremiah 29:11 we read: " For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord,"

plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

When we know that we go to no place by accident, we understand that the seasons of our life are inevitable but the beauty of the Gospel gives clarity and direction to how we embrace each season.

Prayer: *Sovereign Lord, thank-you for your plans for our life. We know you will accomplish your perfect will in our lives through all the seasons. Keep us dependent on you and strengthen our faith and trust in you in all our days. Amen*

Elaine Donald

Day 38

Friday, March 31

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.” Luke 1:68

My first experience with the concept of redemption was probably through S & H Green Stamps. I remember helping my mother put the stamps in the sticker book after making a purchase at the gas station. When the book (or books) was finally filled with 1200 stamps, we would go to the store and redeem it for a coveted item such as a set of Lincoln Logs or dishes.

It was always exciting to win tickets playing a carnival game because you could redeem them for a prize after you were done playing. Of course, the more tickets you won, the bigger your selection of prizes would be. However, as I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to the conclusion that most of the prizes aren’t really worth redeeming if you consider the money and time you’d need to spend to get the needed number of tickets.

So what does it mean when we talk about Jesus redeeming us? The Merriam Webster Dictionary has several different definitions for redeem including: to buy back; to release from blame or debt; to atone for; to make worthwhile, etc. But what really caught my eye was the word at the bottom of these definitions: redeemable. Despite our myriad of faults and sins, God still views us as redeemable! Worthy of redemption. Seriously?! But why? How many of the people who personally encountered Jesus felt or had been told that they were unworthy, less than, or sinful? How many people today need to hear the good news that God sees

them as redeemable — worthy of redemption? Jesus came in person to buy us back, release us from blame or debt, to atone for our sins, to make us worthwhile - and to share the good news that God loves us and finds us redeemable.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for looking beyond our flaws and sinfulness to see something in us that makes us redeemable in your eyes. Help us to open our eyes and to look at those around us (and even at ourselves) who need to be made aware that You find them redeemable. Let us cry out, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them."*

Valerie Crane

Day 39

Saturday, April 1

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (ESV) 2 Timothy 2:13

Shortly before his death, Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy. In Chapter 2 of the letter, Paul alerts Timothy of the trials to come as a leader of the church and tells him not to lose faith. In Verse 13, he reminds Timothy that in spite of his, Timothy's difficulties to come, God will always be with him.

Reading this scripture passage, I thought of it as saying "Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful." No matter what, the Lord is there for us, regardless of how we behave or the trials we face. Why does He do this? Because He is our perfect God; He cannot deny Himself. Or, in other words, as the Good News Translation puts it, He cannot be false to Himself. False about what? False about the promises He made to us to always be our God and we to be His people. False about His promises to watch over us and provide for our needs. Our God is never false. These Blessed Assurances of His promises are there to help us and Timothy remain true.

Prayer: *Lord, we know that You are with us even when we behave as though we're not with You. We are mere humans and thus will fail and we ask Your forgiveness. But You will not fail us. You will continue to bring us back to Your love and kindness. You will continue to teach us to share that love and kindness. Help us to remember that. Amen.*

Bob Saturn

*Then young women will dance and be glad, young men
and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
Jeremiah 31:13*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Matthew 5:4*

There are many aspects to my first grade Easter not committed to memory. I don't remember if I wore the dress and white shoes ordered from the Sears catalog. I have no idea if a bunny left me a basket of treats. I'm not even sure I dyed eggs. But the overwhelming feeling of grief still weighs on me as if it happened last week. My grandfather died on that Good Friday.

When a child suffers a tragedy, it can be quite difficult to navigate how to provide comfort suited to that particular child, especially since children don't have maturity, yet are fascinatingly resilient. Perhaps for me, having this loss occur on a holiday sealed its fate permanently in my mind. I most definitely could relate to the stories being told on Easter Sunday the following years. I knew firsthand what it felt like to lose someone important to me on Good Friday. Death was real. The first time stepping foot in my grandparents' home, I can vividly remember searching the house for Pappaw, much like Mary at Jesus' empty tomb. Death was final.

Where I have failed in providing myself comfort is in acknowledging exactly what God intends for us to do with grief. God wants us to turn mourning into gladness? He wants us to feel comfort? And dare we recall ... joy?

The Beatitudes, from where the Matthew passage is taken, serve as a how-to guide for Christianity. Each Beatitude explains how to be blessed. Being blessed doesn't ascribe to a worldly standard of being "lucky," "successful" or "rich." It's actually the ability to experience hope and joy, period. Interesting to link a Beatitude to a passage from Jeremiah, perhaps the biggest failure from a societal perspective on blessings.

