

GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



REFLECTIONS FOR LENT 2026



"SEEKING JESUS TOGETHER."

About Our Church

We are a people who are guided by our Mission: To Know Christ and Make His Love Known.

Our Mission leads to our Vision as we pray to become: A family of faith, trusting in Christ, immersed in God's Word, constantly in prayer; A community of joy, made new by the Holy Spirit, worshiping and praising our Lord, giving ourselves and our gifts to God's kingdom; Ambassadors of God's love, embracing all who seek Christ, providing Christian nurture, offering the hope of Christ to the world.

Whichever type of service you are seeking, there is a place for you. We offer different service times and styles. We have a small, quiet traditional service at 8:30am, LifeSong contemporary service at 8:45am in the Wesley Center, and a traditional service with choir at 11:00am.

We have a heart for serving others and making a difference in our community and the world. We also have programs and ministries for every age and stage in life to help people connect with new friends and grow in faith. You can find out more at www.gotgraceumc.org or on our Facebook page: @GotGraceUMC.

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REFLECTIONS FOR LENT 2026

“SEEKING JESUS: TOGETHER”

These personal reflections for the Lenten season of prayerful preparation are written and published by the congregation of

Grace United Methodist Church

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Dear Grace Friends and Neighbors,

This booklet is full of devotions that were written by the people of Grace United Methodist Church in North Augusta, South Carolina. This is a special gift to you during the season of Lent. Our heartfelt hope is that this booklet will help you experience Lent daily as a spiritual journey toward the glory of Easter. Lent is a time when we can step back from our very busy lives and center more clearly on what God has done for us and continues to do each day.

This collection of everyday thoughts and prayers speaks in a variety of voices. Each offers a small glimpse into the journey of faith of each person as they are seeking to follow Christ. They also reflect the vitality and extraordinary range of benefits of our church family.

The sharing of this booklet is just one way we, as a congregation, can reach out in Christian love to the members of Grace UMC and their families, friends, and neighbors in our community. We also hope that writing for this 3rd Annual Lenten devotional will continue to become an important part of our ministry.

A special thanks to our friends at The Church of the Good Shepherd, a United Methodist church in Vienna, Virginia, for their help and guidance in putting our booklet together. The Virginia church is celebrating its 27th annual *Devotions for Lent*.

We warmly invite you to participate in Grace UMC's Lenten season events. Please see pages 47-49 for a detailed schedule of services and special programs and consider joining us as we journey through Lent together.

We hope these short devotions bring you peace and joy. As we journey through the next 40 days, thank you for being with us. Our prayer for each of you is to experience God's love and grace throughout this season.

God bless you!

Today we enter the season of Lent with one of the most raw and humbling days of the Christian year—Ash Wednesday. A day that reminds us we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Not exactly a celebration, right? And yet, it has become one of my favorite days. No, not just because my name is Ashley, though honestly, how could I not appreciate a holy day that leans so heavily on ash? But because it expresses the very heart of our faith. We serve a God who meets us in our brokenness, restores what is lost, and brings beauty from ashes.

Wait, there's beauty in ash, in dust? That small, fragile, and annoyingly persistent stuff we wipe off the shelves and still find hiding in the corners, no matter how hard we try. Yes, that dust! Because when placed in God's hands, it forms humanity, gives life, and brings hope.

So, as we pause to receive the cross-shaped ashes on our foreheads and hear the words, “*You are dust, and to dust you shall return,*” Genesis 3:19, may we remember that this is not a moment of darkness, but a sacred clearing; a place where God meets us honestly and begins something new. Perhaps that's why the meaning of my name, Ashley, “clearing among the ash trees,” feels especially fitting on this holy day. The ash tree is resilient. After fire or harsh conditions, it sends up new shoots, rooted deep in life and strength. Its branches bend without breaking, which reminds us that even when life feels burned or broken, God brings growth, restoration, and renewal.

So, as we journey toward the cross and the empty tomb this Lenten season, let us hold fast to the words of the prophet Isaiah: “He will give them a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” Isaiah 61:3.

And if, like me, you need a melody to carry these promises in your heart, Crystal Lewis reminds us:

*He gives beauty for ashes,
Strength for fear,
Gladness for mourning,
Peace for despair.*

From ashes to beauty. From despair to joy. From brokenness to resurrection. That is Ash Wednesday. That is Lent. That is Jesus, who meets us in our mistakes, our grief, our fragility—even in the dust—and makes it holy.

So, this Lent, let us embrace the ashes and dust, trusting God's power to bring beauty from them.

~ Rev. Ashley Buchanan ~

Thursday, February 19

Psalm 51

When I was in college, I had a terrible habit of misplacing my glasses and forgetting to reorder contacts. Most days, my poor eyesight didn't seem like much of a problem. I could go to class, walk around campus, and live my everyday life without many consequences. I convinced myself my vision was "good enough."

That changed one night when I was driving in the dark and almost had a wreck. The headlights blurred into doubled streaks of light. The road was hazy. I couldn't tell where the lane began or ended. In that moment, I realized how blind I really was, and how much I had been depending on my own limited vision. It woke me up. After that night, I started keeping up with my appointments, prescriptions, and glasses because I understood what was at stake.

We can move through our spiritual lives the same way.

We assume things are fine because nothing feels wrong. Our relationships are healthy enough. We keep up with our routines. We are helpful, friendly, and even admired by others. Everything looks fine, at least from our point of view.

The problem is not whether things appear fine.

The problem is what we are using to measure ourselves.

When we compare ourselves to others, we may never see our own sin. When we compare our thoughts, motivations, and actions to cultural standards, we might decide we are doing well. But when we stand before the holiness of God, when we see ourselves in His light, everything changes. The blur disappears. The truth sharpens into focus.

This is exactly what happens in Psalm 51. David isn't just admitting he made a mistake. He sees the reality of his heart in comparison to a holy God. He recognizes his deep need for forgiveness and transformation. His response is not denial, excuses, or comparison. Instead, it is a plea:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Psalm 51:10

Like David, we often don't recognize our need for a Savior until we see ourselves clearly, not through the lens of our own expectations or the world's approval, but through God's holiness. His clarity leads us not to shame, but to mercy. Not to despair, but to hope.

The clearer our view of God becomes, the clearer our need for His grace becomes. May our prayer today be to see clearly. Not so we can despair over our brokenness, but so we can run to the God who heals, forgives, and restores.

Prayer: *God, sharpen our vision and soften our hearts. Help us lay down the illusions of self-sufficiency and look to You alone for mercy and strength. Amen.*

~ Megan Stafford ~

Friday, February 20

Psalm 51

My Bible notes stated that this is a psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David committed adultery with Bathsheba.

My thoughts on key points and what we should take away from this scripture.

We all have fallen short and need forgiveness.

Cut yourself some slack. Past mistakes are not meant to be a lifetime sentence. All have fallen short just like David, yet God still used him for good, and God will do the same for us.

Help us follow God's teachings and share His teachings with others.

God wants what is best for us by giving us Jesus' teachings to follow, which, if followed, will lead us to being the best version of ourselves. If we follow the path of Jesus, we will be a good example and help lead others to be the best version of themselves.

God does not delight in sacrifices, but rather a "broken and contrite heart".

A contrite heart is about being deeply remorseful for one's wrongdoings, feeling genuine sorrow, and being eager to make amends. It means recognizing our faults, feeling a profound regret, and then turning away from those missteps. It's less about guilt and more about a sincere desire for reconciliation and change.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Help us to acknowledge and turn from our sins, ask for forgiveness, forgive ourselves, and forgive those who have sinned against us. Help us to*

follow your path, be your hands and feet to help those in need, and set a good example for others. We may be the only Bible that others will ever read. In Jesus name, Amen

~ Byron Neely ~

Saturday, February 21

Matthew 18:17

When you watch children play at a park or playground, what do you see? I see running with abandon, smiles - so many smiles that radiate joy and acceptance for anyone who wants to play. I also see bravery in challenging themselves to go higher or run faster. Very rarely do you hear them standing around wondering who is the greatest.

When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, His answer was very direct: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

There were many sweet blessings of Grace's Return to Bethlehem 2025. I was especially struck by the children dressed up in their outfits from Jesus' time. Even though they were playing a part, as they approached our basket shop, they looked up at us expectantly, trusting with faith. They were walking humbly in obedience, as well as sometimes running with certainty! They were present with their task at hand.

Jesus wants us to follow Him in much the same way. So, walk with obedience and humility, trust unconditionally, look expectantly, and run with bravery, joy, and love!

~ Anne Comer ~

Sunday, February 22

Deuteronomy 6:5

"Love The Lord First"

Multiple Bible verses remind me of what I was told many times while growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in the Deep South — that God always comes first, then your spouse, then your children, parents, family, brothers and sisters in Christ, and then everything else. My parents and grandparents taught me what they had learned from growing up in the church.

God must be our number one priority because it is through Him that we have the opportunity to spend Eternity in His Presence. As the scripture

verse tells us, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” From this command to love, we recognize that we can share the love of God with others and teach future generations. Our relationship should be shared openly and lived authentically so others can see the joy and peace that comes from loving Him.

Sadly, today, because of the many differences in opinions, many families struggle to be in a relationship. While it is certainly okay to agree to disagree, it is heartbreaking when someone close to you decides that a candidate, country, and so many other controversies come before the love you have for God, your spouse, and your family.

We have family members we love so deeply, but realize that discussing anything that is opposite to their beliefs or even seeing them is becoming out of the question. I am praying harder than ever — not for them to give up on their beliefs — but for them to find a way to be in a relationship with those who love them. Loving your family through all of these divisions is not just about maintaining peace; it’s about living out your faith in a way that honors God and reflects his love to others.

While sometimes choices must be made to focus on one person over another, the goal is not to neglect any of our relationships. The biblical balance is allowing God to permit us to meet all our relationship priorities, inside and outside our families.

