

LENTEN READINGS
FEBRUARY 22-APRIL 9, 2012



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

Prayer of Repentance and Hope

O Lord, who has mercy upon all,
take away from me my sins,
and mercifully kindle in me
the fire of thy Holy Spirit.

Take away from me the heart of stone,
and give me a heart of flesh,
a heart to love and adore Thee,
a heart to delight in Thee,
to follow and enjoy Thee, for Christ's sake,
Amen

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (AD 339-397)

Prayer for Restoration

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of my salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalm 51:10-12

Think on These Things

Daily Readings
for the Lenten Season 2012
offered by
First United Methodist Church
Shreveport, Louisiana

In souls filled with love,
the desire to please God
is a continual prayer.

John Wesley

Front Cover: The grass withers, the flowers fade,
but the Word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8

**WORSHIP SERVICES AT
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:**

Sundays:

Traditional Worship
8:30am & 11:00am in the Sanctuary
Dr. Pat Day, Senior Pastor

FAITHLink Contemporary Worship
9:30am & 11:00am in the Emmett Hook Center
Rev. Derek Joyce, Associate Pastor

Wesleyan Communion Service
9:45am in the Couch Chapel (1st Sunday of each month)
Drs. Carl Rhoads and Will Andress

Wednesdays:

Business Lunch
12:00pm in the Multi-Media Room, 3rd floor E&A building
Rev. Jonathan Beck, Senior Associate Pastor



Head of Texas Street Shreveport, Louisiana
www.fumcshreveport.org
PHONE: 318.424.7771 PRAYER: 318.429.6898

*The mission of the First United Methodist Church is to
embrace and extend God's grace
while passionately growing servant leaders.*

LENTEN WORSHIP SERVICES:

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 22, 2012

12:00pm in the Multi-Media Room

6:00pm in the Sanctuary

Rev. Jonathan Beck, Senior Associate Pastor

HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2012:

Traditional Worship 8:30am & 11:00am

Dr. Pat Day, Senior Pastor

Contemporary Worship 9:30am & 11:00am

Rev. Derek Joyce, Associate Pastor

Procession of Palms during all worship services

Wednesday, April 4, 2012:

12:00pm in the Multi-Media Room

Rev. Jonathan Beck, Senior Associate Pastor

Maundy Thursday, April 5, 2012:

6:00pm in the Sanctuary

Rev. Jonathan Beck, Senior Associate Pastor

Good Friday, April 6, 2012:

Music for Good Friday, 11:00am in the Sanctuary

Chancel Choir & Orchestra of First Methodist

Worship Service, 12:00pm in the Sanctuary

Dr. Pat Day, Senior Pastor

Easter Sunday, April 8, 2012:

Traditional Worship 8:30am & 11:00am

Dr. Pat Day, Senior Pastor

Contemporary Worship 9:30am & 11:00am

Rev. Derek Joyce, Associate Pastor

Flowering of the Cross at 10:00am
in the Eternal Flame breezeway

Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, Lust

Beatitude Virtues: Humility, Compassion, Courtesy, Devotion, Mercy, Purity, Peace, Endurance

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Readings for Lent, 2012

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy . . .”
Philippians 4:8

Seven Virtues: Faith, Hope, Love, Temperance, Wisdom, Justice, Courage

Fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control

Preface to the Readings

The Lenten Season is observed for 40 days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and extending to midnight on the day before Easter, omitting Sundays. The first Sunday of Lent is called Passion Sunday and the Last Sunday is Palm Sunday. The week preceding Easter is called Holy Week.

The original meaning of Lent is "spring". Traditionally, it was a time of preparation. Christians have long used Lent as a time to prepare themselves for Easter, by asking God to show them their failures and by repenting of their wrong doings.

Also, it was at this time of year that the Early Church instructed new converts in theology and church doctrine to prepare them for Baptism, to take place on Easter. It was both a time of learning about the Christian faith and a time of self-examination. Devout soul-searching resulted in repentance, self-denial, almsgiving, prayer and fasting.

The Lenten season is a time for new beginnings, a time of spiritual spring-cleaning; a challenge to reject evil in our lives and turn our hearts to God.

It is also a time to reflect on Christ's journey to the cross ending at the Resurrection, a time to draw closer to our Lord as we remember his great love and sacrifice for us.

*"This is how we know what love is:
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."*

I John 3:16 NIV

Praying the Psalms

Psalm 25

Show me Thy ways, O Lord;
teach me Thy paths.
Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me so to live,
For Thou art the God of my Salvation;
On Thee do I trust all the day.

Psalm 139

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

Psalm 5

Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.
Listen to the voice of my cry, my King and my God,
For unto Thee I will pray.

Psalm 8:1

Oh Lord, our Lord,
How excellent is Thy Name in all the earth:
your glory is above the heavens!

“Whatever is true...”

Philippians 4:7-9

These days it is hard to tell what is true. Not too long ago photographic evidence would seal a case in court. Digital photography and the ability to manipulate, overlap and create images make us wary of any photographic “evidence.” In one way we are learning to expect anything and to believe nothing.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul is using “true” not only to mean factually true but also true to form, good. In order to experience the “peace of God” (4:7) we have to start with our mind — seeking the truth of God in Scripture and prayer, looking at the world through God’s eyes. Then we can cling to what is true and good and beautiful according to the Creator and renounce what is evil and destroys people and communities. Allow God’s vision of a new creation to fill your mind. Paul tells us that when we are filled with such truth and goodness and put it into practice, we will know God’s peace.

As you enter this season of Lent I encourage you to fast and pray. Fasting helps us become intentional in our lives and slow down. Then we can look at the truth of who we are, what we are doing, how we are impacting others, and whether or not we are promoting what is true, good and beautiful.

Thinking on “whatever is true...” may prevent a lot of heartache down the road. It may even save you.

Lord, help us to be skeptical of the lies of this world that we may see what you truly want us to be and become. Guide us in our search and empower us with your Spirit to put it into practice. AMEN.

Rev. Jonathan Beck

“So put away all malice and all guile. . .

. . . and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” 1 Peter 2:1 – 3 RSV

A few years ago my view of Lenten penitential vows changed, when I was fortunate to hear Rev. Bill Mayo preach during a Lenten service. I have heard many sermons in my life, but I must admit that few of them have stuck in my memory in any life changing way. That sermon was one of the few. The title was “What I will give up for Lent.” In that sermon he explained three personal attitudes he wished to rid himself of.

Now, when Lent nears, I meditate and pray on what I want to give up. Here are my top three:

First, negativity. I often look for the worst in any situation. I want to give up negativity and learn to look for the best.

