

We would like to thank those of you who submitted Devotionals! I pray everyone enjoys reading something inspirational each day of Lent!
He is Risen!

Wednesday, March 2nd , 2022

Ash Wednesday

DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

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Isaiah 40:31

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

This passage from Isaiah has always been my favorite bible verse. Now today, I find myself living it. A few weeks ago, I fell and broke my upper right arm at the shoulder. It's very painful and has left me immobilized in many ways. Having my arm in a sling makes it very difficult to do most everything. I need help from John to get in and out of bed, cloth myself, and just about everything else. Cooking is impossible but I have been so blessed to have meals offered by my family, my Aldersgate family, and many friends.

Little by little I find myself able to do small things. I walk but do not faint. As I wait upon the Lord, I know I will get better. I know it will take time but waiting on the Lord, I know things will eventually improve and I will be soaring with the eagles once again.

Dear heavenly Father, I wait, I trust. In Jesus name. Amen

Charlotte Clifford



Friday, March 4th, 2022

It was the summer of 1990 when Cindy and I moved to this place called Slidell, Louisiana due to me getting transferred here from Texas with my job. We were both born and raised in Central and South Texas and had really never lived much farther than a couple of hours from our “homes” and our families. We also had in tow our two sons who were 4 and 2 years old at that time. Although we both grew up in church, we had really just recently begun getting involved in church again. We knew that one of the first things we needed to do was to find a church family in order to survive this new chapter in our lives, especially since we had no family or friends here in South Louisiana.

We were both raised in the Methodist Church, so we began our search at the two Methodist Churches in Slidell. We visited First Church in Olde’ Town one Sunday and decided to drive by Aldersgate right after the service to find out more information on it. Pastor Cliff Wright was outside greeting the congregation after their service and Cindy and I and our two boys walked up to him and introduced ourselves. He told us all about what Aldersgate UMC had to offer, so we visited the following Sunday. Cliff immediately remembered our names and our story, and we were impressed by that, and we immediately felt welcomed and loved. We joined Aldersgate shortly after that and right away we felt like we were home. It was the best decision we made.

We immediately plugged Nathan and Kyle into Sunday school and watched in wonder as both of them grew in their love of God and involvement in Aldersgate through amazing Children’s programs, Youth programs, Music and Drama programs, and unbelievable Mission opportunities. I must say that our joining Aldersgate United Methodist Church made our jobs as parents much easier. They have both grown into mature, loving, Mission minded Christian men, and I attribute a lot of that to them being raised here at Aldersgate.

Cindy and I have strengthened our Christian walk with Jesus over the years because of the wonderful loving church family that we have here at Aldersgate, as well as the exposure to God’s grace from working with the Youth program for many years and the opportunities to attend many of the wonderful Mission trip opportunities that this church has provided. For that, we will be eternally grateful to our church family at Aldersgate United Methodist Church. It has been a blessing to work with all of the Senior pastors that we have seen here over the years – Cliff Wright, Don Cottril, Dave Fortuna, Nick Evans, John and Marie Williams, Gary Willis, Nancy Wofford, Tracy MacKenzie, and now Frances Hooten, as well as all of the wonderful Associate Pastors we have seen – Walter Parker, Josh Milliron, Lane Cotton Winn, and Mike Palermo. We also celebrate all of the wonderful staff that have been an integral part of the life of this church. What a journey this has been! Thank you Aldersgate United Methodist Church!

Blessings,
Ron Davis

***Psalm 100:5 For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.***



Your Personal Blessing

***“.....Then each one’s praise will come from God”
(1 Corinthians 4:5 KJV)***

What an incredible sentence. *God will praise each one of them.* Not “the best of them” nor “a few of them” nor “the achievers among them,” but “God will praise each one of them.”

You won’t be left out. God will see to that. In fact, God himself will give the praise. When it comes to giving recognition, God does not delegate the job. Michael doesn’t hand out the crowns. Gabriel doesn’t speak on behalf of the throne. God himself does the honors. God himself will praise his children.

And what’s more, the praise is personal! Awards aren’t given a nation at a time, a church at a time, or a generation at a time. The crowns are given one at a time. God himself will look you in the eye and bless you with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

(Matthew 25:23 NIV)

The devotion above was taken from:

“GRACE - For the Moment”

Inspirational Thoughts for Each Day of the Year

Author Max Lucado

Provided by: Cindy Kemp

Photo credit: Jane Aucoin

Sunday, March 6th, 2022

First Sunday in Lent

What's in a Name

“What's in a name? That which we call a rose/
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

-- Romeo & Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2

On a recent Sunday, Francey mentioned the clergy group that we were a part of in our first year out of seminary. In one of our assignments, there was a quote I encountered that has stuck with me. It's about a British philosopher that had one of those now old-fashioned devices that answered your land-line, with this message:

“This is not an answering machine. It is, rather, a questioning machine. The applicable questions are: Who are you? -- and -- What do you want? And if you think those are simple questions, consider the fact that most of us go through our entire lives without ever answering them fully.”

It's hard enough knowing ourselves, but most of us like to be known by others. One day when I was subbing middle school in West Monroe, two 6th grade girls approached me during lunch break and asked me, What're our names? I had only been at their school a short while, and I was stumped. I knew their faces but not their names!

Who are you? What do you want? What's my name? Simple and difficult questions to ponder. But as you do, keep these words from the prophet Isaiah in mind: ***“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.”*** (Isaiah 49:15-16)

Richard Hooton



Monday, March 7th, 2022

Lent. The season of rebirth. I've always been about rebirth. My very name means born again. It is embracing the hope of rebirth that has carried me through many of my life's challenges.