TODAY: Say this prayer: *Heavenly Father, please guide everyone during these troubling times to follow your path. Help us keep you, God, as our number one priority. Make us strong as we follow you each day. We ask you to soften our hearts and the hearts of our family members, give us all wisdom, and help us all love each other as God loves us all. In your name we pray. Amen.*

~ Pam Rawlinson ~

Monday, February 23

Psalm 89:14-16

You might have heard the saying that it is better to walk the walk than just to talk the talk. The belief is that just speaking words is not always as impactful as showing the action you are speaking about. However, the people I know who are the strongest Christians are not just verbally sharing the gospel but are serving others while saying so. They are talking the talk while walking the walk.

Our church mission statement is to Know Christ and Make His Love

Known. If you think about the Make His Love Known part, you might think it means just talk about Jesus as your Lord and Savior. However, what verse 15 is saying to me is that Making His Love Known is not just sharing the message, but to show in my personal walk what having a relationship with Jesus is about—showing how my personal walk is impacting the lives of others.

The Christians I see that are both talking the talk while walking the walk of faith are the most joyful people I know. I continue to strive to achieve that joy, and these verses in the Psalms are a good testament of how to do it.

TODAY: *Dear Lord, thank you for your righteousness and justice. I ask you to give me the strength to not only proclaim your love but also to show your love to the world. I pray others will see joy in me. Amen*

~ Briton Williams ~

Tuesday, February 24

Psalm 32:7; Hebrews 4:14-16

“God Welcomes Our Prayers”

Recently, I enjoyed hearing a group of Sunday School pupils, including our granddaughter Audrey, sing for parents, grandparents, and friends in the chapel. One little guy was obviously out of his comfort zone. As soon as the singing ended, he asked the leader, “Can I go to my dad now?” to which she replied, “Yes, you can go to your dad now.”

In the spiritual sense, we never have to ask if we can go to our Father. He is always with us and ready to listen when we speak to Him. There are times, though, when grief, pain, or despair over various situations make us forget that He is there. How wonderful, in such times, to have those who encourage and show support with food, cards, notes, texts, calls, or prayers that remind us that they love us and are showing us God’s love. God loves us, too, and it’s always okay to go to the Father in times like these.

Participation in small groups gives us a “built-in” support system. Our Upper Room Encouragers, both men’s and women’s groups, enable us to discuss practical life questions related to the day’s Scripture and devotional and to share insights and feelings in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship; we help each other see the ways God encourages us through Scripture verses, songs, and other individuals. These opportunities remind

us that God is always our “hiding place” and teach us that, when we pray together, we can “come boldly to the throne of grace...and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). It IS always okay to go to our Father with whatever is on our hearts and minds!

Today’s Action: *Give encouragement or support to someone in your family or in your community.*

~ Laura Lusk, Sr. ~

Wednesday, February 25

Ephesians 2:10

“Walking with Purpose, on Purpose”

There have been so many times in my life where I have found myself asking God questions like “Lord, what is MY purpose?” or “God, what would you have ME do?” In times when the way doesn’t seem to be quite so clear, and the world seems to be crumbling around me, I am drawn to Ephesians 2:10 to refocus on my purpose. This scripture reminds us of a powerful truth: “For we are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

As an artist myself, I know that a masterpiece is not rushed, accidental, or flawed—and neither are any of us. God intentionally created us with care, creativity, and purpose. When we feel overlooked, unsure, or not “good enough,” this verse gently corrects us and points us back in the direction of our Creator. Our value doesn’t come from what we achieve or how others see or feel about us, but from the fact that we are lovingly made by God Himself.

Our lives have direction. God didn’t just create us and leave us to figure everything out alone; He prepared good works for us ahead of time. Good works for us to DO. Every act of kindness, obedience, courage, and love matters, even when it feels small or insignificant in the moment. We don’t have to strive to earn God’s approval—we already have it in Christ. Instead, we live out our faith by walking confidently and on purpose into the purpose God has designed, trusting that He will guide us one step at a time.

~ Michael Keltz ~

I look up to the mountains.

Does my strength come from the mountains?

No, my strength comes from God,

Who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.

I grew up in a small Methodist church. The Bible I was familiar with was the King James version. In that King James scripture, it appears “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” That is the verse I learned.

And even now, it is still my assurance. I turn to God in the ordinary. I turn to God in the horrific. I am thankful my washing machine works on any given day. I know that God has been and continues to be my strength. He was with me when I lost my husband, Bill, many years ago, and still is with me each and every day.

When I pulled out last year’s devotional, I found that it sounded a lot like this message for today. Continuing in Psalm 121: 8, “*the Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.*”

~ Mary Jane Wisenbaker ~

Friday, February 27

Luke 22:42-44

Most Fridays, you can find me behind the reception desk in the Asbury Building. When you call the church or stop by, I am usually your first point of contact. I field requests for gas and rent money, and help with prescriptions and food needs. We live in a richly blessed community in so many ways, but still, the face of poverty stares at many of our citizens.

Also, I see the faces of church members and staff as they grapple with the human condition. I am amazed at how faithful our folks are as they carry their individual burdens. I have seen people with heart problems, cancer, and the weight of caring for aged parents or ill spouses, all in a spirit of love. Anyone would understand these folks retreating to their private lives, but their spirit of giving and concern resounds loudly with the fulfillment of their church duties and obligations.

Today’s scripture finds Jesus contemplating his very own human condition as the cross looms ahead of him. Luke 22:42 (NIV) has Jesus saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will,

but yours be done.” We see the humanity of Jesus as he wonders if there might not be some other way to salvation. However, in the end, Jesus accepts that cup of the cruel cross and thus assures us of our heavenly home.

One of my favorite hymns speaks to the faithfulness of our Father. The hymn, “Great is thy Faithfulness” by Chisholm and Runyan. Just as we, as a church, remain faithful in our prayers and service, our heavenly Father is faithful to each one of us as we navigate this human existence.

The refrain from the Chisholm and Runyan hymn speaks best:

Great is thy faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness

Morning by morning, new mercies I see;

All I have needed, thy hand has provided;

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to be faithful in our daily walk with you.*

~ Tom Dorn ~

Saturday, February 28

Matthew 5:43-45, 48

“Making the Impossible, Possible”

Jesus is always pushing the envelope of what we consider ‘normal’. Most of us love and pray for our friends, because it’s so easy to care for the ones who love us.

But love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?? We all have someone in our lives who makes it difficult for us to love them. Maybe they say hurtful things, maybe they have belligerent personalities, and maybe they even openly wage war against us. It is very difficult to love someone who does not love us.

Then Jesus continues with “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Love our enemies and be perfect?? That’s impossible!

As we all know, it’s so hard to be good. I find myself making promises like, I won’t think unkind thoughts about people, or I won’t say mean-spirited words to the person who just cut me off in traffic (even though they can’t hear me), only to fail minutes later. I can’t seem to become the kind, patient person that I want to be. I am a deeply flawed person.

Loving my enemy and being perfect? It's impossible for me. I can't do it on my own. I can't do anything good on my own, and I need Jesus. I ask for the gift of grace, his free, unmerited, unearned, undeserved grace. Only through grace can I become the Christian that I want to be. Jesus can transform us if we let him - He can make the impossible possible.

Prayer: *Jesus, you know my weakness and failings and that without your help I can accomplish nothing good. Help me to love difficult people and to bear forth your light in the darkness. Pour out your grace upon me and teach me to bear patiently all the trials of suffering or failure that may come to me today. Amen.*

~ Emily Mumford ~

Sunday, March 1

Psalm 121

I frequently drive on Martintown Road, particularly the stretch that passes in front of St. Bart's (Saint Bartholomew's Episcopal Church). When passing by, I usually try to read the church sign near the road. It often offers whimsical invitations to worship, such as "What's missing in CHCH? UR."

As I passed by one day, I read "Come in to get a free quote." After my autopilot driving brain came to life, I thought, "That doesn't sound right." After a few seconds, I realized that my vantage point had been skewed and my view blocked due to some creatively parked large vehicles in the church parking lot. As I whooshed by, I was actually reading the sign of the insurance company just down the road from St. Bart's.

With relief, I realized that the words I had read were an invitation from an insurance company, not the church. My initial confusion provoked some thought.

The helpful insurance company was offering something free. Their offer most likely would involve potential customers presenting them with a list of values and assets in order to be freely informed of how much the company would charge them for a policy of protection. There would no doubt be talk of premiums, deductibles, and term limits. The insurance company is hoping for a signature on a policy.

Psalm 121 proclaims a better plan. "*The Lord is your protector.*" (Psalm 121.5a NASB).

Hmm, the rest of this Psalm has no mention of assets. Elsewhere in scripture hear Jesus' words: "*Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they*

have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds!” (Luke 12: 24 NET).

Likewise, in Psalm 121, there is no mention of term limits, but “*The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.*” (Psalm 121.8 NRSVA).

Also noteworthy is the comprehensive coverage. “*The Lord will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul.*” (Psalm 121.7 NASB).

The insurance company knows about life, there will be trouble, and there will be losses.

Jesus was candid about life. “*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*” (John 16.33b NIV).

And, oh, what a “policy” He offers: comprehensive coverage, no term limits, no assets required, and best of all, premiums and deductibles paid in full.

The world is a scary place.

I’m signing on with Jesus.

As we travel this season of Lent together seeking Jesus, and as we travel through life, from where shall our help come?

Our help comes from the Lord.

~ Ronda Bryce ~

Monday, March 2

John 14:13

My grandmother's house was a two-story cinder block home on a farm in Corryton, Tennessee. Her kitchen window looked out over House Mountain, part of the Ridge-and-Valley Appalachians. Early in the morning, you could see the smoky white haze of the mountain top and the bright and colorful Morning Glories sprinkled about her yard, dripping with the sparkle of dew.