Jeremiah warned about doom, and no one listened. He was poor, tortured and neglected for his prophecies. Yet God's measure of

success places Jeremiah as one of the Bible's greatest. Jeremiah had blessings. He felt God's firsthand comfort in all those times of mourning and grief, and his obedient faith made him a success.

Jesus, at his crucifixion, was considered a failure at being able to save himself if he "really was" the real God almighty. The crowd mocked him for this. What they failed to recognize was the blessing. That crucifixion and subsequent resurrection teaches what it means to be blessed by mourning. As terrible as that moment was for Jesus to endure, the hope for our salvation far outweighs the grief.

Easter will always be a deeply sad time for me. The darkness of death permeates this holiday personally, but as it should, for I understand how the disciples felt. I also know to treasure the opportunity of knowing a man like my Pappaw because my younger brother didn't get that chance. I acknowledge the peace in knowing how Pappaw didn't suffer with his health longer than he already had. He is in a better place, and one day I will hopefully have the ability to hug him again. Those are the blessings that God needs me to face. Mourning isn't easy. Comfort is most definitely there, though.

Prayer Focus: *All good things come from God.*

Tiffany Henshaw

Day 41

Monday, April 4

I keep my eyes always on the Lord. Psalm 16:8

There was a time when one of my sisters attended a large main-line denomination church in the heart of a major American city. It had a "toney" address; nonetheless, there was a strong homeless presence right across the street from the church's front doors.

Good people in the church noticed their neighbors and decided it would be a kind gesture to offer a hearty meal each Sunday following the final morning service. Enthusiasm for the project quickly spread. A committee was formed; plans were made; details were finalized. And then someone asked the question: Which china should we use (to feed our homeless neighbors)? The everyday ironstone or the "good" china (with an important provenance)?

Opinions on each side of the question were offered. Then they became a little more heated. Tempers flared. Anger mounted.

It was at about this time that my sister came home for the weekend and recounted for my mother in painstaking detail the situation at hand. My sister was disenchanted. Maybe she just wouldn't return to this ridiculous church with its petty squabbles. And her rant continued.

Finally, when the tirade ended, my mother – who had little patience with disharmony in the church and events that took more than two minutes to explain– turned to my sister and said: Honey, all you have to do is keep your eyes on the cross.

Sage wisdom from one who had been in the same rural congregation for about 70 years at that point. She had seen it all when it came to church life and knew that the church is a microcosm for all of the other aspects of life...with one difference: The refusal to let the human condition derail the focus on living, loving and serving like Jesus. The commitment to keep one's "eye on the prize." You see, my mother knew the verse from Isaiah that tells us: The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord is forever.

And that brings us back to today's verse and why it states "always on the Lord." Here's the reason: If our gaze wanders, there are shiny objects galore to keep us spellbound, and we just might miss the ministry that the Lord has placed, right in front of us.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us tune out the noise and close our eyes to the bright lights of the midway that can be our lives. Give us the mental strength and wisdom to keep our eyes on you. Amen*

Clyde Manning

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"
Luke 19:37-38 (NIV)

When I read the verses for today's devotion, I immediately thought of a hymn we sometimes sing on Palm Sunday, "Ride On! Ride On in Majesty".

The crowds were joyfully praising God for all the miracles they had seen. The Messiah had arrived to restore their kingdom. As we now know, the crowds were expecting a political and military leader to free them from the Roman Empire. In contrast, Jesus arrived as a humble King of peace fulfilling the scripture found in Zechariah 9:9. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The words of the above-mentioned hymn describe that day's events eloquently. I do not think it inconsequential that this hymn in the Red Book is sung to a tune written in D Minor (unlike the more common tunes for this hymn written in major keys) and is very foreboding, similar to the tense music in a movie just before a disturbing scene. The events of the following days vividly bring to mind the pain and sacrifice made for our salvation.

My favorite verse is the last one because it reminds me of the glorious outcome of that upcoming week, the power of Easter morning.

Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
 In lowly pomp ride on to die;
 Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain.
 THEN TAKE, O GOD, THY POWER AND REIGN.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of Christ's death and resurrection. Remind us daily how to be more like Him. Amen*

Anonymous

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV)

This very familiar verse was in the second letter from Paul to the Corinthians. Though part of a larger encouragement passage from Paul to this early church, it holds a special meaning for us today. The “grace of Christ” is the unmerited, all-generous love of God/Christ for us, His people. We have not earned this love that we freely have been given. The meaning of the phrase “though He was rich” we know to be eternal riches, the wealth of glory that He held with His Father rather than earthly wealth. “For our sake He became poor,” teaches us that, though life was austere for Jesus, there doesn’t seem to be evidence that Jesus was any poorer than most others in his time. Therefore, it is not thought that this refers to lack of material wealth. We can then understand that though Jesus was rich beyond measure in spiritual, heavenly wealth, and that we are poor in that scope, the Love and Grace from Christ comes to us, so that we can receive this same spiritual wealth.

Looking at this in context with verses 1-15 of 2 Corinthians ... Paul is urging the Corinthians to financially support the Church of Jerusalem, a poor struggling Jewish church. He knew that the church of Corinth had received the incredible gifts of God’s love and mercy through the resurrection of Jesus and he was encouraging them to see giving as an act of worship. After all, it is through Christ’s sacrifice that we become spiritually rich and it is through our riches that we give to others who need help.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to remember the gift you have given us of your love and mercy, even though it is unmerited. We know Jesus gave up His place in glory to come for us so that we may know that love. We ask too that we can show grace and mercy to those who need it as we go through our days.*

Nancy Holland

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” Genesis 8:22

Wowza, that's quite a promise! The water of the flood had receded, passengers both human and animal have disembarked, sacrifices made and then God speaks the promise of today's scripture passage. Meanwhile, twenty-one centuries plus after the dividing line in the sands of time measuring from the birth of Christ you may have a difficult time telling farmers in the drought stricken West (or even supermarket shoppers looking at inflated prices driven by various economic factors) even accounting for the atmospheric rivers of rain that have recently inundated central and Northern California, that *seedtime and harvest* are continuing apace.

Even though I still find cold and heat sufficient reasons to tend to the thermostat that activates my heat pump to provide a comfortable balance of warm and cool air at the appropriate times of the year, there are glaciers melting and oceans rising and rising ocean temperatures inviting more hurricanes year after year to harass the coastal properties so many of us would like to continue to enjoy. It's beginning to feel a little like God set



the thermostat for planet earth, made that promise, and walked away to tend to something besides the climate. Then the power went out and the back up batteries in the thermostat ran down and here we are.

So, should we be worried? Surely there was a back up plan — a back up generator so to speak. Well, guess what! Our great, great, great, great, etc. ancestor Adam and after him, generations of generations on down to us were given “**dominion**” over it all. We, our parents, their parents before them on down to our children and their children after them as well as all our neighbors (and you may ask, “Lord, who is my neighbor?” and you’ve probably heard Jesus’ answer to that question) have been woven into the human fabric of the safety net for this fragile shiny blue orb.

But there are tears (read like airs) and tears (read like ears) in and among the fabric. What to do about those tears and tears? Noah, (not the first one) Noah Yuval Harari in his new children’s book, **Unstoppable Us** speaks very powerfully about this super power that homo sapiens have: cooperation. There you have it — our God-given **superpower!** Think about it. What have you or I or any of us ever done without someone else’s help; without standing on someone’s shoulders?

None of it — day and night, summer and winter, cold and heat, seedtime and harvest, none of it will cease — as long as the earth endures — and how long might that be? . . . as long as we **cooperate** with our neighbors, near and far and our children and grandchildren to whom we owe a future.

Since this is a Lenten devotional, why not think of some environmentally unsustainable habit you can’t seem to break and work on it. Recycle, turn off a light switch, don’t run the water while you brush your teeth. Celebrate Earth Day and the One who created it a little early this year.

Prayer: *“God we thank you for this beautiful planet and for planting us here. Help us to cooperate with our human families and neighbors to make it and seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter all endure. And so shall it be.*

Michael Crane

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. Psalm 34:8

In the classic film noir, *High Sierra*, Humphrey Bogart plays Roy Earl, a recently released convict who has been enlisted to lead a jewelry heist. It's a fascinating movie, although nerve-jangling at the number of things that go "wrong" from the beginning. It's also an interesting study in where Earl seeks refuge from the police and also from his own human condition.

First, he takes refuge in what he knows; that is, a life of crime. It's where he's comfortable; it's his identity. Then he takes refuge in a romantic relationship when he becomes enamored with a young woman, Velma, who has a clubfoot. Smitten with Velma, Roy ignores the fact that she is engaged. He pays for her corrective surgery believing her gratitude will lead to love and a life together. He was wrong on both counts.