Rebirth—good.

Change—not so much.

Change is scary, unknown, full of bumps and roadblocks. For several years I have been contemplating moving to Tennessee from Louisiana instead of dividing myself between the two locations. Easy to go; hard to leave. I want to control things, but planning is cursory to me. I want things my way, but I can barely define what that is. And decisions, they're the worst. So I set an arbitrary date for a moving van to park in my drive. Mulling things over would only result in further procrastination.

Silly Renee, whose name means reborn. Maybe I should lean into the assurance that God could actually do a much better job of controlling my life than I. Maybe I should quiet myself, quit fighting, and trust His promise that all shall be well. Hasn't every instance I have given up and given in to God resulted in something so much better than what I strove for on my own? Yes.

Moving day came whether I was ready or not. The day my earthly possessions would find a new place and, symbolically, 46 years of history, adventures, and friends would all be stripped away. Such an emotional day. Control impossible. Change inevitable.

People text now to communicate, but moving day I received two phone calls. One was the first thing in the morning from a friend in Tennessee asking when I'd be back. She ended her call with "I miss you when you're not here and I love you." The second call, from my Slidell next door neighbor, came right after the moving van pulled away. My neighbor and I see each other infrequently but have the comforting reassurance that each is nearby. She called to say she would miss me and she loves me.

Welling, my heart knew who was holding things that hard day. Who holds my every day.

The very first holy week Jesus apprised his followers there would be change. Likely they feared, "Change—not so good." Yet Christ's change, His dying for us, assured ALL humanity that He loves us and doesn't want to miss us.

Jesus' "I love you" is more than change...it is rebirth.

Renee Swalm

Photo credit: Jane Aucoin

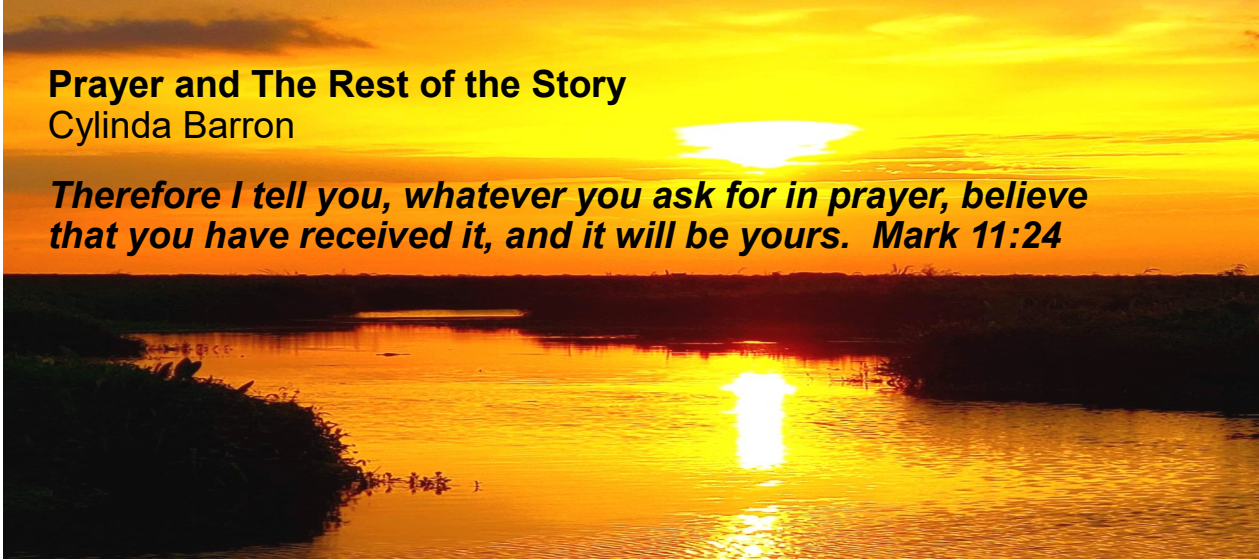


Tuesday, March 8th, 2022

Prayer and The Rest of the Story

Cylinda Barron

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24



The Lenten season of 2009 coincided with my Dad's diagnosis and death from leukemia. My Dad was diagnosed with leukemia around March 6, 2009, and he died 49 days later on April 25. As I look back, that Lenten season was an interesting time for me and my faith. I grew up in the church and have always had things like prayer and bible reading in my life, so it made sense that all through the time my Dad was sick I prayed for his healing. I had complete faith that God would answer these prayers. What I did not realize until after his death and my subsequent disappointment in God for not answering my prayers, was that God did answer my prayers, just not in the way that I expected. I expected my Dad to be healed physically, and obviously that did not happen; however, my Dad was fully healed spiritually, and my family and I got to experience that healing as his time of passing was filled with peace. As I spoke at his funeral, which occurred only a few weeks after Easter, I reflected on the assurance we have as Christians that this end we have on Earth is not our end. As Paul Harvey would say, we know the rest of the story, a story we will get to experience with our loved ones when our time on the Earth is over. This assurance has given me comfort these last 12 years, years I have had to navigate without my Dad. Sometimes it is still hard and I miss him, especially when those special milestones take place, but I know that my prayers were answered then and will continue to be answered. I also know that I will still get to see my Dad again one day.

Dear God, as we journey through these days of Lent leading to the death of our Christ, we pray that we will be filled with the peace and joy we have in you and in our knowing the rest of the story.

Photo credit: Jane Aucoin

The Resurrection

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." — John 11:25

When Jesus finally made his way to Bethany, Martha greeted him with an accusation: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus then promised that Lazarus would rise again. And Martha said, in effect, "Yes, we know—someday."