Second is anger. Anger is a sin of selfishness, the “look what’s happening to me” attitude.

Finally, the big one for me, I want to give up fear and insecurity. Often I worry, only to look back and see that my fears and worry were wasted energy. This is the sin of distrust, of not truly taking Jesus at his word when he said, *“I am with you always, to the close of the age.”* I want to trust the promises. What will you give up for Lent?

Lord, help us know what to discard to be more like You.

AMEN

Hugh Bailey

Making a List

When I think something is important to remember, I write it down. If it is really important to remember, I find a piece of tape and stick it where I cannot fail to see it. Birthdays, invitations, deadlines, phone numbers, scripture verses – all survive for me because I wrote them down.

The season of Lent is hard to get a grip on. It is a little sad, but then a lot of joy. To keep the ideas in a form I can remember, I found a list to work from, and to add more as I understand.

Fast from anger and hatred, provide a little more love.

Fast from indulging in judgment, for we are forgiven.

Fast from discouragement. God is in control and has a purpose for your life.

Fast from complaining. Remember the joy of the Lord.

Fast from resentment or bitterness. They will scar your soul.

Fast from frivolous spending. Someone needs your generous gift.

I am beginning to understand that prayer and fasting, humility and remorse for sinful attitudes, giving generously and cheerfully to bless someone else, all make it possible for Jesus Christ to reach me with even more peace and confidence. So let it be.

Jean Whitaker

*You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you. Isaiah 26:3 NIV*

On Giving Alms

*"If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:
for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."*

Romans 12:20

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those throughout the world who live and die in poverty or hunger. Give then, through our hands, this day their daily bread; and by our understanding love, give peace and joy AMEN

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India



"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare." C.S. Lewis

Blessed is the one who considereth the poor . . .

Psalm 41:1

"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? . . . And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would." John 6

"Prepare Ye"

*"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Handel's MESSIAH" Isaiah 40:3*

When we think of Advent, the concept of preparation becomes our main theme. *"The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"* We are getting ready for the coming of the savior who arrives on Christmas day.

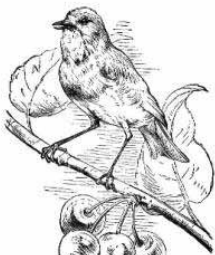
When we enter the house of God during the season of Lent, we prepare our heart and mind for worship in silent prayer, meditation, or the reading of scriptures and devotional hymns. Therefore, we are ready for the Holy Spirit to work through us as we praise and worship Almighty God, remembering the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ.

As we begin each day during this time of Lent, and all of the year, may we, in preparation, join the hymn writer in asking God to "Grant us Wisdom, Grant us Courage, for the facing of this hour," and for all that is to come in our hearts and lives.

E. Ray Peebles

*Come back to the Lord with all your heart;
leave the past in ashes, turn to God
with tears and fasting, for He is slow to anger
and ready to forgive. (see Joel 2:13)*

Lord, Hear My Prayers
In Your Holy Name



“ . . . whatever is noble . . . ”

*“So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child;
and since you are his child,
God has made you also an heir.” Galatians 4:7*

Being born into a royal level of society, or meeting standards of chivalry and courage, or making a public sacrifice for a great cause, all have the distinction of showing nobility.

Someone who is truly noble understands that there are inherent responsibilities in their lofty position, requiring them to think and behave at a truly virtuous height. Privileges of rank and status and acclaim are public, but the obligations are private.

Being an heir in the royal family of God confers the greatest nobility of all. The obligations are tremendous: go and preach the gospel, feed my sheep, be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, pray for those who persecute you and then forgive them, love all your neighbors, welcome little children, care for widows and orphans, take no thought for tomorrow . . .

The only way one could discharge these obligations of high rank is to remember who he is. Remember being rescued from a horrible destiny by the tragic death of a Friend, a debt of honor that can never be wiped out. Only by living in the memory of being hugged into and adopted by that Friend’s family can the obligation be fulfilled.

The sacrificial Friend says, “I am with you always.” That is what nobility is.

Dear Friend, make us truly noble in every way. AMEN

Continue in My Word

During the Lenten season many of us either give up a bad habit or take on a good one. Habits either work for us or against us. In my Daily Devotional, I came across this particular one taken from Daniel 6:10. *“Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed.”*

The author of the devotional states, *“Take any habit you practice, multiply it by 365 days, then multiply it by 70 or 80 years and you can write your own obituary!”* Simply put: great people have great habits. Jesus was a creature of habit. He went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and as was his [habit], he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” (NIV Luke 4:16). Daniel prayed three times a day in exile. His prayer life was so predictable that his enemies used it to set a trap for him.

Habit is a gift from God. It has been said that if you do something for twenty one days, you have proven that you can do it for twenty one YEARS! Jesus said, “If you continue in my word then you are my disciples” (John 8:31). Note the word continue; it’s the secret of true greatness. Success can actually be found in our daily routines.

This Lenten season I will take steps in building a stronger “routine and predictable” prayer life. I’ll focus on twenty one days first and then onward to twenty one years. I pray that you have a wonderful Lenten season and may good habits be yours.

Janet Fowler

From Everlasting to Everlasting

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen
Galatians 3-5

It is so comforting to know that there is a God who forgives us when we fall short of his will, and still loves us unconditionally. As humans we try to live our lives as we think we should, without asking God for guidance.

Can we actually say we consider how God would want us to live our lives? Knowing that God is omnipresent, all knowing, and loving?

Knowing that we have a Heavenly Father who is there for us 24-7 is truly a comforting feeling and one that will be with us for an Eternity.

Thank you God for loving us, for guiding us, for teaching us your word, through your Holy Bible and the Holy Spirit. Forgive us Lord when we fall short of your blessings. Teach us to love those who try to pull us down and to forgive them always as you have taught us. AMEN.

Margaret W. Jones

“On every occasion of uneasiness, we should retire to prayer, that we may give place to the grace and light of God, and then form our resolutions, without being in any pain about what success they may have.” John Wesley (1703-1791)

Judging Others

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Matthew 7:1-5

In Jesus’ name, and in praise to the Lord God Almighty, I share a testimony of God’s not giving, but taking away, in answer to prayer.

A blessed “No” comes when we judge in a hypocritical way, as the saying goes, “the pot calling the kettle black.” And it comes when we “can’t see the forest for the trees.”

The “No” comes when we fail to attend to our own shortcomings, and rather try to condemn others for theirs.

As glaring as my false sense of being “holier than Thou” was, in a particular instance, the Holy Spirit granted me discernment and the power to overcome my thoughts of hurt and retribution. I was blinded by the power of Satan’s deception.