We lived in South Carolina but spent many carefree summers running and playing with tons of cousins on this magical mountain, secure in the unconditional love of a grandmother who had plenty for everyone.

I always knew that Mamaw Beeler would be looking out that kitchen window, eagerly anticipating our arrival. She would fling open her door and, with arms stretched wide, she would grab each one of us and hug so

tight, we had no doubt we were dearly loved. The kitchen always had the delicious aroma of her "country cookin" she had prepared for our visit.

In John 14, Jesus tells the disciples He is going to prepare a place for them. All the preparations my beloved grandmother made in anticipation of our arrival showed her love for her children and grandchildren.

How much more is the unconditional love Jesus shows for His children when He is preparing a home for us in eternity!

I like to think that Jesus is at the window looking out over His creation, watching for me so He can throw open the door to heaven, take me in His outstretched arms, and cry, "Welcome home, my beloved child!"

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unconditional love and for the joy I feel when I think about my future home with you in paradise! Amen*

~ Kay Poss ~

Tuesday, March 3

Mark 4:26-29

"Planting Seeds of Faith"

Each spring, I plant zinnia seeds and sometimes vegetables, then water and fertilize and carefully tend them, watching daily for their growth. Some thrive, but despite my careful attention, some do not.

In late fall of 2023, I tossed a few pumpkins into an untended part of my yard, thinking they would decay and maybe a few seeds would sprout in the spring. I gave them no attention, so it was no surprise when spring came, and nothing grew.

A year later, in the fall of 2024, Hurricane Helene raged through our area. A huge oak and other debris had to be removed from my yard, which was churned up by the uprooted trees and heavy equipment.

Then, in the spring of 2025, a spot of bright green caught my eye. Within a month, a huge area was covered with healthy green pumpkin vines and their bright yellow blooms! The growth was fast, and produced beautiful pumpkins - some of which decorated the church altar at Thanksgiving. If the seeds had produced a vine in 2024, the hurricane would have destroyed it.

This makes me think of how we plant the seeds of God's kingdom - sometimes intentionally through lessons, conversations, and acts of charity. But at other times, we may unintentionally scatter seeds - an overheard remark about our blessings, being observed praying over our

meal in a restaurant, a kind remark and ‘God bless you’ to a server or cashier, others seeing the importance of worship and Christian gatherings have to us.

We’ve heard:

“Who plants a seed beneath the sod and sees it grow believes in God” (author unknown), which suggests that the act of burying a seed and waiting for it to grow, even without seeing immediate results, is an act of faith in God.

The real gardener is God, and if we scatter seeds of love and faith, He will grow them in His time. That knowledge encourages us to keep scattering, keep planting, and to trust Him, whether or not we get to see the results.

Jesus planted the greatest seed for the kingdom of God when he lived as our example and died as our savior.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to remain faithful in sowing the seeds of your kingdom, and help us to trust you to tend their growth at the times when we don't get to see results. Help us to honor the sacrifice Jesus made for us by loving and serving others. In Jesus's name, Amen*

~ Polly Hargrove ~

Wednesday, March 4

John 7:53-8:11

In these verses, Jesus is in the temple courts where many people are gathered around him. He is teaching when a group of Pharisees brings in a woman. They told Jesus that she was caught in adultery. They tell him that according to Law, Moses commanded that she be stoned. The leaders are trying to trap Jesus to accuse him of not following the law. Instead, Jesus tells them, "*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone*" at her. Jesus then begins writing in the dust. The leaders slip quietly away, one by one. The statement Jesus made shows us to show compassion and not to judge others. We are quick to judge others, not knowing their circumstances or their character. We have all sinned, and before we cast a stone, we need to look at ourselves and ask, "Have I not sinned?" It is God's place to judge, not ours. Our role is to show forgiveness and compassion.

Prayer: *Dear God, please help me to always show others forgiveness and compassion and not to judge others, for I know I have sinned and need forgiveness. Amen.*

~ Cathy Moseley ~

Thursday, March 5

Luke 12:32-34;
2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Have you ever opened your Bible and read a message that felt like it was talking directly to you, just when you needed to hear it? This happens to me all the time, as it did one December morning, when I was reading my devotional on Luke 12:33, when Jesus was teaching us that by being generous to the needy, we are storing treasures in heaven that can never be taken away.

Now this message came at a time when I had just moved and was still paying two mortgages on top of maintaining my Mom's house until I could get the other two houses sold. I was really feeling the crunch, especially at Christmas time, and it was causing undue stress. (Yes, I know that He also tells us not to worry, and through prayer, I'm still working on that!)

While meditating on that passage, a text message came in from a friend saying that a cry was going out begging for help in providing Christmas gifts for kids in our community who would otherwise not receive anything. She wanted to know if our Sunday School class would be able to lend a hand. I got goosebumps! Not only had God's word brought me a timely reminder, but He also used my friend's words to encourage me.

I am blessed beyond anything I deserve, and it is all because of God's goodness! However, He doesn't bless us so we can take care of ourselves. He wants us to use those blessings to care for others, especially those who are needy. After all, He sacrificed everything for our sakes! I was reminded to "live with an open hand rather than a closed heart," no matter my circumstances, not just at Christmas time or during Lent, but at all times.

God will always provide a way, and as we obey, we are investing in our eternal future, showing Him our gratitude and bringing Him glory!

Pray: *Heavenly Father, I know that all I have been given is a gift from you. May I always remember to be grateful and to share my blessings as a sacrifice of love with those less fortunate, trusting that You will provide for all my needs. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.*

~ Debbie Harmon ~

Friday, March 6

Psalm 96

I am a nature lover. Always have been. Maybe being born among the dust

and dryness of the Andes Mountains instilled a love in me for anything green, anything living, anything colorful. All I know is that when I *really* need to engage in some serious talking with God, I need to be outside in His vast garden.

So much so that I spent this past October in the Western North Carolina Mountains with no television or news, no distractions outside of occasional texts to loved ones, having the most delicious apples as a staple in my daily diet, surrounded by the colorful array of Fall colors bursting forth with daily change. With nothing but my eyes, ears, and heart wide open, I had the most vibrant talks with the God who not only “made the Heavens” (Ps. 96, vs. 5), but also took the time to mold ME...and every one of YOU!

The writer of Psalm 96 must have been filled with the same kind of joy, comfort, awe, and worship that filled my soul during my time in the mountains...I felt filled to the brim, so much so that merely reading Psalm 96 was not enough...I learned that one needs to SING it...needs to DANCE with it. The tune doesn't matter, only the heart. Let the indescribable JOY felt in God's creation overflow as you “*ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name*” (Ps. 96, vs. 8) while the “*heavens will be glad and the earth rejoice, the sea will roar and all that is in it, the field exult, and all the trees of the wood sing for joy*” (Ps. 96, vs. 11-12).

During my time in the mountains during October, I longed every day to see the resident eagles of Lake Junaluska...Although I never had a sighting, I was privileged enough to learn where their nest is, which was awesome enough in its own right...as much so as the tiny but resilient daisy I saw peeking out of the devastation among the rocks left from Hurricane Helene...

Our God is a majestic God...how can we not worship HIM with our whole hearts, our souls, and yes, even with our warbling off-key voices raised in song!

~ Janis Collins ~

Saturday, March 7

“Start Where You Are”

Isaiah 43:18-19

Recently, I read Twice, the latest book by Mitch Albom. I was intrigued by the statement on the front cover, which read, “What if you got to do everything in your life again?” Wow! There are so many things I would

like to do over: my brief marriage, a long-term substitute teaching position, and my choice not to let God have a place in my life are just a few. I realized I couldn't do anything about the first two regrets, but it was not too late to do something to turn the last regret around.

I was in my 70's when I finally discovered that the church could provide what I was missing. All I needed to do was to find the right place. After visiting several, I determined that the right one was nearby Grace United Methodist Church. It even had a Sunday School Class, the Women of Faith, that fit my needs. I started attending two services, the contemporary and the traditional. The message was the same in both, and I loved the music that each service offered.

I soon joined an Upper Room group. I knew I needed to absorb the Bible as much as possible, so besides reading a daily devotional, I took several classes on studying the Bible. Socialization with other believers provided guidance when needed.

So what did I eventually learn that helped me grow closer to God? I learned prayer was important - anytime, anywhere, about anything. Reading the Bible was necessary to understand what God wants us to do.

I now know I love God and He loves me. Worshipping Him has become the most important part of my life.

There is a quote from C. S. Lewis that describes how I feel about this season of my adult life: "You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." Thank God for that!

~ Judy Simpson ~

Sunday, March 8

Exodus 1:17

Need a pick-me-up? Talk to a 5-year-old. In their eyes, I'm the best teacher ever. For some, I'm the only teacher they've ever had, but I will still take the compliment. That's the same with every group of young children I've taught, but each group of students is also a little different. The difference this year is that I've often felt like Moses leading the Israelites in the wilderness. We are wandering through this year, trying to find our way. We have overcome some significant challenges, but there is still a lot of hard journeying to do. It's going to pay off, but we are more than halfway through the year, and the grumbling and quarreling are quite strong with this group. These kids do not hold back. Not with me. Not with their peers. We've been nicknamed "The Taylor Tornadoes." We play

hard, and we work hard when the right conditions and needs are met.

In Exodus 17:1-7, we find Moses and the Israelites going wherever God led, and the people were not great travel companions. Their lives had been spared. They were actively being delivered. The payoff was going to be huge. However, they tested God. They grumbled and quarreled. God still gave them what they needed, water from the rock. Moses struck the rock as God instructed, but the text also says, "*I will be standing there in front of you.*" God didn't say, "Meet you in the promised land. Turn left at Horeb." God was there. God was leading. God was delivering and saving. Still, they complained.