As Jews, Martha and Mary believed that someday God would bring about a resurrection of the dead, but that probably seemed so far off that it gave little comfort for the present. The promise of the resurrection can seem that way to us at times too.

The sisters also believed, however, that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. And when he did raise Lazarus (John 11:38-44), can you imagine the effects that had? What was it like for Lazarus after dying and then being raised? How was life changed for him and his sisters? I'm sure they saw Jesus in a totally different light.

During Lent, as we trace Jesus' path to Jerusalem and beyond, we're compelled to hear Jesus' wake-up call about the purpose of his coming and what that means for us still today. If our faith is foggy and distracted by grief or sorrow, he shakes us once again with these astonishing words: "I am the resurrection and the life."

This is one of the "I am" statements of Jesus, each of which anchors Christ's identity as the one true God: "I am the resurrection and the life." And he asks us, as he did Martha, "Do you believe this?"

Prayer: Jesus, give us firm faith that you will raise us too from death, because you are alive! Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional



Thursday, March 10th, 2022



Psalm 37:7

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

I'm in my car a lot. And if you are constantly in your car, quite often you're going to find yourself in traffic jams. There's two ways to look at the situation when you're at a standstill and worried about getting to where you need to be.

The easy way is to stress out. Worry about how it will affect the rest of your day and feel the muscles throughout your body tense up to the point where you're uncomfortable in your bucket seat. Even though there's nothing you can do. Stuck is stuck.

I believe there's a better way to look at traffic jams.

In our hurry, hurry, hurry world, I like to think that God is offering us a time out. A good kind of break. One we probably needed because we're on the go, go, go. We are constantly reminded to listen for the voice of God, but who has time? I don't know about you, but I have trouble blocking out the noise of life.

So, think of traffic jams not as a problem, but as an unexpected gift of time with God.

Turn off the radio. If you're at a true standstill, briefly close your eyes. Be still. Breathe deep. Relax. Pray if you like or just listen. Enjoy a moment in God's presence. You may hear a whisper, or you may not. But I believe you will receive a gift of peace either way.

And when the car in front of you starts to move again, say thank you to the God who shared a moment with you to be still.

Suzie Hunt

Ephesians 3:20

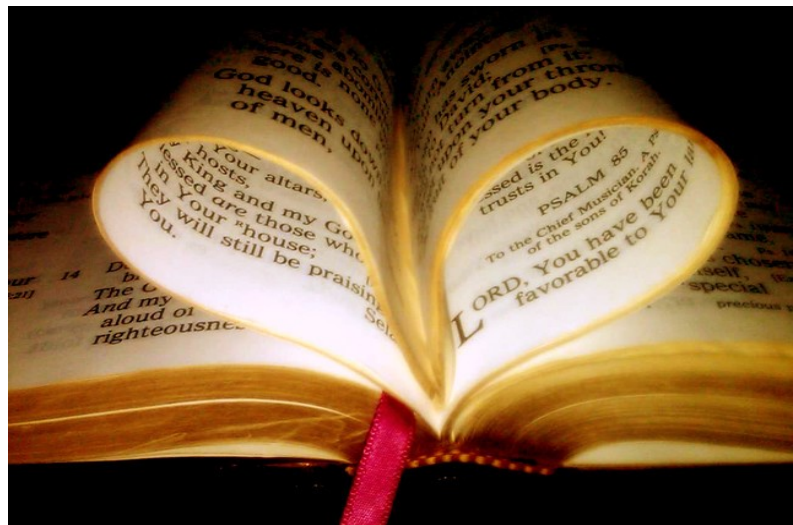
Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

I had the privilege very recently of purchasing my daughter-in-law's very first Bible! She is a lovely person who is very spiritual. She attended a Catholic school before college and was baptized; but her family did not attend church. My son has attended church his whole life. So you know where I am coming from if you have reared your children in the church.

We have had some deep conversations about religion, and I felt as though there was something pulling her. My son and she recently had a baby, and he expressed to my husband that they wanted to have the baby christened! Hallelujah and thank you, God! And my DIL told me they wanted to start going to church. I believe the birth of their baby spurred on these events which brings joy to my heart.

Buying someone their first Bible is a big responsibility, so I asked Reverend Francey for advice. My DIL recently received her Bible and just attended her first Bible study class with friends who are also searching! I feel so blessed especially in this Lenten season to be a part of her journey. My DIL has inspired me to not give up something but to add more in this 40 days—more praise to God, more Bible reading, more prayer.

Blessings,
Denise Liuzza



Saturday, March 12th, 2022

We have no idea what tomorrow holds! When the clock struck midnight going into 2020, I was ready to take on the world. This was going to be MY year, I was turning 50! I had trips to plan and take!

2020 started out normal, like every other year before. I had planned to make the year epic by traveling and taking trips with friends. We already had a date planned for Vegas and an idea of when we wanted to take our trip to Cabo San Lucas. Celebrating my 50th birthday all year would be amazing!!

Mardi Gras rolled as usual, as well as the St. Patrick's Day parade in Slidell.

We were well into March, ready to book our Vegas trip, when this strange virus literally shut the world down. Covid-19 was spreading through the entire world. Where did this come from, what was it, why did the world shut down? School as we knew it ended on March 13, 2020. The school year was OVER, Just like that, over! Worship was shut down and churches went virtual.



Now we have this invisible, highly contagious virus that we are playing chase from; the world is on high alert. The media has single-handedly placed fear in the minds of everyone. We didn't leave the house unless we were essential workers! All these new terms were on the tip of our tongues: Essential workers, quarantine, pandemic, isolation, transmission, asymptomatic, mask and so forth. What has happened to society? Why is everyone so afraid?