Though I am still a work in progress, I now give pause before acting or speaking against someone else. AMEN

Through God’s love, blessing and mercy, and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we give thanks for salvation bestowed on all who believe in His name.

Anthony E. Morgan

Keeping a Holy Lent

Repentance and Return

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51:1-2

Lord, protect us in our struggle against evil.

As we begin the discipline of Lent,
make this day holy by our self-denial.

grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
one God, forever and ever. AMEN

Fasting and Prayer

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” Isaiah 58:6 NIV

Jesus, lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world, give us your peace.

Alms and Service

“One of the principal rules of religion is to lose no occasion of serving God. And since [God] is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve [God] in our neighbor; which [the Lord] receives as if done to [Godself] in person, standing visibly before us.” John Wesley

Gifts of Sacrifice and Grace

That God himself would pay the price of our sins is unimaginable. What a wondrous gift we have been given! The historical events of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection are overwhelming, *But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* I Cor. 15:57

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
I Cor. 25:55

Christ promised never to leave us or forsake us. In one morning sermon, Dr. Day reminded us that God is in charge of the details of our lives. We can turn to him for help instead of getting frustrated over little things.

God freely gives us peace which passes all understanding.
Hallelujah!

*Dear God, thank you for providing the sacrifice for our sins.
Thank you for your grace and love each day, in Jesus' name,
AMEN.*

Jere Saur

Do Not I Love Thee, O My Lord

Do not I love Thee, O my Lord?
Behold my heart and see;
And turn each cursed idol out,
That dares to rival Thee.

Thou knowest I love Thee, dearest Lord,
But O, I long to soar
Far from the sphere of mortal joys,
And learn to love Thee more!

Southern Harmony #40

On Being a Servant

"I thank him who has given me the strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful for appointing me to his service." 1 Timothy 1:12

The current gridlock and partisanship we see in Washington brings to mind my three terms in public service here in Caddo. Fortunately, it wasn't nearly that bad, for service was my motivation.

Three quick examples however, will show what we faced. First, I received a letter from a fellow commissioner telling me he "had written me off because I suffered from two fatal flaws." Those flaws were then described as "northern origins" and "a military background." Sorry! I couldn't do anything about either of these pre-existing conditions. Second, I was asked "Why don't you compromise and do things our way?" Sorry again, that's not my definition of compromise.

But the last example was by far the best. On a zoning issue, one commissioner was actively soliciting support and asking for votes. Surprisingly, I was not asked. After the meeting I asked this commissioner why. The response was the best complaint I have ever received. Very belligerently, I was told. "Well, I know you. You're only going to vote for what you think is right!" Guilty! I could only say "Thank You!"

I have often heard someone mention that they went to the service last Sunday. But "service" means more than that. 2 Timothy 14:14-15 talks about full time Christian service. Psalm 100: 1-2 is about serving the Lord with gladness. When we work and serve in our community, we show what kind of servant we are. Our example shows what kind of Christian we are.

Dear God, please show us our service and help us to do it for you.

Bob Brown

Jesus Christ is Lord

Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:11

Lent is a season which calls all Christians to a time of prayer and preparation to celebrate Easter. We are urged to use Lent as a time for repentance, self examination and renewal. Repent for doing those things we should not have done and for failing to do those things that we should have done.

The Bible makes clear that Jesus Christ is Lord. What does that mean for Christians? One's Lord is the ruler or master of one's life. We sing "He is Lord of Lord, he is King of Kings" If that is true then we are called to repent for our failure to love our neighbor as our self and our failure to give a helping hand to those who are less fortunate than we. It means that in all things, both major and minor, we will ask ourselves "What would Jesus do? What would Jesus think? What would Jesus say? If Jesus is Lord of our lives then we are not. This changes everything about how we interact with our fellow man.

Oh, Lord, forgive us for failing to follow your example in everything we do. We know that you gave your life for us. Give us the wisdom and courage to follow your example wherever it may lead. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. AMEN

Syd and Gail Nelson

I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. Psalm 18:1

Called to Righteousness

Luke 18:9-14

“Righteousness: the characteristic of being morally upright; being without guilt or sin.” (Merriam-Webster)

In a parable of Jesus, a Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple at the same time. The Pharisee believed that his everyday life should be guided by the law of the Torah and as a “religious” man, he followed the rules and expected to receive benefits from his compliance. In his prayer, he thanked God that he was not like other people, such as thieves, those who were untrue in sexual relationships, or even the tax collector, all of whom he judged to be sinners. He reminded God about his fasting and tithing.

The tax collector, a person seen by other Jews as a Roman collaborator, acknowledged his guilt as a sinner and asked for God’s mercy.

As usual in His parables, Jesus confounded logic and completed the story by telling us that the tax collector was forgiven, not the Pharisee.

What can we learn about true righteousness from this simple story?

- We are all called to be righteous.
- We cannot “buy” our salvation by our deeds.
- We must confess our sins.
- We must believe in Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer and accept God's forgiveness.

Gracious and Loving God: Hear my prayer: Forgive me when I stray from your path. Guide and direct me as I seek to lead my life according to your will. In your Son’s name I pray. AMEN

Rev. Hu Debo

I've Pitched My Tent

"I've pitched my tent in the land of hope"

Acts 2:26, The Message

Last August our church celebrated a remarkable achievement when our Children's worship center and the Emmett Hook Center were named by Bishop Hutchinson. In his sermon the Bishop declared that like Abraham we had pitched our tent in the land of Hope.

At Christmas Church Night I visited with an African-American gentleman who had recently joined First Methodist and regularly attends FAITHLink. When the program began, he happily took pictures of one of the young dancers—the daughter of a friend, he said. He made pictures, too, of the youngest children in the Christmas play. Later, he introduced me to one of the sheep, his beautiful five-year-old daughter.

He told me how blessed he felt to be a part of the church and to know that his daughter can enjoy all the activities available to her in a safe and loving environment. I thought of my own child, about her age when I joined First Methodist. I thought of the hopes I held for him and was sure this gentleman holds the same aspirations for his child to "grow in wisdom and stature and in love for God and man."

When God became man and lived among us, in essence he pitched his tent and built an altar in our hearts. In this ultimate season of Lent as we await Christ's triumph over sin and death, how many more parents and children, young people and adults—citizens who hope and dream—are waiting for us to be Christ in the world around us?

Dear God, use my hands and feet to bring Christ's love to the world around us. AMEN

If You Live To Be, Everything Can Be A Blessing, Even In Suffering

“Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart.”