Life only moves in one direction. We can't go back to Egypt, even though what's ahead might feel worse or more complicated than where we've been. Sometimes, whatever we are facing presently might not be ideal. As my kindergarteners are learning, not everything is fun or easy. Sometimes you are stuck in a place you'd rather not be or among people that you'd rather not be with. Still, God leads. God is there and can provide what we need. As we journey through this season, here are some questions to ask ourselves. Where are you wandering to? Where have you come from? What are the wild and barren spaces in your life? How often do we let discomfort and negativity rule? Where is God in your story? Who might need a companion on their journey?

Prayer: *God, you've seen our quarrels and heard our complaints. Thank you for not leaving us alone in our wallowing. Thank you for your provision and presence. Amen.*

~ Carissa Taylor ~

Monday, March 9

**Proverbs 27:19;
John 3:21; James 2:15-17**

These verses from Proverbs, John, and James are three of my favorites. My goal in this season of Lent is to find more ways to be of service in our community and focus more fully on the blessings that we have in our earthly life, trusting God to guide all my thoughts and actions.

As I look back nearly thirty years to my first mission trip to Bolivia, I feel blessed to have been part of Grace's first construction mission serving the "poorest of the poor" in Escoma. Working alongside local citizens and our team to help build a church was a major turning point in my faith journey. The people's parting message to us ... "don't forget us" ... and, on our return home, the sight of the abundant resources that we enjoy

here at home can still bring me to tears. The indigenous people of Bolivia, especially the children, showed so much joy and peace, despite living in what we consider to be poverty. We saw the same in the people of Limon and Icotéas, Honduras, as our 2000 mission team helped to build a small medical clinic to serve their towns. We could see the same in those whom we helped in our community through missions like Salkehatchie, WARM, and others. Was it their faith in God that we saw in their eyes, or did they see Christ reflected in us through our desire to help them? I pray it was both.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, guide me through life's changes and turmoil and let me find peace by being of service to others. Amen*

~ Bruce Wilson ~

Tuesday, March 10

Psalm 81

Psalm 81 is a song of invitation: God calling the community to gather, remember, and respond. It begins with celebration and ends with a plea for His people to return to unified obedience and communal relationship. In a world that often praises independence, the psalm reminds us that God forms us into a community shaped by shared worship, mutual care, and collective obedience.

The psalm opens with a command to sing. Notice it is not addressed to one person: “*Sing aloud... shout for joy... raise a song.*” These are plural invitations. This is worship that cannot be contained within a single voice. The Methodist tradition has long cherished singing; not merely as music but as a spiritual practice that binds us together. Charles Wesley, the poet of our tradition, understood that shared song forms a shared faith. When we lift our voices together, we become more than individuals; we become the Body of Christ.

But Psalm 81 also carries memory. God reminds Israel, “*I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.*” The story of deliverance from Egypt was not a private rescue but a communal salvation. Likewise, in our own journeys, God’s grace is often experienced not only personally but through the witness and support of others. We are shaped by the testimonies of the saints (and sinners) who walk beside us, who remind us of God’s past faithfulness when we ourselves forget.

Even more, the psalm also reveals a grieving God: “*But my people did not listen... Israel would not submit to me.*” This sorrow is not anger at isolated

disobedience, but heartbreak over a people who drifted away, together. God's yearning, "*Oh, that my people would listen to me*" is a longing for restored relationships, for a community aligned with God's heart, and only His heart.

There is so much in the world right now that can cause us to feel alone or without a community. We only have to turn on the news or scroll through a few minutes of social media to realize how divided the world is. I wonder how Jesus would feel if he were to sit in on one of our services. Would he feel a connection of fellowship among us while we sing? Are we overpowering the disconnect we see and feel when we leave our church with a shared voice of love for God, love for each other, and love for ourselves? Let us unite our voices and show the world that, even with our many differences, we are one voice, singing praise with each other for the God we all love.

~ Heather Vaught ~

Wednesday, March 11

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

How often have we looked around us, seen that something was wrong, and thought to ourselves, "I know exactly what needs to be done, if they would only listen to me!"? If we are truthful, we will admit our own prejudices and preconceived notions are often personal stumbling blocks in our lives. Having just navigated difficult debates within our denomination and nation, it is interesting how this passage sums up where we as a people often look for answers. It does not matter which "side of the fence" one is on – an honest assessment of human history is enough proof to show that no leader or ideology is ever entirely right. If so, would we be in the position we are in now? Will any human effort currently planned result in the "be all and end all" of solutions? No! As a people, we are broken, selfish, and self-centered. We are like the Jews and Greeks of Jesus' day. The Jews had a preconceived idea of who the Messiah would be and how the Messiah was to carry out God's work; anything different did not fit their definition and was to be rejected. Likewise, the Greeks were a proud people, placing all their hopes in the single basket of "wisdom and philosophy," rejecting the notion that Christ (incarnate God) would ever be sacrificed for humanity – for them, that was just folly!

Both sides missed the point. Jew and Gentile failed to realize that it was not God's place to do humanity's bidding, as the broken world saw fit. Rather, the "perceived" foolishness of God was (and is) wiser than the

most learned musings of humanity.

The Corinthians wanted strong, brilliant orators – such as Apollos or Cephas. For them, Paul was a stammering, bumbling fool who did not have a clue about what he was saying. And yet, God used Paul, resulting in his becoming the greatest evangelist of his day, and possibly of all time. God’s foolishness? – or, God’s wisdom!

~ Rev. Terry Roof ~

Thursday, March 12

Ephesians 4:32

Lent is an opportunity for us to intentionally reflect on our faith. The goal is to leave Lent with a renewed sense of purpose and devotion to God. For today’s devotion, I decided to focus on the themes of faith and forgiveness. For me, faith is my personal and active relationship with God. It encompasses trust, belief, and discipleship. Faith is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a transformational one. I believe that faith is both a gift and a choice. A choice we make each day.

Faith is closely linked to forgiveness. Forgiveness is a way to release bitterness and to heal from past hurts. Holding onto grudges can create a spiritual block and hinder one’s relationship with God and with others. Forgiveness is an act of faith that opens the door to spiritual healing and deeper relationships. Faith enables us to shift the focus from the things that hurt us to our belief in God. Knowing that God will work through the situation for us.

Faith can also cultivate a deeper sense of compassion and empathy, allowing us to see the humanity in others and recognize that everyone makes mistakes. By choosing to forgive, we are not only opening the door to healing but also experiencing the freedom and joy that come from letting go of past pain.

My own personal story includes instances of being deeply hurt by individuals close to me... both family and friends. At earlier times in my life, I did not always rely on God to walk me through difficult situations. I thought I had to do it on my own. I would often allow myself to be the victim. Always waiting for someone to apologize for what they had done or said or how they had hurt me.

As I grew older (and wiser), I learned to forgive people. And for that I am grateful. Patience, prayer, practicing compassion, working with a therapist, and setting boundaries are some of the ways I have been able to more

easily practice forgiveness. The Bible tells us that we should forgive because God forgives them. And, as a bonus, I have learned that forgiveness is necessary for my own spiritual well-being.

~ Pam Emory-Siedling~

Friday, March 13

Ephesians 5:1-9

When I was in my twenties, my favorite hobby was playing slow-pitch softball league games during weekdays and tournaments on the weekends. Double-elimination tournaments were typically scheduled on Friday and Saturday, but as games were played, championship games often ran after midnight. Since our team was above average, I often arrived home well after midnight at 1-2am, depending on the tournament location. Before going to bed, I always set my alarm clock for attending church later that day and followed through with my intentions. Looking back, this was an important example as a young adult of maintaining a discipline of regularly attending worship services on Sunday mornings. My teammates seemed to notice and respect how I carried myself as they nicknamed me “Clean Kev.”

My oversimplified takeaway on the referenced scripture is to set a good example in all that we do. Setting a good example is certainly the goal, but how is that accomplished? For me personally, I rarely consciously set out to be a good example with routine daily activities. For me, setting a good example starts with disciplined regular worship (e.g., corporate worship, small groups, Bible study). This helps me stay calibrated for living “as children of light.” Also, I believe that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, “nudges” guide me when a good choice is needed that could set a good example or remind me when any questionable behavior does not set a good example. The combination of regular worship and the Holy Spirit stands out as a fundamental element of my life.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunities to set a positive example through our daily choices and commitments. Help us remain faithful in worship and attentive to the gentle guidance of Your Holy Spirit. May our actions reflect Your goodness, and may we inspire others to walk in Your light. Strengthen us to live with integrity, discipline, and love, so that our lives honor You in all we do. Amen.*

As you go about this Lenten season, remember, you do not walk alone. The Holy Spirit is your guide and strength, gently nudging you back toward the light when you stray. Lean into regular worship and fellowship

and let God's love shine through you in every circumstance.

~ Kevin Scaggs ~

Saturday, March 14

John 2:13-22

When my oldest two children were two and three years of age, our family took a trip to the Luray Caverns (for several months after, the oldest told friends and family about his trip to the YuWay Cavuns), in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It was a beautiful, sunny fall day when we entered and began our descent under the earth. The way was clearly lit along the path, so our group of about thirty people had no problem following our young guide as he pointed out stalactites, stalagmites, pools of water, and other amazing points of beauty.

When we reached a depth of over 100 feet, our guide stopped to share some facts and history about the caverns. Then, he said that in a few minutes, he was going to turn off all the lights, and we would experience the phenomenon of total darkness. I was fine until he added that this was forbidden by their insurance company, but no one had ever gotten hurt before. At that point, when no one else spoke up, I asked, "How long are the lights going to be off?"

Everyone laughed, and our guide assured us that it wouldn't be long, and before anything else could be said, he flipped a switch.

After a few seconds, I heard some murmurs from the crowd and knew we were all experiencing something that could be experienced in only a few places on earth. My eyes, accustomed to automatically adjusting to gradients of light, searched to no avail for just a gleam, a glimmer, a spark of light, but none was to be found. The cave was absolutely, completely, and utterly devoid of any light source. After about 30 seconds, which seemed endless, the guide turned the lights back on to multiple sighs of relief.