Since this happened two years ago, we are slowly getting back to normal., or whatever normal is? Personally, I did a LOT of bible study, improved my prayer life, read devotionals and did a lot self-reflection. We have educated ourselves on this crazy virus and learned to live with it. But most importantly, I have stopped living in fear, because FEAR, he is a liar! We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we know WHO holds tomorrow!

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Luke 14:27

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:34

Cecilia Richards



Sunday, March 13th, 2022

Second Sunday in Lent

Grounded

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

During the season of Lent, we are called to get in touch with our humanness. The season of Epiphany reminds us that we are star dust. Lent reminds us that we are dirt. Interestingly enough (although a chemist might beg to differ) I do believe that star dust and dirt are very much the same. Their primary difference is location and perspective.

Just like Adam, we are all created out of God-made dirt. The dirt of the ground. Diana Butler Bass writes in her book, Grounded, “*We are animated dirt. Soil and life joined. From the living ground we were made and to the living ground we will return.*” I return to these words each Lent. They help to ground me. I know deeply in my heart and soul that life is fragile. It is easy to go through life on auto pilot; never reflecting on who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.

Lent gives us the opportunity to become grounded once again.

Let’s shift the image a little. In electricity, *the ground connection* provides a path for the electric current to flow. A grounding wire ensures the electrical current returns safely to the ground without harm. God calls us during Lent to reconnect with who we are and to recognize God’s purpose in our life once again. We are ground that is grounded through the love and grace of Christ Jesus. This is as physically true as it is spiritually. May we rediscover this Lent our grounded-ness in the Lord.



Let us pray: Ever loving God, into your hands I commend my spirit in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. May I remain aware that one day my body will be returned to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Until then, may I remain grounded in your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Francey Hooton

Our Time is Not Our Own

By Kent Van Til —

Scripture Reading: [Hebrews 4:1-11](#)

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.”

Exodus 20:8-9

God gives us the time we have, from the beginning to the end of our lives. It is not our own.

Many people, however, have the arrogant notion that time is their own, so they should be able to spend it as they wish. They get upset if someone “wastes” their time. But time is not a commodity we get to “spend.”

God built creation with Sabbath-rest as its goal. This was not because God was exhausted after six days of creation. The rest that God commands is for us so that we can enjoy his creation and honor the one who gives us life within it. So each week we should enjoy a day of rejoicing in God’s work while setting our own work aside.

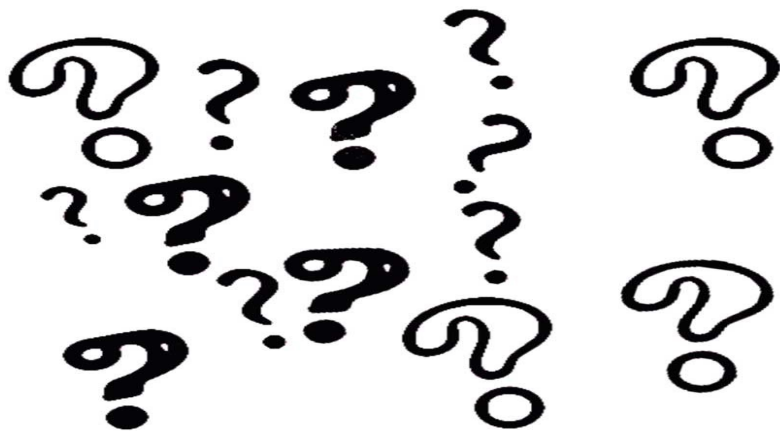
Plenty of people think that this command is inconsequential today. They believe their own work is so important that it super-sedes God’s Sabbath command. It does not. Resting and rejoicing in God remind us that we are not in control.

Some of my relatives own supermarkets in the Chicago area. Their stores are not open on Sundays. In this way they show they love God more than money. They and their employees enjoy a Sabbath-rest in honor of God. God has prospered them and will do so for all who keep his Sabbath.

Thank you, Lord, for the time you give us. Thank you too for reminding us each week that time is not our own. Bless us, we pray, in Jesus. Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional

Where Are You?



The Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" — Genesis 3:9

The first question God asks in the Bible may seem a bit strange. We might think God would ask, "What have you done?" since Adam had disobeyed God's instruction not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. But the question God asks is "Where are you?"—and, of course, God knows exactly where Adam and Eve are.

God's question makes clear to us that we cannot hide from him (Psalm 139:7-12), that we belong in his presence, that he made us to walk with him. But the guilt of our sin pushes us to try to hide. We try to cover up or run away, not wanting to face up to what we've done.

The time of Lent, the forty days before Easter, gives us an excellent opportunity to focus on the "where" of God's question: our walk with God. The Bible uses the word "way" for the first time in Genesis 3:24, saying that the "way" back to the garden was blocked by an angel with a sword. But God loved the world so much that he provided the way back to him, and to full life again, through Jesus Christ, who said: "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Walking with the Lord means constantly answering the question "Where are you?" and emerging from our hiding places—that we may see ourselves in the light of God's grace. It's a good question to ask at the beginning of each day this month.

Prayer: Have your own way with me, Lord, and keep my feet on the path that leads to eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

John 3:16 – Salvation’s Cause

“For God so loved the world”

The motivating factor behind God’s redemptive plan for every man and woman is His love for us. He not only loves us, He so loves us! Later, the apostle Paul sought to describe this love by speaking of its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Ephesians 3:18), “God is love” (1 John 4:16), and this deep emotion is what brings about the possibility of our redemption; knowing Him in the intimate relationship of Father and child. God’s love for you is the motivating cause of salvation. “For God so loved...”