Philippians 4:6

We spent twenty years in Oklahoma- Kansas building small churches, doing many jobs along side of other people, as to be expected when you don’t have a lot of people or money to have things done for the congregation. We met life-long lasting friends while working together with faithful people in these constructions.

We started with the building first, then set up folding chairs to hold services, and continued our objective from there as money was available to finish. God was always present to guide and direct us on our journey.

When we moved back to Shreveport, we concluded that we should join a church that was established and without folding chairs for the main services. We would be pew sitters, but you know that doesn’t work when you know in your heart that you were put here on this earth to help people. After a while, we felt the need to reach out and help in any way that we could.

God brought us to FUMC for a reason and we are trying to fulfill that reason with the work that we now do in this great church. We all believe that we come up short, but when we have God as our leader and we thrust out there and do the best that we can, that is all that God wants from us.

Father, thank you for work to do that will honor You. AMEN

Harold and Vesta Reed

Don't Forget To Dance

“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.” Psalm 30:11

The first visit with my teacher friend to their home astonished me.....only a few miles from a comfortable East Texas town sat their home, with no glass in the windows, an opening where a front door should be, a hot plate to cook for 14, and no transportation to town. We had come to bring some food for them. They were friendly, joyful and welcoming.

Thinking the girls might enjoy a trip to a restaurant, we chose a local buffet. As we finished washing our hands, one of the sisters started to leave the restroom. Danielle and Victoria called out in unison, “You forgot to dance!” I discovered that seeing a full length mirror was an unusual treat and it was their game to improvise a short and joyful dance before it -- spontaneous celebration.

In December of 2011, Danielle and Victoria were killed in a tragic automobile accident . As my thoughts flew back to that family, I was reminded of “Don't forget to dance.” How they lived those words.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” Matthew 6:25-27

May we always see the joy and not forget to dance.

In grateful memory of Victoria and Danielle

Kathryn Thomas

Teaching and Learning

This past Christmas I received an iPod from my daughter Cathy and her family. She and my granddaughter Kelsey convinced me that I should embrace the 21st Century music technology. I had to agree that nowadays there probably are better ways than LPs and CDs.

However, I discovered that one doesn't just turn on an iPod; instead, there are gyrations to go through to set up this cute little device. Fortunately, Kelsey was there to show me. I can get by with computers, but managing the complexities of recording entire albums of music onto a device that fits in a shirt pocket borders on unbelievable.

With enormous patience Kelsey began explaining these things giving me my first lesson in modern music playing abilities. (No doubt many more will be needed). It was her knowledge and ability to teach that caused me to consider how it is that some have such aptitude. Kelsey is a freshman at LSU studying to be a high school math teacher, and even at her young age her teaching skill is evident.

Paul said that we should, *"...continue to think about what is good and worthy of praise, true and honorable, right and pure, beautiful and respected."*

I so admire good teachers. They are the ones who mold the lives of our children, and they deserve our utmost appreciation. Their command of subject content and skill of communication are strengths not possessed by all. Teachers truly are the "good and worthy of praise".

Father, bless those who teach for they are among the best of us. Amen.

Richard and Frances Jones

Almighty God,
you alone can bring into order
the unruly wills and affections of sinners:
Grant your people grace
to love what you command and desire what you promise;
that, among the swift and varied changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. AMEN.

1979 Book of Common Prayer



O Lord and Master of my life,
give me not the spirit of laziness,
despair, lust of power, and idle talk.
But give rather the spirit of sobriety,
humility, patience and love to Thy servant.
Yea, O Lord and King,
grant me to see my own transgressions
and not to judge my brother,
for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. AMEN

St. Ephraim the Syrian (AD 305-373)

A Daunting Task and a Willing Mother

Acts 1: 12 – 26 recounts perhaps the earliest collective action of the disciples following the Cross and the Resurrection. The 11 met on a mount near Jerusalem, “together with Mary, the mother of Jesus.” The task was to replace Judas. Two nominees were proposed. One (Matthias) was chosen.

One of the first tasks of the disciples, following the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, was to gather together and choose a replacement for Judas. Joining them was Mary, the mother of Jesus. As a new spring comes, let us be reminded of that time.

Knowing their task would be monumental, the disciples immediately filled the gap left by Judas, electing Matthias. Consider the implications of their having conversations with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Thirty years earlier, Mary had made a hard journey to Bethlehem while carrying her unborn child. Over the following years, she guided and nurtured him through childhood and young adulthood. She was at the Cross when he was crucified and at his gravesite shortly after he arose. Finally, as the passage above indicates, she gave support and advice to the disciples as they began their task of sharing his teachings with the known world.

Father, may I reflect today on Mary, the mother of Jesus and all she did toward molding him in her own special way, and continuing to carry forward his message after the Cross. May I draw courage, strength and conviction from her example. AMEN

Purity

“Where do you get that living water?”...“The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” John 4:11-14

When I was growing up, there was a nearby corner ditch always full of stinky water. Long after the rain fell, and the other ditches drained, this one still remained full, with a toxic odor. You could see a thick, green layer of algae growing, and during the warmer months it became a mosquito farm. This single corner ditch was likely the primary mosquito producer in North Louisiana, repugnant in every way.

The simple explanation for the ditch being this way was lack of drainage. Because there was nowhere for the water to go, it stagnated. Water, the pure and elemental source of life for the earth, became contaminated and impure because it could not flow freely.

When I reflect on Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well in John 4, I am reminded of how important it is to have living water that originates with God and flows through us to give life to those around us. Apart from Christ, we are like this woman and the corner ditch: stagnant, dirty, impure. But with Christ, the living water surges in and through us, making us pure and holy. With this living water, we are able to give life and to lead others to the source of all life—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the living water of eternal life truly flow through us, to purify us and give us abundant life. Amen.

Rev. Derek Joyce

Live in His Oneness

“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.” John 17:22-23

The Christ taught us that we do not pray only to God, but to God of Gods, to Lord of Lords and to King of Kings. We pray to God who is without beginning and has no end. We pray to God who is eternal beyond time and space. We pray to God who creates and reigns over billions of galaxies, each with stars and worlds in infinite numbers. Yet, we are told to pray to the Supreme God, in whose Divine image we are created. God loves and hears our prayer.

Contemplating Oneness with God makes eternal life seem real. The words of Jesus recorded in the gospels come alive, as His words apply to his Oneness with the Father, and to our Oneness with the Father. We live and move and have our being in Christ, within us now and throughout eternity, in the heavens and on earth.

The purpose of our Creation is to serve God, our Father. We serve no divine purpose when we live our life in a state of fear and doubt or guilt and shame. We serve no divine purpose when we accept man and God as duality not in complete Oneness with Him.