As I was reading today's passage from the Gospel of John, I noted that it is filled with profound truth and insight, and my trip to the cave immediately popped into mind, and as I encountered the Word, the Life, the Light. I thought about the complete and total darkness that existed before the creation of the world and all that is in it. The writer of John tells us that the Word, the Life, the Light became flesh. That Light can never be extinguished, obscured, or overcome. That light is Jesus. Even if we find ourselves in physical or spiritual darkness, as followers of Jesus

Christ, we can be assured the Light is still here to lead us physically and spiritually. We do not have to fear the dark because we know the ever-present, eternal Light.

A Prayer for Today: *Loving Heavenly Father, during this season of Lent, as we ponder the past darkness of our lives, we thank you for the Light that has brought us salvation. Let us not hide our lights under a basket, but enable us to spread the true Light, Jesus Christ, by reflecting him wherever we go.*

~ Rev. Sandy Heslop ~

Sunday, March 15

1 Samuel 16:113

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*

This poem, “The Riddle of Strider,” is written by Bilbo in honor of his friend Aragorn, the long-awaited king, in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Its place in the story helps identify the true king, unknown to the hero Frodo at the time.

Apparently, it can be difficult to tell who a true king is by appearances.

“All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost...”

It seems King David, soon to become the iconic king and focus of the covenant with the People of God in the Old Testament, does not strike a kingly figure. He is the youngest, smallest, and a lowly shepherd. Even God’s prophet, Samuel, can’t imagine the possibility that *this* person could be called by God. And yet, it is while he is in this lowly state that all his highest virtues are displayed: Faithful, obedient, courageous, thoughtful. David is not made admirable and virtuous by being king--if anything, it’s the opposite! Power corrupts (another thing Tolkien teaches us!) David’s worth and call are all present now, before any accolade, crown, or glory.

So it is with us.

~ Rev. Patrick Taylor ~

Psalms, the Hebrew hymn book, uses the word “trust” frequently in its 150 songs, referring to confidence in God’s providence and care for Israel. The story of Job is also a lesson in this same assurance. Suffering through great losses, Job proclaims, “Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him.”

Have you ever trusted someone and had your trust betrayed? It is deeply hurtful to have a friend or a relative let you down. Jesus had that experience when His close companions denied Him and deserted Him after celebrating Passover together.

Mocked, beaten, and ridiculed by some who had seen Him as a revolutionary savior, His fellow Jews called for His execution. Jesus died, still trusting in God’s goodness.

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark relate that Jesus recited from Psalm 22 as He hung upon the cross. That psalm begins with a plea: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” It concludes with hope and trust.

I have known many trustworthy people. My late husband, Mal, was respected for many reasons, especially for his integrity. He once cited a hymn as a simple, not “simplistic,” summation of the life of a Christian. “*Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*”

I trusted Mal. I trust that Jesus, by example and by teachings, showed us the way to live our best life. “All the rest is commentary.”

Prayer: *Lord of All, despite the evil, pain, and suffering we see in the world, teach us to trust in the power of goodness. Show us how to forgive ourselves and to forgive others when we grow discouraged. We thank you for those who encourage us to trust. Amen.*

~ Sally McKibben ~

We have all been impressed with the latest computer programs that supposedly have the answers to all the questions we may pose. Who else besides ChatGPT.com, and other AI platforms, could you ask, “What are the elevation ranges of the Andes mountains?” and receive the answer instantly - “0 to 22,838 feet”. Remember the days when we would travel to a library and conduct research that would take hours? We *actually* checked books out of the library! If they were not returned before or on the due date, we were fined.

Information and data are wonderful. But what about the wisdom to interpret data or apply data and information to real-life circumstances? I have always loved the Book of Proverbs. There is more wisdom in that book than in any other book I have ever read. It is still applicable to all of the world's problems, even though it was written approximately in the 900s BCE. It covers a wide range of topics, including youth and discipline, business matters, family life, self-control and resisting temptation, marriage, seeking the truth, wealth and poverty, immorality, and, of course, wisdom. Let's take the following modern-day topics and review some of the passages that might address them. All of the citations below are from the Book of Proverbs:

Economics – 11:4 and 24 “Riches won't help on the day of judgment, but right living is a safeguard against death.” “It is possible to give freely and become more wealthy, but those who are stingy will lose everything.” 13:11 “Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows.”

Government – 11:11 and 14 “Upright citizens bless a city and make it prosper...” “Without wise leadership, a nation fails; with many counselors, there is safety.”

Family – 1:8 “*Listen, my child, to what your father teaches you*”. If you did not have a good father, this will inspire you to be a good father. 10:1 “*A wise child brings joy to a father.*”

God – 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths.”

Good v. Evil – 1:10 “...*if sinners entice you, turn your back on them!*” Oh, how the application of this verse could solve so many problems. 2:12 “*Wisdom will save you from evil people...*” We first must acknowledge that there are evil people in the world.

Relationships – 10:32 “The godly speak words that are helpful, but the wicked speak only what is corrupt.”

Work – 10:4 and 16 – “Lazy people are soon poor; hard workers get rich.” “The earnings of the godly enhance their lives, but evil people squander their money on sin.”

These verses cover only the contents through Chapter 13 of this 31-chapter book. Many more wise verses are there.

Prayer: *Lord, let us never forget that true Wisdom comes from you. Amen*

~ David Blevins ~

Wednesday, March 18

John 1:15-27

"Just Keep Swimming"

Have you ever felt like all was lost? Perhaps everything seemed to go wrong during a very long day, or maybe you experienced a very difficult time with no sign of your circumstances improving. During those moments, life's worries can cloud our vision and make us doubt our direction.

In the movie *Finding Dory*, a lovable blue tang fish, Dory, goes on a journey to find her parents. Suffering from short-term memory loss, she has a difficult time finding her way back home. Feelings utterly lost and close to giving up, she says, "I've lost everyone. There's nothing I can do. I forget. That's what I do best." There's a moment where she cries out and repeats, "What do I do? What do I do?"

After that moment of despair, she starts to notice her surroundings. She focuses and looks for signs of what to do or where to go next. Suddenly, she spots one shell, and then another, and discovers paths and paths of shells all leading to a little place off in the distance – home. For years, her parents stayed there and made paths of shells stretching in all directions so that she could follow the shells and find her way home. They never gave up on her, always believing she would find her way back to them. This touching scene mirrors our spiritual journey with God.

Like Dory, we often find ourselves lost in life's chaos and confusion. We may feel isolated, distant from God, and overwhelmed by our circumstances. Yet, even in our darkest times, God's presence is steadfast. He leaves us "shells"—small, consistent signs of His love and guidance—reminding us that He is always near, waiting to lead us back home.

Just as Dory's parents never stopped believing in her return, God never stops loving us and lighting our path, even when we feel most lost. Trust in His unfailing love and follow the "shells" He places in our lives, guiding us back to His welcoming arms.

~ Lauren Vande-Stouwe~

I am one of those people who start the day reading or at least scanning the news. BBC, CNN, Fox, ABC, and several others. I even subscribe to several news feeds to get more or different viewpoints and perspectives. As I look at everything going on around our country and the world, part of me says hesitantly “What is the latest catastrophe?” And part of me just thinks “same stuff, new day!” I find myself praying for those affected by the event and the first responders, volunteers, and government officials trying to help.

But, I often wonder and have discussed repeatedly in Sunday School and other small groups, HOW do people get through their “storm” or tragedy if they don’t have Jesus? How much more tragic if they don’t believe and can’t turn to God in prayer.

My family, like most, has had its share of challenges and even some tragedies. The storms come and it can feel dark, forbidding, and lonely.

But I am Blessed! I have Faith. I know I am never alone and know where to turn first.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, o Lord” Psalm 130:1

At times I couldn’t pull together coherent thoughts to form a meaningful prayer, but could only cry out to God. I am sure you have been there too.

And God always answers.

Throughout scripture God invites us to pray and he promises to hear our prayers. In this Lent season, as we REFLECT on our lives repenting of our sins and acknowledging our blessings, as we PRAY for our family and Church and our confessed sins and pride, as we WAIT for Easter and the resurrection

Let us, in Faith, remember the words of the psalmist

“My soul waits, and in His word, I hope.” Psalm 130:5

~ Jenny Napper ~

Lent has a way of slowing us down enough to realize that adversity doesn’t always leave quickly. Some challenges remain. Some reshape us. And some reveal what our eyes were too clouded to see before. Today, we

look at Matthew 9:27–34, where Jesus heals the blind and the mute. The two blind men followed Jesus and cried out:

“Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

I imagine them stumbling, reaching, maybe listening for footsteps. They didn’t have sight, but they actually saw Jesus more clearly than many who had perfect vision. And when Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said, simply and honestly, “Yes, Lord.” According to your faith, be it done to you. And their eyes were opened.

Faith is certainly one of the greatest gifts of all. It was a necessary ingredient for healing. Perhaps, crying out to the Savior was also a necessary step in the healing process.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve cried out for mercy many times. Not polished. Not poetic. Just a cry from a place where the mountain feels too big and too ominous to climb. When the challenge felt bigger than my strength. Maybe you’ve been there. Maybe you’re there today. The two men in Matthew 9 weren’t afraid to cry out. They weren’t embarrassed to show their need. They weren’t ashamed to follow Jesus right through their darkness.

Lent invites us to do the same. To admit we can’t see as clearly as we pretend. To confess our need for His healing touch. To cry out from the shadows and reach for the Light of the world.

Something else strikes me in this passage. Jesus doesn’t heal them on the road. Not in the crowd. He heals them in the house—in a quieter space. Sometimes the deepest healing doesn’t come in the public places—not in Sunday morning smiles, not in the “I’m fine” conversations, not in the surface-level moments.

Sometimes healing comes in the private room where you finally let yourself break. Where you whisper prayers, you haven’t said out loud. Where Jesus asks you, gently but firmly, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” And maybe like me, your voice shakes when you answer.