John 3:16 – Salvation’s Cost

“that He gave His only begotten Son”

Our salvation, the free pardoning of our sin, and the promise of abundant and eternal life in Christ did not come without cost. Freedom is never free; it is always bought with blood. From the early chapters of Genesis, there is a scarlet thread woven throughout the pages of Scripture revealing the blood atonement. It climaxes in the final and complete sacrifice for sin on a Roman cross outside the city gates of Jerusalem. Jesus not only spoke of His love for us, “but God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Our salvation in Christ came at a great cost: God “gave His only begotten Son.”

John 3:16 – Salvation’s Condition

“that whoever believes in Him”

Salvation is not spelled “d-o,” but “d-o-n-e.” Many people, however, think their own good works are the pathway to eternal life. Consequently, they do this or do that, or they don’t do this or don’t do that, all in order to earn salvation. But our salvation is *done*. It is already purchased for us with the blood of Christ on the cross. Our part is to believe, to transfer our trust from ourselves and our own efforts to His finished work on the cross of Calvary.

To believe does not mean to simply give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ. It means to transfer our trust to Him alone for our salvation.

The most pointed question in the entire Bible is asked of the apostle Paul by a Philippian jailer:

What must I do to be saved? – Acts 16:30

Paul’s immediate reply follows in the next verse:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. – Acts 16:31

I believe *in* George Washington, but I don’t believe *on* him; I don’t trust my life to him. Salvation’s condition is through faith — and faith alone — in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 – Salvation’s Consequence

“should not perish but have everlasting life”

What a consequence! What a promise! Those without Christ are perishing, but those in Christ have the eternal promise of “everlasting life.” This comes not from our own human efforts, morals, or good deeds, but the promise is to those who realize that God’s love reaches down to us, was made possible through the payment of Christ, and is received by grace through faith alone; believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

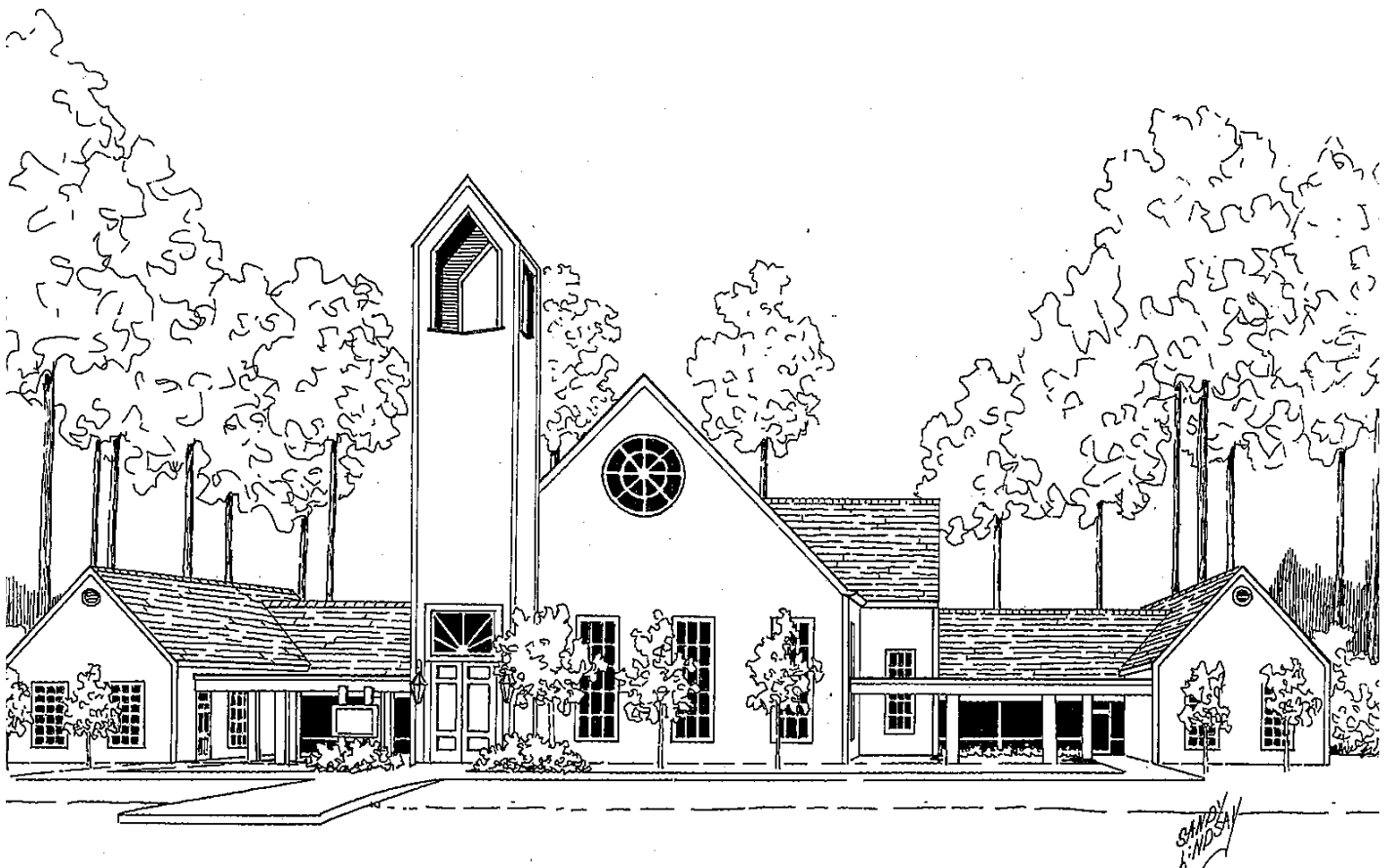
For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

Saturday, March 19th, 2022

Pray that your church will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and that your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God in the hearts of those on the receiving end (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Bow your knees before the Father, imploring that according to the riches of His glory He may grant your local church to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner being of each member, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Pray that your church members would have genuine love for the Lord, for each other, and for the world. Ask for God's grace to help you all abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good; to love one another with brotherly affection and to outdo one another in showing honor. Pray that your local congregation would not be slothful in zeal, but would be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Ask that He would guide you in rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation, being constant in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, and seeking to show hospitality (Romans 12:9-13).