Life is meant to live, experience, know and discover our Holy Oneness with Him.

Blessed are you, O Lord Most High.

Bill Bain

Near to the Heart of God

Unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord.

Psalm 32:10 NLT

St. Augustine observed that God loves each of us as if there were only one of us. Do you believe those words? Do you seek to have an intimate, one-on-one relationship with your Heavenly Father? Or, are you satisfied to keep him at a safe distance?

In the rush of our daily duties, God may seem far away, but he is not. God is everywhere, with us night and day. He knows our thoughts and our prayers. And, when we earnestly seek him, we will find him, because he is here waiting patiently for us to reach out to him.

With this security, let us reach to him today and always. Let us praise him for the glorious gifts that have transformed us, today and forever.

God loves you, whether you like it or not.

Dear Lord, for the love you have shown me and the blessings you have given me, I thank you and I praise you. Your Son died so that I might receive the blessing of eternal love, and the blessing of eternal life.

I will praise you, Lord, today, tomorrow and forever. I will praise you for your love, for your mercy, and for your Son.

AMEN

Leonard Gates

Easter is the Resurrection Story Lent is the Preparation for Easter

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5:1-5

We have some earthly experiences that we would like to climb out of. Times when we have been unforgiving. Times when we have not been a good example. Times when we have injured family by our greed, and times when we have used poor judgment – and we don’t know how to climb out of the spiritual grave we dug. We need the hope of glory.

A bit of Divine visited this world and left us directions to spiritual success. Love of life and love for others head the list, with forgiveness close behind. This Divine intervention entered as a baby and grew up to be a Savior of all who followed His teaching.

The second part of the story is the hope we have for a future relationship with loved ones. This hope is contained in Jesus’ words, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

Whether stuck in a ditch, or longing for reunion in Heaven, Easter is the celebration of hope that Christians have. I hope you have a meaningful Easter experience.

Rev. William E. “Wishy” Nolan

Through a Glass Darkly

*“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known.”* I Corinthians 13:12b

My life is marked by abandonment and loneliness. My father died when I was only six, and in those days my mother did not think it right to take children to a funeral. The needed closure or explanation did not come, and I often sat on the steps, after my mother went to work to support us, and waited for him to come home.

School was difficult, as other children had fathers, brothers, sisters as well as mothers. My father's absence made me think he did not love us and had simply left.

Mother never gave up on me, even through my depression and rebellion growing up. I was able to return her care when she became ill and to care for her until her death when I was only thirty-nine. She never stopped loving me.

Suddenly, I was in charge of my life. I felt lost at getting the oil changed, paying bills on time. My work helped me fill what was a lonely time, and I wanted to learn to accept what I could not change, but going home to an empty house was very hard.

My current prayer is to be able to forgive, to show love to the unlovable, to understand why people are the way they are. The season of Lent is a chance to start again working on becoming a better person, able to help someone else in the power of Christ.

Jo Ann McFerren

The Lord Will Deliver Me

He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. Psalm 40:2



So, they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

An official in the royal palace heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern while the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate.

“My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.”

Then the king commanded *Ebed-Melech the Cushite*, “Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” and they pulled him up with padded ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guards.

Jeremiah 38



So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels[of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Genesis 37



I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.

Psalm 30

**He who does not slumber or sleep
watches over you. Psalm 121**

I would like to share this personal experience, because it brought comfort and peace to me.

As I was waking up one morning, I felt a presence in my room. Then, a voice said:

**This world in no way compares
with the one to come.**

I got up and looked for someone, but no one was there. Then I knew – it was a gift from above. I felt bewildered and, at the same time, in perfect peace.

The experience reminded me once again of Psalm 25:

*Show me your ways, O Lord,
teach me your paths;
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.*

Emily Wrye

Guide us waking, O Lord,
and guard us sleeping;
that awake we may watch
with Christ, and asleep
we may rest in peace.

Evening Prayer

Off-Duty

A veteran of the Cold War gave me this story:

A chaplain on an overseas base would leave his office at 4 PM every day, and go to the bar. He'd sit at a visible table, with a beer in front of him, and acknowledge every soldier who came in, until he left at 5:30 for home.

One afternoon, the chaplain nodded to a new face, an airman in fatigues who looked tired and down. The airman got his drink, came over to the chaplain, looking at the ribbons and insignia on his uniform.

He noted the chaplain's cross on one collar, and then asked about the crossed rifles, a symbol of the U.S. Army Infantry, on the other?

The chaplain explained that he had served on the ground in the Korean War before he was an officer and before he was a chaplain.

The soldier sat down, and said wearily, "I guess I can talk to you, because nobody with those rifles can be all good." And they talked.

The chaplain left satisfied with his afternoon's work, seeing more needy people in the bar than at the chapel services. (end of story)

None of us is totally good, but we can put ourselves in a place where the people God sends to us can find us.

"There is none righteous, no not one." Romans 3:10

"But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Whatever Is Of Good Repute

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.” Proverbs 22:1 (NRSV)

“Hey, dad... I sort of got myself into a little situation.”

That was the way my teenage son began a phone conversation with me over this previous Christmas break. A few days earlier, he had driven to a local coffee shop to meet some friends. Being a fairly new driver, he misjudged the space pulling into a parking spot and, in his exact words, he “tapped a car and exchanged some paint”. Now, I had to give him credit for his strategically well thought out response. It sounded like he made a new friend! But it was his following comment that struck me. “It would have been easy to drive away, Dad. No one saw me do it, but I thought the right thing to do would be to leave my name and number on the windshield.” And that was the situation. The owner had just called.

Now, before you give my teenager too much credit, this situation had happened two days prior to the owner calling him and he had hoped he would get away with it. But it did bring about a great conversation in our home about how we choose to live when no one else is looking.

*On this Lenten journey, as spoken in Proverbs, it's a good name that shines brighter than anything we could ever own.
AMEN.*

Mark Sorensen

Testimony of God's Care

"I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live." Psalm 116:1-2

I lost my husband this year.
His passing was bittersweet,
As I actually lost him about four years ago
To Alzheimer's.

Dear God, I pray for renewal in my relationships with family and friends. I thank you for the people in my life who bring comfort, who pray for me and who are examples of your love. May God always bless you, love you and keep you.

Mary L. Caraway

Promises of God's Care

from Psalm 91: 1-6, 11-12

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday...For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

“... and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear Him.” Mark 9:7

Many “calls” come to us today. Some of them we should answer because of love, duty or necessity. But just as surely as there are calls which should be answered, there will also be calls to which we should not respond –calls that come from the Wickedness.