But the miracle is...

He hears shaking Faith, and it is enough. He honors trembling Faith, and it is enough. He is the Healer of our sight and of our voice.

Lent brings us face to face with our blindness—with the ways we stumble, the ways we doubt, the ways we lose sight of what matters.

But Lent also brings us face to face with a Savior who does not recoil

from our darkness and silence. He steps into it. He calls us forward. He opens our eyes. He restores our voice.

As we walk through this season of repentance, reflection, and renewal, may our hearts whisper the same prayer the blind men prayed:

“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”

And may Jesus speak to each of us—in the quiet room, in the stormy night, and in the broken places. And may Jesus open our hearts and renew our Faith. Restore our voice in a world that may want to silence us or cancel us. And let us cry out and fall to our knees, admitting our weaknesses so that we may receive the blessings He has prepared for us.

~ Kevin Hendrick ~

Saturday, March 21

**Isaiah 58:7;
Ecclesiastes 3:1**

“Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them, and to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Homelessness is all around us. Working as a Church Secretary was my first experience with those less fortunate. It’s the hardest part of my job to have someone asking for help and knowing some of those have no idea where food will come from and nowhere to lay their head down in the warmth of a home. For some individuals, their home is their car. We did not know this would touch our household personally, and we again are providing shelter to someone who is family and was living in her car with her dog. God has asked us again to do what we can to give her an opportunity to rise back up.

In North Augusta, we are fortunate to have Community Ministries of North Augusta, where our family member has reached out in her time of need to hopefully give a helping hand to others, while also receiving help for herself to get back on her feet. She does have a spirit of love for others, too! We chose to listen to God’s call again (she has lived with us before), and He is asking us to provide shelter, food, and most of all, guidance and love. We have seen first-hand family members who are still finding their way in life, trying to help others less fortunate, and we’ve always believed there is a reason for everything. We are hopeful that by the time y’all are reading this, God has answered prayers.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You call us to a true fast, one that reflects Your heart for those suffering. Open our eyes to the hunger and homelessness around us, both physical and spiritual, and which has revealed itself to us personally. May our actions demonstrate true righteousness, not just religious rituals, so that our light breaks like the dawn and the Lord’s glory guides us to make a difference in someone’s life. In your precious name, Lord Jesus, Amen*

~ Karen Mays ~

Sunday, March 22

Leviticus 20:26

“Holy”

If the WINTER BOMB did not hit us the weekend of January 31-Feb 1st, our BIBLE YEAR Sunday School class discussed the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Remember back a few weeks when church was canceled for a few snowflakes one Sunday and then a potential ice storm the next week. As we all recall, neither materialized! Now, as I write this devotional, a WINTER BOMB is supposedly headed our way. When you read this devotional, we will know whether the BOMB HIT US or whether we had church. I was rooting for CHURCH!

Back to Leviticus. It is considered one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand, if not the most difficult. Those of us reading THE BIBLE YEAR, A Journey Through Scripture in 365 Days can determine for our ourselves just how hard it was as we make our way through the rest of the 66 books of the BIBLE.

In my 40 years of pastoral ministry, I never preached a sermon from the Book of Leviticus. If the WINTER BOMB did not hit us, Pastor Cathy’s preaching text was from Leviticus 16, The Day of Atonement. I believe I remember her saying, that was her first ever sermon from Leviticus. It’s a book so easily avoided!

As many of you now know, the 27 chapters that compose this third book of the Torah, are filled with rituals required for Divine Worship.

“Its chapters draw distinctions between what foods, animals, and personal conditions are clean and unclean, pure and impure—which are acceptable in God’s sight and which are not. In observing the distinction between these categories in their lives, the Israelites answer their calling to be God’s holy people.” (pg. 27 The Bible Year, Leader Guide)

How do we, “people of Grace UMC” determine what are acceptable and unacceptable practices in our lives as we live out our calling to be God's holy people? How do you, as a member of Grace, determine what are acceptable and unacceptable practices in your calling as a holy child of God? And yes, YOU are a “holy child” of God. Your baptism made you a “holy child” of God. Take a moment and think about that. Maybe say out loud, I AM A HOLY CHILD OF GOD! Pretty humbling isn't it!

Assuming the WINTER BOMB did not hit, January 31st and our Bible Year Sunday School Class met, we discussed the rituals we as UM participate in that help us remember what it means to be God's holy people. In fact, that very Sunday during worship, we, the Grace church family, had the privilege of kneeling at the altar rail, extending our hands forward and receiving the elements of “bread and cup” remembering that the very body and blood of Christ was shed for us. During these remaining days of Lent, let's intentionally remember and participate in those rituals that draw us closer to the “holiness” of our God so we can indeed be “holy”.

~ Rev. Cindy Raski Fuller ~

Monday, March 23

Psalm 103

“Waiting For This Call”

During Lent in 2019, we received a phone call from our oldest son, Stuart, and his wife, Michelle, that would change our lives. I can still remember every detail of finding out we would become grandparents.

Stuart said I needed to put my phone on video (now that was a technological challenge!) so we could see something special. Finally, Rodney and I saw them as they said their dog, Tanner, had something to show us. Tanner was wearing an outfit with writing on the back: “Promoted to Big Brother.”

We immediately thought that Michelle and Stuart were getting another dog. Laughing, Stuart said, “Mom, we are going to have a baby.”

Immediately, I began crying while hugging Rodney. I love babies, kids, and youth so much, and I always thought I'd have six kids. But becoming a grandmother, I was flooded with memories of my special grandmother, my Momma's momma, who was so amazing and truly shaped my life with her faith, kindness, love, patience, and, of course, cooking lessons.

I was so excited for Stuart and Michelle and the thought of them being

parents. Having children will help them to learn and grow into themselves — it certainly did for Rodney and me. And we look forward to developing our grandparenting skills – and sharing our unconditional love - without the same expectations and burdens of responsibility as parents.

Waiting from April to October for the arrival of our first grandchild was sometimes difficult, as we live over 12 hours away. But Stuart and Michelle were great at keeping us informed, and we were blessed to see them during the late summer. Seeing their nursery set up brought me to tears as I thought of when Stuart was born and slept in our bedroom in our tiny home in Vienna, and when Zachary shared his room with Stuart as a baby.

Finally, a little after midnight on Oct. 24, Stuart texted that they were at the hospital and the baby would be born soon. Rodney and I were up early to go to the airport for a cousin’s wedding in Indiana, so I kept checking my phone. Right before we left came the message I had waited for all my life – “Mom, we have a baby girl!”

Two weeks later, we were finally able to meet Elizabeth Grace Rawlinson — so precious with dark blue eyes, a full head of dark hair, and very awake and alert. Being able to finally be a Granny, to hold, cuddle, sing, and rock this beautiful baby is an amazing feeling. We look forward to her baptism and other important milestones this year and in the years ahead.

We pray that Elizabeth grows up knowing that she is a unique and special gift from God. She has much to draw from her amazing parents, who are smart and studious, have a close church family, and love playing outdoors, participating in sports, reading, cooking, and dancing.

Thank you, God, for this precious, precious child who has made me the happiest person by becoming her grandmother.

TODAY: *Pray for all the children and grandchildren in a world that can seem uncertain and turbulent at times. Pray for God’s guidance to give you moments and the words to pass faith through the generations in your family.*

~ Pam Rawlinson ~

Tuesday, March 24
“Giving Space and Grace”

Ephesians 2:8

In his inspired writings, the apostle Paul often wrote about grace. Ephesians 2:8 serves as a prime example: *“For by grace you have been saved*

through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” This theme permeates the entire spirit of the New Testament. Grace, the unmerited love and favor of God, makes life on earth worth living, and it enables us to look forward to an eternal home in heaven when our time here is completed. In the meantime, we have ample opportunities to live gracious lives.

Several years ago, in the height of the Covid epidemic, while in another community, wearing my mask, I stood in the checkout line at a store. The unmasked man in front of me turned and asked me to give him some space. This surprised me because I thought I stood at an appropriate distance away, and the tone of his voice seemed to reveal irritation.

Although I did not feel particularly gracious at that moment, I stepped back and gave him some space. Additionally, by voicing a brief word of apology, I also gave him some grace. In responding this way, I also believe I gave myself a little grace. Getting upset over trivial matters never makes things better. Grace helps keep life in perspective.

Our Heavenly Father gives us space to live abundant lives; God grants us freedom to serve in a multitude of places, and divine grace gives us inner freedom and salvation.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, thank you for filling us with your love, forgiveness, and grace. Give us courage and wisdom to share these things with others. In Jesus name, Amen.*

~ Rev. Joe Lusk ~

Wednesday, March 25

**Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41;
Psalm 143; Matthew 22:23-33**

The dawn awakens me to walk miles on the Greenway every day, to contemplate Scripture and greet folks and dogs with a “Hey”. This morning I ponder the 3 assigned passages in my mind to determine what Lenten devotion I may find.

Jeremiah says God will gather the people of Judah from where they are scattered and give them one heart and one way that really mattered. He will make an everlasting covenant to not refrain from doing good and plant them in this land of faithfulness as He should.

Of the seven penitential psalms of the church, today's is the last.

The poet reflects on the human condition and the sins of his past.
He recognizes his own powerlessness and his life's place.
His only hope is to throw himself upon God's grace.

Jesus cut the Pharisees to the core in the Gospel. The Sadducees were next.

They did not believe in life after death as revealed by the text.
They tried to trap Jesus by a story of a wife who married brothers seven
and asked to whom she would be married once in heaven.

Jesus routed their intentions and nature unforgiving
By saying God was not of the dead but of the living!
The people knew the religious authorities were reaching
And were remarkably amazed at Jesus' teaching.

So, while mulling and praying over which text to use this time
I looked down and saw a penny and a dime.
Why not use all three I thought with a smile and great mirth.
I headed home—my prayers and coins increased my worth.