Sunday, March 20th, 2022

Third Sunday in Lent

Utah Rocks

About a year before I quit Exxon to go to seminary, I spent a week out west with a couple of friends at their cabin in Utah. One day as we were driving off the mountain into Cedar City, we made a turn on the highway and there was this amazing vista of SW Utah and part of Nevada. I remember turning to Pete and asking, "How can anyone see this and NOT believe that there is a Creator who made it all?"

Since then, Francey and I have taken several holidays (holy days) to that part of the country and visited all of the National Parks in Utah: Bryce Canyon, Zion, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands & Arches. And of course we've ventured down to the north rim of the Grand Canyon. Going into the visitor center at one of the Utah parks, we both walked out with tee-shirts emblazoned "Utah Rocks" - and it does!

How can one view those amazing rocks without acknowledging that there is indeed a Creator who had a hand in it all? None of that and none of us were made without God having a hand in it all.

For it was you who created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. -- Psalm 139:13

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. -- Genesis 1:31

Richard Hooton



Monday, March 21st, 2022

Hebrews 11:1 (NIRV) Faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see.

After Hurricane Katrina flooded my Chalmette home with more than 9 feet of water, completely destroying the ceiling of our one-story home and even flooding our attic, we spent 3 months in Houston with family while trying to figure out where to permanently relocate.

By December of 2006, after a one-year stay in a Kenner townhouse apartment, next door to warring brothers who fought so hard we thought they would burst through the wall separating us, we decided on Slidell, as we had many friends who had moved here over the years, including our very best friends who had lived just down the street from us before Katrina. Other friends had a lot they were selling north of I-12 and offered to build our home, AND to rent us the double they also owned and were renovating on 6th Street near Fremaux (as it had also flooded during the storm).

The process of homebuilding during 2007 was fraught with high prices, theft of materials, lack of manpower to do the work, and delay after delay. Besides dealing with the trauma of loss, we were also dealing with the trauma of rebuilding during this trying time. I was constantly worried that we were over-extending ourselves and that, in the end, we would be unable to afford the house we were building.

It was during this period, in the spring of 2007, that I joined Aldersgate UMC, transferring my membership from my former congregation of Covenant UMC in Chalmette. It was also during this time that the AUMC youth choir performed a song titled “**Faith Is**,” whose lyrics totally spoke to my heart:

Faith is more than the words we say, faith is in our actions as much as what we pray.

Faith is standing up when we'd rather run away.

Faith is more than the word “believe.” Faith is trusting those things our senses can't perceive.

Faith is having courage that God will never leave.

Faith is more than we understand. Faith is trusting God when life doesn't go as planned.

Faith is knowing we are held safely in God's hand.

Faith is a feeling, a blessing, a power to help us even in our darkest hour.

Faith. Faith.

FAITH became the theme of my home. I had to totally put my faith and trust in God and rest in his assurance that He had us all in His hand and was working to pull us out of the worst experience we'd ever lived through. My faith saved my sanity and allowed us to complete our home and make it a safe refuge for other family members escaping later hurricanes, including Hurricane Ida. We were able to use our whole house generator for 3 days until our power was restored and housed 14 extended family members from 1 to 12 days!

PRAYER: Thank you God, for your faithfulness and your blessings to me and our family, especially in our times of need. Thank you for the Peace that you give to calm our hearts and minds, and most of all, thank you for always being there.

Dede Ricard



Tuesday, March 22nd, 2022

Ecclesiastes 3:11
God's timing is perfect



I often go to Lake Road in Lacombe to watch the sunsets. I spend time along the bayou and marsh watching the colors and reflections along with the marsh birds before going down to the end at the lake to watch the sun sink below the horizon. I have a particular spot where I stand on the crushed cement and I can frame the photos I take as I give thanks for the day and the beauty.

Twice recently, I have had the same experience at the same time with two different people, a week apart. The first week, there were several cars with some just there to watch the sunset and some fishing. There was an older gentleman about 15 feet to my left. We struck up a conversation and he continued to fish. As I held my phone up to try and capture the beauty of the sky and the setting sun, the alarm on my phone went off for a prayer time I share with friends. At that exact moment, I snapped a picture and the alarm went off, he put his fishing rod down and looked over and said "Only God." (something I say often)

The following week, I saw a young man with two small children walking back to their truck. I said hello and we started talking. He said he lived nearby and asked how often I came as this was his first time driving there. We talked a bit and he watched me take pictures and then came over to watch the sunset with his children next to me. Not looking at the time, I held my phone up to capture the sunset and, as my prayer alarm went off, he looked at the sky and said "Only God." We talked further and I told him I had started adding devotionals to my photos. He asked if I was on Facebook and that, while he was rarely on, he wanted to know if I would add him as a friend on Facebook so that he could see them.

I've met neither again but the young father still follows my devotional posts.
"Only God"

Devotional and photo: Jane Aucion

Wednesday, March 23rd, 2022

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” James 1:19.