Amid the many voices around us today, God the Father tells us to hear His Son and unless we do hear the voice of Jesus, confusion will reign in our lives. Wherever duty takes us today, wherever business affairs may lead, above all other voices, calls, and demands, let us hear Him. Whatever struggle we face, whatever temptation, joy, victory or defeat may lie ahead, His Word to us is, “I am with you, I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Therefore, when duty calls, He is there to give grace and wisdom.. When the voice of temptation calls, there is no need to answer because Christ is with us with strength to overcome. So throughout every day, whatever voice may call to us, the heavenly Father says, “This is my beloved Son. Hear Him.”

Lord, give us the strength to listen to You and to know that we are safely in Your hands. Always. AMEN

Ron Viskozski

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”
Psalm 19:14

Life Change

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:5

We are a one-dog family and have always found a "rescued" dog through local shelters. Our current dog, Chloe, is a rescued Old English Sheepdog. Due to our hot summers, that breed is rather rare for this part of the country. My wife received a call from the local shelter and went to take a look at our possible newest family member. Chloe-the-sheepdog was dirty, matted, and had not seen a bath or a brush in a long time. Underneath her dirty exterior was an incredibly sweet personality.

After her bath (or two), a week or more of brushing and grooming, and, of course, a more than generous amount of family loving, Chloe now thinks she's ready for "Best in Show". With her new opportunity in life, Chloe has become a mainstay of our family with her bright eyes, wagging nub of a tail, and happy demeanor.

As we reflect on renewal at this time of Lent, we remember that we have all been "rescued"! With God's help, we can commit to cleaning up our own act and starting to make permanent improvements. We can always depend on our Christian church family to love and support us, too!

Lord, please give me your strength to take action now to make much needed changes in my life and to commit to those changes permanently.

Doug Baldelli

God's Graciousness

*“Stand up in the presence of the aged,
show respect for the elderly and revere your God.
I am the Lord.” Leviticus 19:32*

This Christmas past, I had the privilege of recruiting volunteers to help deliver poinsettias to our members in retirement, assisted living and nursing homes. The plan was for the volunteers to pick up their poinsettias at the end of the Christmas Day Sunday church service.

I didn't want to load a few people down with delivering them all, and I wanted more people to have the chance to bless others with a gift. It means so much for shut-ins to know that the church has not forgotten them, even when they're unable to attend services.

As the month progressed, I began to lose some of the volunteers due to illness, unexpected plans, etc. I continued to recruit volunteers and then another unexpected event would occur, and once again there were cancellations. I admit I was getting a little nervous.

At the end of the Christmas Sunday service, the Pastor announced that even if you hadn't signed up to make deliveries, all help would be appreciated. Through God's overflowing grace, people came with outstretched hands to help. I still held many assignment cards, so each person was a welcome sight. I left the sanctuary that day with a grateful heart.

Dear Lord, help us to be aware of the needs of the elderly in our congregation. AMEN

Ann Rhoads

God has given me so many gifts. . .

. . .this large church that feels small, a wonderfully tolerant husband, and three children, all challenging at some point. God also gave me a treasure beyond measure.

When my oldest child, now 28, was in K5, a group of us room mothers just clicked, and have been close friends for twenty something years.(We did add a few non room moms) We became prayer warriors and a crisis support system.

One year had been extremely difficult for us all. That was the year of the "Prayer Bracelet". Given as a gift, it was a visible token of our strong bond as Christian women, mothers and friends. I secured the silver charm bracelet in a shadow box to allow all the four charms to hang loosely and shine. Below each charm I typed its significance.

The first charm was a round silver locket. In HONOR of our circle of friends. Charm two was a crystal encrusted silver cross. In LOVING MEMORY of(two of us had lost sons in tragic wrecks.) The third was a silver heart, give THANKS to God for those who have fought and survived life-threatening illnesses and addictions.

The fourth charm, and perhaps the best, was a round cut crystal ball, In FAITH for a beautiful future.

Below the bracelet read, *"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-17.

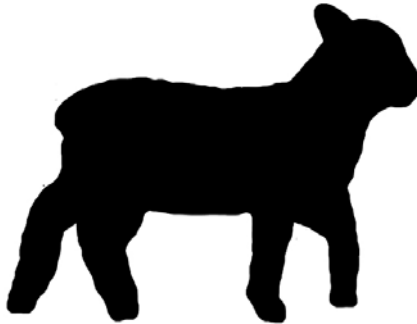
We still get together and give thanks to God for our treasure of lasting friendships. *And Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you. . . I have called you friends."* John 15

Brenda Kinnebrew

MARCH 24 | SATURDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK IN LENT

O sacred Head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns,
Thine only crown;
How pale Thou art with anguish,
with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish,
which once was bright as morn!

What language shall I borrow
to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee. AMEN



*“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth:
he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,
so he openeth not his mouth.”* Isaiah 53:7

Loveliness

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11 (NRSV)

Once a small boy heard a great commotion in the farmyard. Rushing there, he found a hen being savagely attacked by a hawk. He was too late to save her. He began to wonder why she had not fled to the safety of the barn with the other hens. Then the answer to that question became apparent as from under her spread wings emerged a number of little chicks. And on each chick was the blood of that mother who loved enough to sacrifice herself for their salvation.

This is an analogy of the atoning love of Christ for us. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets, and stones those which are sent unto you. How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*

Mark is reminding us that as Christians we are children of God for a purpose. And that purpose is that we should carry out a mission of redemption. And we gain the power for such a mission from fellowship with Christ, God's own son. We are children of God for a purpose; to carry out a mission of loving redemption.

Eternal God, help me to love enough to carry out a mission of redemption for my brothers and sisters. AMEN.

Dr. Carl Rhoads

God Is Love

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:37 NIV

An American couple visiting in India came upon a girl carrying a large basket of cow dung on her head. The condition of her hands and clothes made it obvious that she had labored for some time to fill that basket. And then the basket slid from the girl's head, landing upside down, its contents spilled over the ground!

The couple looked at one another, paused, and then began to help the now distraught young woman to refill her basket. Once it was filled, they followed her the rest of the way to her village. As she began to tell her neighbors what had happened, a man ran to the well to pump water for the visitors to wash their hands; a woman brought soap; another brought a towel. Then a man brought tea to share with the couple. The people spoke Hindi which the Americans didn't understand, but they understood the smiles and laughter and gestures of appreciation.

The couple returned later with an interpreter. Through him, they told the villagers about Jesus, His teachings, and His death and resurrection. One of the women in the village said, "We do not understand these things, but if someone would come and explain them we could understand."

This couple put Jesus' Great Commandment to into practice. That deliberate action opened minds and hearts of strangers of another faith to know the unconditional love of God.