~ Rev. Jerry Fuller ~

Thursday, March 26

Psalm 90:12

“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” - Psalm 90:12

Time - what does time mean to you? It is one of God's greatest gifts, but often the easiest to overlook. We take for granted there will be more time to work, play, live - more days, more chances, more opportunities. But scripture reminds us that our days are numbered, that each day should be lived with clarity and purpose. Jesus lived just 33 years on this earth yet his death and resurrection offers all of us eternal life.

When my husband, Don, was facing brain surgery after an accident, the neurosurgeon said to us, “Time is of the essence.” In that moment, time became still, heavy, and deeply personal. Every minute mattered. Every decision carried weight. In those moments of uncertainty, I discovered that God was not rushed, yet he was never late. While the doctors prepared for lifesaving surgery, God worked within it. His presence was felt and served as a reminder that he never leaves us. As we move through this Lenten season and look toward Easter, we are called to reflect on how we are using the time God has given us.

That season taught me not to take moments for granted - to say what needs to be said, to hold hands longer, to pray more honestly. "Time is of the essence" is no longer something said medically, it is a truth that should remind us to live awake, grateful, and surrendered today-that every day carries divine potential.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, teach us to number our days Help us to see time as a gift and to use it with wisdom and grace. Thank you for walking with us through uncertainty. Show us the opportunities you place around us so that we may honor your holy name.*
Amen

~ Linda Smith ~

Friday, March 27

Psalm 100

Journey with us back in time to Bethlehem, our community is welcome. Christmas Eve service, all Christians visiting our service, families, guests, come, come and partake in our sacraments.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Take this bread, my body, do this in remembrance of me. Take this cup, wine for the blood I will shed for you, do this in remembrance of me."

During this Thanksgiving holiday season, no matter the season, daily devotions, Advent, and Lent, one common message that unifies all of us is that Jesus came to change the lives of those who centuries ago believed, witnessed his birth, life, and ministry, his brutal crucifixion, death, his resurrection, and his ascension. It changed the lives of the people. All believers are unified with these truths.

During the season of Lent, we invite our community to join us, as we also join other denominations.

Many people united together by their devotions, gifts, and prayers, to help implement the programs and teaching of the Word of God to the people of God. Biblical proofs, continue.

During this season of Thanksgiving, sometimes we can get so caught up in the day-to-day that we forget how important our message is. We are a community of Christians. Come join us in worship.

~ Constance Miller ~

It's December 2025, and to say this has not been a good year is an understatement—every month since February has seen some challenge and/or major loss. When signing up to write this, I was hoping to be on the other side of all the tragedy and be able to provide an inspiring “faith wins” type of story. Instead, I'm sitting in a hospital room, next to my mother's bed, with a line from an old hymn playing on repeat in my head, “I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,” with the occasional outburst of Casting Crown's “I will Praise You in the Storm” interjecting.

Music. My entire life revolves around music. There's a line in a Tricia Yearwood song that says it perfectly, “And though I have forgotten all about it, the song remembers when.” A song will start playing, and a memory will instantly come forward. When I am facing hard/difficult times, a song or two will play on repeat in my head, and that is how I get through. Music is my coping mechanism.

When I had a 31-week preemie in the NICU (my son), the chorus from Nicole C. Mullins “When I Call on Jesus” is what got me through - “But when I call on Jesus, all things are possible. I can mount on wings like eagles and soar. When I call on Jesus, mountains are gonna fall. 'Cause He'll move heaven and earth to come rescue me when I call.” That 31-week preemie is 17 years old and graduates in May.

Today, that afore-mentioned line from “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” is screaming, SCREAMING, in my head. As I was reading today's passage, Psalm 31: 9–16, I realized it parallels that song.

Both writers were in distress and felt like the world was caving in around them. It would have been so easy for them to give in to that distress and live in a valley of despair, but that's not what they chose. You know what, neither do I.

I am moving past that afore-mentioned repeating line to the next, “Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.” Now compare that to the end of today's passage, “*My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.*” Yes, I am in a storm, a valley of despair, as many are, but that storm will not define me, and I will not take up residence in that valley. Yes, it's easier said than done, and some days I give in, let all the feelings wash over me, then I move on to the next day.

Thankfully, I am not navigating this horrible year alone. I have a wonderful husband and sons, supportive parents, three of the best friends a girl can ask for, and a God who will rescue me when I call. Do I know where I'll be by the time you read this? Not a clue. I pray I still have my mom, but I may be trying to navigate life without her, which I honestly don't know how to do. What I do know is God has always been and always will be right here with me, holding my hand and guiding me through it.

“When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near...Hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home”.

~ Carol Smith McGee ~

Palm Sunday, March 29

Matthew 27:1-11

When I was a teenager, I remember my parents speaking to me about the power of peer pressure. Mom and Dad often reminded me to stay objective so that I could determine if my choices were my own or if I had just given in to the persuasive lure of the crowd.

As much as we would like to relegate the impact of peer pressure to times of adolescent wishy-washiness, Matthew's Gospel is a case study in how indecisive and easily influenced a group of people can be. *The crowd* becomes its own character throughout the text, sometimes seeking out Jesus' wisdom, teaching, and healing, while getting in the way at other times. As Jesus begins his entry into Jerusalem in today's reading, the crowd recognizes their King – they throw down their cloaks, waving palms and shouting “Hosanna!” They see the One who will save them and rejoice...

If only it were this simple. This crowd of seekers and might-become-disciples rejoice when their own skin is saved, but stood in the way of two blind men seeking healing just a chapter before (Matthew 20:29-31). Even more horrifying is how the crowd's shouts of praise will be twisted into demands for Jesus' crucifixion by the end of the week as the crowd is persuaded to give in to the whims of corrupt leaders (Matthew 27:20-26). In less time than God spent creating the world, this crowd turned on the Word who gave it its being. From worship to murderous intent, the crowd was swayed into condemning an innocent man, even one who healed their wounds, cast out their demons, fed their hungry children, and nourished their weary souls.

Lord help each of us to be mindful of the pull of *the crowd*. Make us wise to its fickle nature and make us strong enough to stand against the peer pressure that would drag us away from the redemption You have waiting for us.

~ Amber Forrest ~

Monday, March 30

Jeremiah 29:10-12

“The Plans I Have”

Eleven years ago today, our son Graham was born. Kelly and I had only been married a couple of years, and just moved to North Augusta. Jeremiah 29:11 was one of those verses we proudly hung on the wall of our beautiful new home, where we planned to raise our family in a great neighborhood with a picket fence. We were wholeheartedly embracing the “hope” and “future” we believed God had for us.

Things look quite a bit different a decade later. For those of you who have met us in our first year as members of Grace, you likely know us as the parents of three incredible and very energetic girls. But to know our family is to know our firstborn Graham, and how he was diagnosed with a terrible genetic condition at six months old and passed from this life ten months later. Suddenly, the words of Jeremiah hanging on the wall no longer made sense. How could this be God’s plan? God had promised to prosper us, not harm us.

That’s when I began to look at this familiar passage in a new way. God was speaking through Jeremiah to his people who had been in captivity for many years, assuring them that he had plans for them. *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.”* For too long, I had expected God to bless the plans I had for myself, when he had a completely different plan for our lives. Without the joy we experienced with Graham and the pain of our loss, we would never have the beautiful family we have now. Through every step, God has shown us the plan he has for us, and that it is truly a plan to prosper us and give us hope and a future.

God can handle our questions and our pain. Even Jesus questioned the plan as it came time to fulfill his purpose on earth. But because of the plans God had, we are all forgiven and have the promise of an eternal future. Without crucifixion, there is no resurrection, and sometimes we will never know the beauty of God’s plan without the pain of things we

can't understand.

~ Wes Hennings ~

Tuesday, March 31

Luke 23:39-43

She'd been sick before and recovered. Mothers are supposed to do that: be there when we need them always. The call came just before noon, a couple of weeks before Easter. Thelma Carver, my mother for so many years, had died. Although her death happened at a local nursing home, it was her desire to be buried next to my father in our family's former hometown in Maine.

I had never done anything like this before, calling even one funeral home, let alone two. The first one locally needed to prepare her remains for the journey, and another in Maine would conduct the funeral.

My children were there to comfort me, go to the nursing home to get her things, and drive me to the airport the next day. My church, friends, and family members, en route or at the other end of many phone lines, did my thinking for me.

The kind words of the Maine townspeople who remembered her, the family reunion, the flowers and memorials from those who cared about her, the music she had once sung herself, and the flawless work of two funeral homes are almost too many gifts to receive at one time.

Returning home, I found myself knee-deep in pictures, paperwork, and memories. Yet all was getting sorted, discarded, or sealed forever in a grateful daughter's heart. As I worked, I hoped my judgment about who was getting what matched the desires of those who received them. My young granddaughter got into the jewelry box and put on a dozen necklaces at once, a light moment in all the sorrow.

But there had been light moments, too. I'll never forget my brother's exchange with the Maine funeral director. Yankee thrift and all, he didn't want to part with a dollar more than necessary. So when told that the more expensive vault came with a warranty, he exploded. "How Long?" Somehow, concern over how long a cement vault surrounding a metal casket and buried underground would last relieved our tensions and sent us all into hysterics. (Vaults are used in Maine's cool weather until the ground is warm enough for burial.)

The lightest and deepest moment of all came at the end of the funeral. As my family and I hugged each other for the last time, my expressive brother spoke again.

"Well, Jesus, she's in your hands now. We know she's out of pain and that she's happy, and one more thing: Set a place for us, and tell her we'll all be home soon." According to the calendar, it may still have been Lent. But for my mother, Easter came early that year.

~ Barbara Seaborn ~

Wednesday, April 1

Hebrews 12:1-3

Today, we are transported to Jesus' last week and the complexities of the unfolding story in Jerusalem. From a great welcome to a greater rejection. From great love to the basest betrayal. From defeat to triumph. It's all there.