Throughout the movie, Roy seeks refuge in other people, their promises, and in his own invincibility. The last minutes of the film are spent watching the police pursue Roy higher and higher into the Sierra Nevada Mountains, as he becomes more physically confined and desperate. It's a foregone conclusion that the film ends tragically.

Maybe the leap from Roy Earl to us is so unrealistic as to be contrived; yet, hasn't each of us has been confronted with the question of what to do when we don't know where to go? What's the remedy when every decision seems to be the wrong one, or every path is a dead end? There have been times when life's circumstances, our own bad judgment, or a combination of both have penned us in with limited options. *Where do we seek refuge?* Where do we go for help?

Psalm 34 is both a song about God's greatness as well as a call for rescue. It makes no (false) promises of life without fear, pain, sadness, uncertainty or desperation. It is not a silver bullet. But it does tell us, repeatedly, that those who exalt the Lord and who look to Him for answers will find solace.

Do **you** believe that?

Prayer: *Lord, your directive to “taste and see” is clear; yet, embarrassingly, we may not know how to do that. In this moment, enter our lives and guide us, even as we flounder, into finding refuge in you.*

Clyde Manning

Day 46

Great Sabbath – Saturday, April 8

Watchword for the day:

The Lord drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

Psalms 40:2

OK, let's be honest. How many of us have ever actually been stuck in a desolate pit or a miry bog? That's the kind of thing that only seems to happen in old cartoons (the “good guy” is down in a deep hole, or maybe stuck in quicksand) or in Bible Stories that we heard in Sunday School (remember how Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit and left him to die?) or in old Gospel hymns (“I was sinking deep in sin” but “love lifted me!”) or praise and worship songs (“You've taken me from the miry clay; you've set my feet upon the Rock...”)?

Based on the cartoons that I watched as a child (whenever we actually had TV) I would have thought that quicksand would be something I would encounter on an almost daily basis throughout life, but the closest I've come to it was when our Isuzu Trooper got stuck on a very muddy road in Sierra Leone and I almost lost a shoe when I jumped out of the truck. And yet, maybe desolate pits and miry bogs are more common than we might think. We often refer to negative situations in our lives as “the pits” and we are constantly endeavoring not to get “bogged down” by our present circumstances. There are many moments in life when we find ourselves looking up to God and waiting for God to draw us up and set our feet upon a rock and make our steps secure.

The psalmist, David, had many of those moments. But, here's the good news (for him and for us!): In the verse that precedes our watchword today (Psalm 40 verse 1), David says, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” That means that in order to draw David up from the desolate pit or

the miry bog that he was facing, God first had to *incline* — stoop down, lean over — and listen to him. God got down in the pit and the bog with him so that God could lift him up and set his feet upon a rock.

Isn't that the message of Holy Week and Easter? The Word became flesh — the Son of God became the Son of Man — God emptied himself and assumed human likeness — pits, bogs and all — and was lifted up on a cross so that we, too, might be lifted up to new life on the solid Rock! Tomorrow we will remember and celebrate how Jesus conquered that desolate pit and that miry bog, but today, let's just remember for a minute that whenever life seems to be “the pits,” or we feel “bogged down,” God has inclined himself to us and heard us and is with us even now.

Pastor Sam



*Watchword for the day: I lie down and sleep; I wake again,
for the Lord sustains me. Psalm 3:5*

We celebrate the spectacular miracle of the resurrection once a year. Every year, on one specially designated Sunday, we gather at God's Acre and proclaim, "The Lord is risen — the Lord is risen indeed!" We sing, "Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!" And then we look forward to doing this again... next year.

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a once-in-a-lifetime miracle worthy of a once-in-a-year celebration. But the psalmist reminds us that we have mini-miracles to celebrate every day of the year — all year long! The sun goes down in the evening. Darkness prevails. We go to sleep. Then, amazingly, the sun rises! There is a new day dawning. We awake to new possibilities, new hopes and dreams. Resurrection!

The psalmist says that all of this is possible because "the Lord sustains me." As Moravian Christians we believe that the Spirit of God — the Spirit of the Risen Christ — is our sustainer — the one who lifts us up and nourishes our spirits and leads us in our new life in Christ Jesus.

Maybe, just as we join in the Easter Liturgy once a year, we should have our own personal daily liturgy that would begin with the proclamation: "Because the Lord is risen, I, too, am risen indeed! I'm awake because the Lord sustains me. I live because He lives!" And then thank God for the gift of life — new life — resurrection life in Christ Jesus — today and every day!

Pastor Sam

Journal Notes



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Jesus

Son of God, Son of Man

Journal Notes





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