May we, through acts of selflessness and kindness, reveal Your love to all the world. In Christ's name, AMEN

Love One Another, As I Have Loved You

Though we cannot think alike,
may we not love alike?
May we not be of one heart,
though we are not of one opinion?
Without all doubt, we may.
Herein all the children of God may unite,
notwithstanding these smaller differences.

Sermon 39 JOHN WESLEY

Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease;
where there are tongues, they will be stilled;
where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
but when completeness comes,
what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man,

I put the ways of childhood behind me.

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love.

Sticking Around

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

1 John 4:12

In July of 2011, I, along with five other young adults, felt that we were being called to live in intentional community with each other. We explain this by saying that we felt like God, through the scriptures in Acts concerning the early church, was leading us to share life together, meals together, worship together, service together, and prayer together on a day-in and day-out level. We felt like God was leading us toward a very holistic faith, drawing us to one of the lower income neighborhoods to seek restoration in life together, a community in The Yellow House of Highland.

In choosing to live in close quarters with other broken people, you commit to see the very best and the very worst of each other, and to see it through. One of the greatest examples from Jesus, that we can reflect for each other, is the choice to stick around, work it out, to bury self and choose love through dirty dishes, harsh words, hurt and blame, all messier than we ever intended. Persistence wrapped in grace and truth demonstrates that love does not fail. Love washes over a multitude of things and chooses to stay when others leave. And through this, we see God.

“For I am convinced that (nothing) . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” see Romans 8

Britney Winn

Living Your Dash

“ . . . It was to this that God called you; because Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

My mother passed away this fall. We held a funeral that was a celebration of her 100 years of life. The minister collected stories from her children, grand-children and dear friends to tell about her full and happy life. The congregation joined in to speak in remembrance of their shared experiences.

We were pleased that this minister had been her pastor late in her life, and knew her personally. He comforted us with a poem about a life well-lived:

The Dash by Linda Ellis (in part)
I read of a man who stood to speak
at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
from beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth,
and the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between the years.

For that dash represents all the time that she
spent here alive on earth,
And now only those who loved her know
what that little line is worth.

Thanks be to God for the Gift of life.

Thank you God for the Gift of your son, Jesus, as an example of how to live our dash.

Peggy O. Bennett

THINK?

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Prov. 27:3

"Think on these things" Philippians 4:8

Truth, Justice, Goodness

We are what we think. If we think only negative, envious, resentful thoughts we become those characteristics. Resentments are like taking poison and thinking the other person is going to die. If we envy what others are or possess we cannot know what God wants us to be. Negative thoughts are like a cloudy gray day. Positive thoughts are like being in the "Sunlight of the Spirit".

God wants His children to be just in their dealings with others, to look for the good in others and to speak kind words to our fellow man.

Our thoughts are addressed in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus on the cross is the fulfillment of God's love for man. Jesus is first, last and always. He has supplied salvation for our souls and a guide for living.

Dear God, replace my selfishness with unselfishness, my anger and resentments with forgiveness, our turmoil with peace and love. AMEN

Anne B. Rogers

*"(God) has shown all you people what is good.
And, what does the Lord require of you?*

*To do justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God."*

Micah 6:8

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.

Luke 17:15-16 KJV

The homeless and ultra-poor have been compared to the lepers of Jesus' time, but unlike those of His day that had to announce their presence with warnings of "unclean! unclean!" today they walk among us often blending in, unseen.

Our church partners with several agencies providing specific services to those seeking help. Anyone volunteering at the EandA building welcome desk during the week could share encounters with those in need. Many of our visitors are in "survival mode" and will take advantage of the generosity offered, but there are also others who are genuinely grateful.

There are those seeking a hand out.
There are those seeking a hand up.
Jesus offers both of His hands, scarred

Ten lepers pled for mercy and were healed that day as Jesus journeyed to the cross. Only one returned to thank Him. Jesus loved all ten of them to death. His.

Micah 6:8 reminds us that God requires that we "*seek justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*"

Dear God, remind me.

Jamie Sanders

If you enjoy something in this world
without saying a blessing of gratitude,
it is as if you stole it. **Talmud Berachot 35A**

Whatever is Worthy of Praise

“The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength, honor, glory and blessing!”

Revelation 5:12

The only right response to the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ is praise. His obedience to the Father was total. His compassion for humanity was endless. His righteous anger was formidable. His commitment to His purpose was excruciating.

The songs we raise, the scripture we carry, the bonds of community in Christ are joyful praise.

The quiet prayers and the public testimony, the alms in secret and public service, the love we show for those we know and do not know, all honor the example of Jesus. *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Colossians 5:17

Knowing that we can never deserve the position that Jesus gave us in the family of God, we find our joy in “being” and “doing” on His behalf. *His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’* Matthew 25:21.

We are urged to make noise praising God. *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre.* Psalm 150:3.

We are told to make a public display. *Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.* Psalm 149

Our only response? Praise ye the Lord! AMEN.

Rejoice, the Lord is King

*“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing.
In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus concerning you.”*

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

As I began writing this meditation, I had been reading in the book of Psalms. It was amazing how the following words from Psalm 118 took on a special meaning:

*I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.
Open to me the gates of victory, that I may enter through
them to give thanks to the Lord.*

Soon to follow is a favorite verse that speaks to my heart each day:

*This is the day which the Lord hath made:
we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Rejoicing is joy that goes much deeper than the merriment we often associate with happiness. We should be rejoicing for a lifetime of blessings that our Heavenly Father has poured out on each of us. We can rejoice in complete confidence and total assurance, as our Savior stands ready to welcome His children.

The Psalms tell us to rejoice because God has made this possible by Christ's victory on the cruel Cross of Calvary. And, His open tomb is the ultimate victory given by our Heavenly Father from now through eternity! Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. AMEN

Bennette Daniel

Searching for Good

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not to your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5*

She looked very young and vulnerable in her orange jumpsuit, speaking in a discussion group of women who were incarcerated. The session was on finding a hopeful purpose in unpleasant or disastrous circumstances.

In a confident voice, she explained, "When I got into trouble, there was me and my boyfriend and my girlfriend. They got off, I got put in jail. It didn't seem fair. But, while I have been here in jail, the two of them got in trouble again and it was lots worse and God made sure I was not there, I was safe."

Thank you, God, for the wisdom to see Your grace wherever we are. AMEN

Nan Dozier



*In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety.
Psalm 4:8 NIV*

Communion Hymn

Sheaves of Summer (Una espiga)

*Una espiga dorada por el sol,
El racimo que corta el viñador,
Se convierten ahora en pan y vino de amor,
En el cuerpo y la sangre del Señor.*

Sheaves of summer golden from the sun,
grapes in bunches, cut when ripe and red,
changed into the Bread and Wine of love,
the body and the blood of our dear Lord.