What's speaking to me more this year than in previous years is the humanity of Jesus. As John 13:21 reminds us, even in his full understanding and certainty, Jesus was "...troubled in spirit." He was divine. And he was fully human, too. Even so, that certain joy of the future did not fully lessen his spiritual pain. This, the inspired writers of the Bible wanted us to understand.

Today, those of us who absorb too much world and national news, along with angst-filled social media, understand how easily we might sink into deep weariness and spiritual confusion. Hopelessness can turn to bitterness and a state of chronic doubt. The promised joy may seem far away, even as we continue to believe that we, too, are surrounded by that 'great cloud of witnesses.'

This Holy Week, we're taught that Jesus wrestled with God, too, even as he ran the race and accepted the bitter cup and triumphed. This Holy Week, I'm grateful to be a Methodist, where we acknowledge the process of wrestling with God on the riverbank, embracing our humanity as we persevere toward a future completely filled with joy, grace, and love. Thanks to the perfection of our faith.

~ Margaret Key ~

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, *“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

I’m not sure I had ever heard the term Maundy Thursday before Dr. John Youninger came to Grace. John instituted a Maundy Thursday service in which we took communion, the altar was stripped and covered in black cloth. It was a solemn service, and at its conclusion, everyone left the sanctuary in silence. I was scared to say anything to Christy, so I waited until we got inside the car!

What does Maundy actually mean? As with a lot of “church words” it comes from Latin for “command”. There are a number of powerful events that occurred on that Thursday before Easter. First, there was the Last Supper, then Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. That is one of the most symbolic of his actions in the New Testament. Finally, there was the betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

If you have ever seen a portrayal of the foot washing by Jesus, it is very powerful, especially when done by actors in costume at the Last Supper. At my age, it is easier to wash someone else’s feet than my own, but I doubt any of us have ever washed anyone’s feet as Jesus did. All of us have betrayed Jesus in a sense with our actions and misconduct, but none of us will have done it as Judas did.

The Last Supper was the first communion. We have all taken communion many times. Often, we take it because it is given regularly. Many times it is a matter of routine, but if we have done something really bad or we’re going through an event of stress, it will have more of an impact. When my Father was very close to death, he had not been very active in church during his later years. I would go to his hospice bed and visit every day. While he was still alert and conscious, I asked Ken Phelps, who was an associate at Grace, if he would go with me and administer communion to my father. He very graciously consented. In his living room, in his hospital bed, the three of us partook of the sacrament. My Father, like Jesus, took communion for the last time in his life. It was the most memorable

communion I have ever taken.

Prayer: *Help us to Jesus and receive every communion we take in the spirit in which he commanded. "Do this in remembrance of me."*

~ Lark Jones ~

Good Friday, April 3

Matthew 27:46

Jesus' last words from the cross are perplexing at first glance. He speaks of the Father forsaking Him, cries out in a loud voice, and breathes His last breath.

Why would the Father God, upon whom Jesus has always been dependent and faithful, abandon Him? It just doesn't make sense!

But if we think about Jesus' true identity, He is fully human, born in the flesh, in order that He could be immersed in all our experiences and take away our sins and the sins of the world. At the same time, Jesus is fully divine. He is God. He is coeternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is the One who was and is and is to come. The Holy, the eternal, the divine divinity in Jesus could not die.

We cannot imagine the darkness, the desolation, the loneliness, and the isolation of this abandonment moment. And it was all for us. There was no expiation of sin without the shedding of blood. God set that up in the beginning, when animals had to be slaughtered to clothe Adam and Eve after their fall into sin. Jesus is the ultimate unblemished Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He does so, not merely rounding up all our sin conveniently like a shepherd herds livestock, but rather by the agonizing loss of blood on the cross, by the excruciating separation from the Father, and from literally exhausting His last breath for us.

The hope for us from this incredible event of sacrifice is multifaceted, the most important of which is Jesus paid the price for us. He is our Deliverer from sin, our Savior from it. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith and the means by which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are transformed from our darkness into His marvelous light for new life in obedience to Him.

Another hope is realized in Jesus' last words before the Ascension into Heaven. *"I will never leave or forsake you. I am with you always."*

Not only do we avoid the punishment we deserve from our waywardness, rebellion, and sin, but because of Jesus, we never have to experience the

darkness He experienced of abandonment or of being forsaken.

Jesus is victorious over the cross, over sin and the grave; and He bridges the chasm of separation, bridging us to both the Holy and the Eternal, now and forever, we are never alone.

~ Rev. John Newell ~

Holy Saturday, April 4

John 19:38-42

Even in the deepest parts of despair, it can be understood that humans will still do good. In the tragedy of Jesus's death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus both went out of their way to give Jesus a proper burial. When we lose those who truly matter to us, we can be led to turn our backs on the world and sink inward. Instead of this, though, they did a good deed. Even in times of anguish and torment, we must help others and do what is right. Many of their peers would have condemned these good actions, but they still went through and listened to their hearts. I know I am guilty of selfishness and apathy like many others, but these verses call us to set these aside and do what is moral and just. If that is feeding the homeless. Allowing a person to stay with you, making a homemade meal for someone in the hospital, giving someone a shoulder to cry on, or speaking out against an injustice. These are all ways in which we can serve our communities and reflect the light of God. So next time something knocks at the door to your heart, answer it.

~ Alex Brooks ~

Easter Sunday, April 5

John 20:11-14

As I write this devotional, it is the week of Epiphany. "Epiphany" means manifestation or revelation, God or Jesus made visible. On Epiphany in the Protestant church, we focus on the revelation of Jesus to the magi, signifying that Jesus has come to *all*, even to non-Jews, foreigners. In the Orthodox church, the focus is on Jesus' baptism, when God reveals, "*You are my Son, the beloved.*"

But epiphany is not confined to one gospel story, or a holy day on the church calendar. God continues throughout the gospels to reveal Jesus through his miracles, parables, and acts of love and mercy. Some who saw Jesus doubted he was the Messiah. *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."* Nathanael said to him, "*Can anything good come out*

of Nazareth?” John 1:45-46. The Samaritan woman didn’t realize to whom she was talking. *The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”* John 4:25-26

Jesus is made manifest in mysterious ways. The crucifixion is the most mysterious, as suffering and death reveal the nature of Jesus – sacrificial servant. The resurrection baffles those who come to the tomb. Mary Magdalene is face-to-face with the Risen Jesus, and yet *“did not know that it was Jesus.”* She eventually realizes he is right there with her.

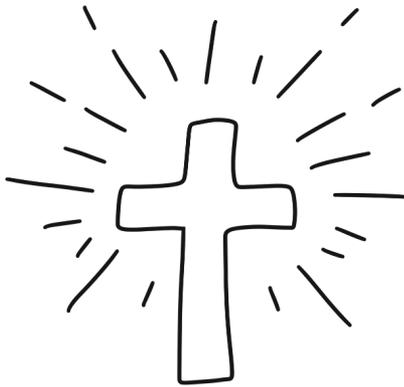
There have been times in my life, and perhaps in yours, when I didn’t realize Jesus was there with me. In times of despair, we don’t feel His presence. Faith means trusting that Jesus is with us, even in suffering. As the poem “Footprints in the Sand” reminds us, there is only one set of footprints because Jesus is carrying you. May God reveal Jesus to you, not just on Epiphany or Easter, but in ordinary events, times of despair, mundane days, and in friends and strangers you encounter.

Happy Easter!

~ Rev. Cathy Jamieson ~



He is
not here



He is
risen

MATTHEW 28:6

HAPPENINGS FOR THE 2026 LENTEN SEASON

Community Lenten Worship and Lunches

February 18, 25, March 4, 11, 18, and 25

Join with others from around our CSRA community for worship and fellowship each Wednesday in Lent. Different churches host weekly worship services (**always at 12:30PM**) and provide lunch before and after (**12PM and 1PM**). Come enjoy getting a glimpse of how different Christian traditions worship during your lunch break.

February 18 (Ash Wednesday)	Grace United Methodist Church
February 25	Anglican Church of the Holy Trinity
March 4	Second Providence Baptist Church
March 11	St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
March 18	Fairview Presbyterian Church
April 25	Clearwater First Baptist Church

Wednesday Inspiration Nights at Grace (WINGS)

Suppers & Lenten Study

February 25, March 4, 11, 18, and 25

Grace UMC gathers for a delicious meal on Wednesday evenings at 5:30PM in the Wesley Center. These meals are family-friendly and a great way to eat together for a great price (\$8/adult, \$6/child).

Please register by the Monday before the meal. Reservations can be placed by calling the Church Office (803-279-7525), by going to the church website (www.gotgraceumc.org/wings), or by completing a Meal & Class Registration card in worship and placing it in the offering plate.

Following supper, there are activities and spiritual growth opportunities for all ages. Adults are invited to join us for a Lent Bible Study at 6:15PM in the lower level of the Wesley Center.

HAPPENINGS FOR THE 2026 LENTEN SEASON

Lenten Prayer Trail @ The Way

Thursdays (419 Randall Road, North Augusta)

Every week during Lent, the trail at The Way campus will have a guided prayer walk featuring scripture, poetry, and other means of reflection. Participants can enjoy the walk on their own during daylight hours, or meet up at a weekly time for a guided group experience.

Easter Egg Hunt

March 21 1pm-3pm

Children and Family Ministries will host their annual Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday. This event is always a fresh, new way to have fun as a family, so be sure to come!



HOW YOU CAN HELP

The success of this project is made possible by many hearts and minds. We are also blessed by the donations we receive from our church members and friends. If you would like to help our Lenten Devotional mission continue, please consider making a monetary donation. Donations can be made in person, at the Church Office, and online at <https://onrealm.org/GotGraceUMC/give/lentdevo> or by scanning the QR code below:





We hope you enjoyed each day's devotion and will share the love of Grace with your family and friends!

Share the QR Code below for more information.