In a recent Bible study, we discussed how we rarely listen to what others have to say. Instead, we find ourselves thinking about our to-do list, judging the person and wondering the point to their story. Make no mistake, when *we* speak, the entire world should stop and listen to us. We have value and much more to do than others. Our time is so much more important.

If we don't take time to listen, really listen with all our hearts, ears and minds, we miss out on so much. We (I am certainly at the head of the line in this aspect) don't know what the person speaking really has on their heart or what is going on in their life. We have no idea why they behave a certain way. Most of the time people just want to be heard and not judged. Often times, if I don't agree with what a person has said, I immediately tune them out or start to judge. "How can they believe that? What were they thinking? That is so silly!" If I continue to listen, I can even become angry and say things that are not of Christ!

Dan has a friend that will call and proceed to talk about everything that is going on in his life. Sometimes when Dan calls him, the friend turns it around and the conversation ends up about him. Dan will remark " I never got to talk about what I was calling him about." After he hangs up, Dan will admit that the friend probably doesn't have anyone else to listen to him. Dan has resigned himself to being that person.

The scripture in James guides us to be Christ's servants of grace and mercy. By listening, being slow to anger and slow to speak, we are acting as Christ would have us to act. We can surprise ourselves by actually learning something by following this directive.

Proverbs 1"5 "let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance."

This Lent, make it a priority to look for opportunities to listen to others, reserve judgement and see what God has for you to learn.

Prayer: Most Holy God of wisdom, please open our ears and hearts to others. Show us the moments where we need to listen and learn. Help us to follow you. Amen

Kathryn McKenney



Thursday, March 24th, 2022

“You are a daughter of the King, you are a bright and beautiful light. Shine on dear one, shine on!”

After close to 26 years in education as a School Social Worker, I knew it was time to retire. I was the definition of burnt out! When school started in the fall of 2021, I updated my resume and the search was on. As the school year progressed, I was stretched thin. All of the sudden, I was the only social worker for our district at the elementary level. Running to 5 schools and trying to serve over 1,000 children was next to impossible. I told God, I need another job! It was time, I was ready to move on. So the hunt was on. Indeed was my new best friend.

While taking matters into my own hands, God was quietly laughing at me. I knew I could collect my school retirement and work part time, but where? I was struggling with life and its mere existence because I was done my job.

Finally, in October, I prayed to God one night, **PLEASE TAKE THIS BURDEN FROM ME! I can't handle my job and the pressures from it. It's time to go, time to move on, this job search is in your hands Lord, I give it to You! Lord, guide me and put me in the job you want me to have, where you want me to be, it's in your hands Lord!! Lord, even if this new job is doing your work! Because I feel you possibly want me in a Christian work place, in Christian Ministry, serving YOU.**

Not a month later, I was sitting in church in JWC, looking at the Connect. THERE IT WAS, in black and white! There was a job advertisement for the Family Ministries Coordinator for Aldersgate UMC! After I read that job opening, I looked up, laughing and told the Lord, REALLY? My church needed someone and I was that person! I read the requirements for the job and felt I was perfect for the position! When I tell you God opened a door for me, I RAN through it! I HAVE NOT LOOKED BACK!

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt I was created for this job, the Family Ministries Coordinator position that I was hired for.

Once I gave my burden to Jesus and it was in His hands, He handled it! #letmetellyouaboutmyjesus! I am humbled, thankful and grateful to serve our church. God has guided me in the direction He wants me in and I listened!

Cecilia Richards



*“Perhaps you were born for such a time as this.!”
Esther 4:14*

*“Arise. Shine. For your light has come and the
Glory of the Lord rises upon you.”
Isaiah 60:1*

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the
Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give
you a future and hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*

Snow Days

*I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

Psalm 121:1-2

One of the joys of my childhood was the anticipation of a snow day. Of course, a snow day meant that some adults would be having problems dealing with snow---but as a child I did not see those problems. A forecast of possible snow would prompt me to eagerly tune in to the morning AM radio broadcast, listening for a mention of Waxahachie Independent School District among any announced list of closures. A light dusting of snow or ice that might prompt a closure in Waxahachie would have been of no concern to my previous school, Libertytown Elementary. Libertytown was in Maryland, and Maryland was equipped to deal with snow in ways that Waxahachie, Texas was not. If my bus driver Mrs. Wolfe, was faced with snow, she knew from where her help would come—it would come from her husband, Mr. Wolfe, who drove the snow plow. Heavier snows might cause a delayed opening, but Mr. Wolfe would soon have the roads cleared. Waxahachie also knew from where its help would come; it would come from changing weather and the melt that was on its way. In life, we can expect to encounter our own snow days, days when the snow of real problems threatens to overwhelm us. We each are affected by our own sets of problems, and problems that may seem to be a few minor flakes to one person might feel like a blizzard to another. While present day schools might declare a day of virtual at-home learning to avoid a snow closure, schools in my childhood never considered shutting down due to lack of internet connectivity. When the snows that come our way threaten to shut us down, from where will our help come? Our help will come from the Lord, a divine help that works through a Mr. Wolfe in his snow plow, through the sunny day around the corner, or through any of the ways God reaches out and offers shelter from the snows of life. Our confidence in God's help lets us recapture our childhood joy during the snow days of our lives.

Saturday, March 26th, 2022

Source: by Pastor Ed in devotional

Two concepts are included in this one illustration of God's creation praising Him. First, since the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, it means that the Lord is to be praised, or recognized as God, everywhere. Second, since the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, it means that God is to be praised all day long. From the bursting forth of each new day to the slow spreading shadows of the evening, every new day is a gift from God to us. And each morning's sunrise has within it the promise of fresh blessings from the very hand that created the sun: "Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, / Because His compassions fail not. / They are new every morning; / Great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). Mercy is *not getting* what we merit, and God's mercy ensures us that we will not get what our thoughts and actions deserve.