*Como granos que han hecho el mismo pan,
Como notas que tejen un cantar,
Como gotos de agua que se funden en el mar,
Los cristianos un cuerpo formarán.*

Like the grains becoming one whole loaf,
like the notes that weave into song,
drops of water merging in the sea,
Christians of one Body we become.

Cesário Gabaráin, tr. George Lockwood
Hymnal: A Worship Book #460

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*“Sing to Him, sing praise to Him;
tell of all His wonderful acts.”*

Psalm 105:2

“Sing lustily and with a good courage.”
John Wesley

APRIL 5 | MAUNDY THURSDAY

In the Garden of Gethsemane



In the Garden of Gethsemane,

Jesus Christ turns to look at us as he prays after the Passover supper. Are we asleep like the disciples? Belligerent like Peter? Sly like Judas?

The curve of his arm is welcoming and open, with room for the whole world.

The spareness of the sketch reminds us of how little we comprehend about the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

**Original art by Jamie Sanders
Interpretation by Nan Dozier**

Think on These Things

“. . .whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

from Philippians 4:8

In my own life, what I focus on has a direct impact on my feelings and my productivity. This may seem obvious, but I bet I'm not the only person to suffer from feeling sorry for myself, unsolicited anger, jealousy brought on by enviousness, and a whole host of other destructive thoughts that seem to produce little else but lethargy and more bitterness.

In this particular passage, Paul is not talking about fleeting impressions, as thoughts of temptation or discouragement come unannounced. He shows a better way to think intentionally, to purge toxic thoughts and break free from apathy that produces inactivity. Paul knew he had much to offer struggling Gentile believers (and us) in the way of instruction and example. He said to do as he did, not because he was arrogant, but because he was doing his best to live his life following the example of Christ.

On this Good Friday, resolve to think on these things. Fill your mind with attributes worthy of the character of God. Give God praise for the blessings in your life; don't complain about what you don't have. Focus your thoughts on the works of God in your life; don't fall into self pity and despair. Learning to control your thoughts and point them in the right direction will show you Christ at work, in you and around you.

Father, give us good thoughts and more love for You. AMEN

Rev. Pam Crews

Of Death and Life

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.*

For years I bore a deep shame. I'd let a wounded sailor die alone. In fog out at sea, we'd picked up injured crewmen. This one, about 19 years old like me, was stretchered aboard and put in my tiny chart room, at my feet.

I had to navigate scrupulously – we'd no radar – and get the men ashore a.s.a.p. The one beside me kept talking . . . and hemorrhaging. My handkerchief, the deck, the charts, were all soon bloody. Struggling to get the ship through the black fog, I wished he'd shut up – going on and on about his dad, his church choir, whatever.

Did I suspect, deep down, what he was trying to tell? That he was afraid to die, and wanted someone to be with him, to care . . .? We were near shore when he asked me for a cigarette, and died. Now, I knew. Those last miles, my eyes were full. The memory of him has never gone.

But, my guilt has! On Calvary! Jesus knew that his people would let him die alone, remember? "You'll scatter, each to his own home." Yet on the cross he cleared our names – mine, yours, everyone's – with "Father, forgive them."

Even more: giving Mary into John's keeping, he gave us Godly work to do – to care for each other. Then, He enabled us to do it, by opening utter trust in God. "Father, into Thy hands . . ."

LORD, teach us Thy truth. Thy word is truth. AMEN

Dr. Donald Webb

In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day,
up from the grave he rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine,
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man
can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Stewart Townend and Keith Getty

Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Psalm 96:1

“I am the resurrection and the life...”

John 11:25

Easter is the most important day in the history of the Christian church. Likewise, the resurrection is the most important single belief or doctrine of the church. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. Take away the resurrection and the Christian faith crumbles and collapses. The resurrection of our Lord is absolutely essential!

Jesus Christ is alive! Let us quit living as though he is still in the tomb! We should quit living as though Jesus Christ is dead; quit living on the wrong side of Easter.

Human history has never been the same since Jesus uttered this powerful life-changing statement: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” This statement was made at the time of the death of one of his closest friends, Lazarus. “I am the resurrection and the life...” This is not a promise of some obscure, future hope, but victory over death now and eternal life in the present.

Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life we do not have to be victims of our circumstances or even fear of dying. We can be victors! This is the message of the resurrection. Life springs from death. A desert becomes a garden. Beauty transcends the ugly. Love overcomes hatred. A tomb is empty! The grim and haunting outline of a cross is swallowed up in the glow of Easter morning sunrise!

He is alive!

Hymn of Adoration

Jesu, priceless treasure,
Source of purest pleasure,
 Truest friend to me.
Ah, how long I've panted
And my heart had fainted,
 Thirsting, Lord, for Thee.
Thine I am, oh spotless Lamb.
I will suffer nought to hide Thee,
 Nought I ask beside Thee.

Hence, all fears and sadness,
 For the Lord of gladness,
 Jesu, enters in;
They who love the Father,
Though the storms may gather,
 Still have peace within;
Yea, whate'er I here must bear,
Still in Thee lies purest pleasure,
 Jesu, priceless treasure!

*The Chorale Book for England, 1863
based on Matthew 13:44-46*

Informal Reading List for Lent and Other Times

A Day In Your Presence: A 40-Day Journey in the Company of St. Francis of Assisi. arranged by David Hazard. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1992. ISBN 1-55661-206-0 (Kindle)

A Lenten Hobo Honeymoon: Daily Reflections for the Journey of Lent. Leavenworth, KS, Forest of Peace Pub, 1999. ISBN 0-939516-43-8

Life and Holiness. Thomas Merton, introduction by Henri Nouwen. New York, Doubleday, Image Books, 1996. ISBN 0-385-06277-X

Practicing God's Presence: Brother Lawrence for Today's Reader. revised by Robert Elmer. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005. ISBN 1-57683-655-X (Kindle)

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home. Richard J. Foster. San Francisco, Harper, 1992. ISBN 0-06-062f846-4 (Kindle)

Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ. Dallas Willard. Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2002. ISBN 978-1576-83296-7 (Kindle)

Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent. Henri Nouwen. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992. ISBN 0-8245-1029-1



Head of Texas Street Shreveport, Louisiana

Dr. R. Pat Day, Senior Pastor

WEBSITE: www.fumcshreveport.org

PHONE: 318.424.7771 PRAYER: 318.429.6898

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