Sometimes mercy comes in interesting packages, which are really God's grace. A doctor, who is a believer, was exhausted after seeing an unusually large number of unscheduled patients one morning. As he sat down for lunch at the hospital canteen, he placed his hands over his eyes and thought to himself, "I'll scream if another patient shows up without an appointment." Opening his eyes, he saw an elderly woman approach. She said, "You know, I was nervous about coming to this hospital, but now I know this place is okay, because I see that the doctors pray before eating." Do you think that was a fresh, new mercy from God? I do!

"LORD, it is true that You really do deserve our praise from the early morning to the setting sun. Forgive us for not always remembering to do so. We praise You now in Jesus' name." Amen

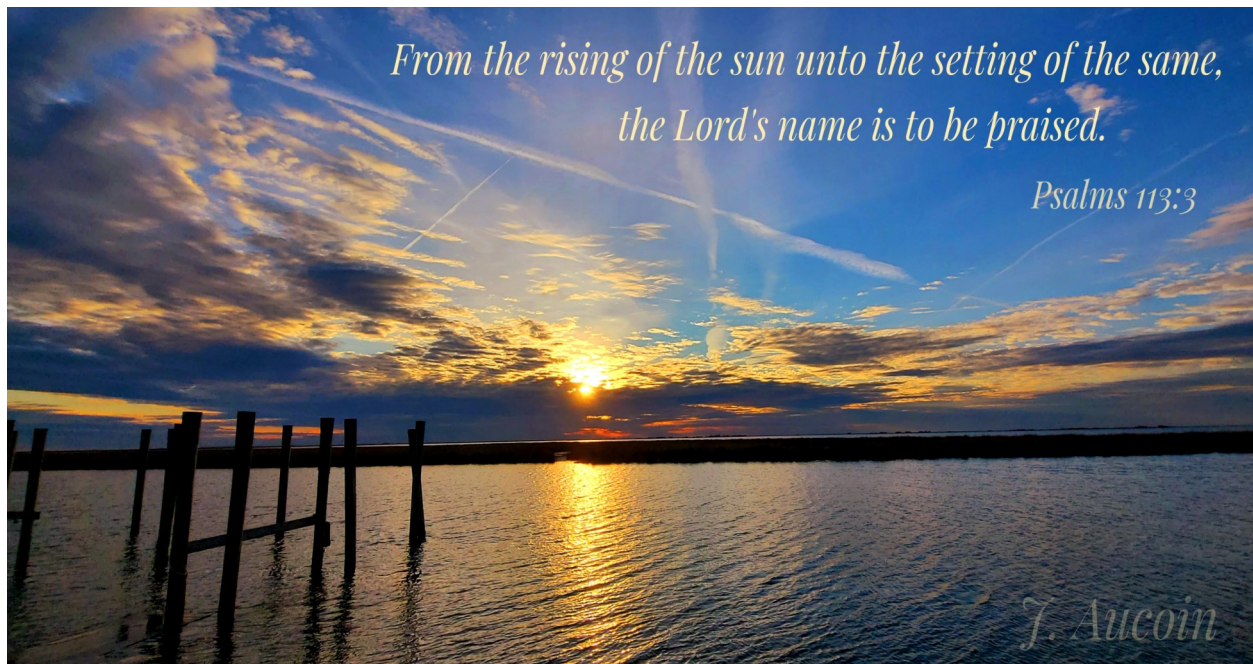


Photo credit: Ms. Jane Aucoin

Sunday, March 27th, 2022

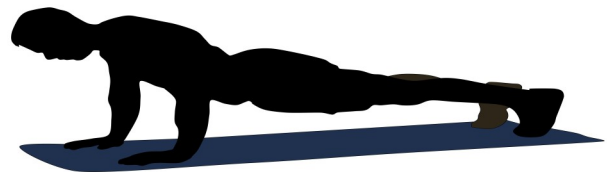
Fourth Sunday in Lent

The Minute Plank

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4

In June 2019 Richard and I began a weight loss journey. We joined *All Hours Fitness* and were working out three to five days a week. About 6 weeks into our commitment to health and fitness we realized that we did not know how to use the equipment. We hired Rainey to be our personal trainer. She worked with us once a week for eight weeks. It was better than marriage counseling. We learned a lot about each other and our complete lack of physical stamina.

One thing we never mastered was the one-minute plank. We could each do a 30 second plank but not a minute. Leading up to Lent 2020 (yes that Lent) I was trying to figure out what my spiritual discipline would be.



After a lot of soul searching, Richard and I decided that we would try to master the one-minute plank. The plan: add a second every day for the first fifteen days of Lent. Then once we got up to a 45 second plank we would add a second every other day so we could do the one minute by the Saturday before Easter.

In spiritual terms this physical exercise had a deeper meaning for us. When Jesus died on the cross he had to bear his whole weight for hours without any relief. The question we wondered was might we learn how to bear our whole weight for just one minute?

Long story short, we did it. Richard and I both learned how to do a one-minute plank during Lent 2020. Since then, we fell off the weight loss wagon. The pandemic and my brother's death interrupted our personal health and fitness journey. This Lent it is time to begin that journey again. We know we can succeed again because we learned how to do the one-minute plank before.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank you for the ability to train and accomplish goals. Help us to renew our passion and commitment as we begin again. Amen.

Francey Hooton

Monday, March 28th, 2022

The Resurrection and the Life

Scripture Reading — John 11:20-32

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." — John 11:25

When Jesus finally made his way to Bethany, Martha greeted him with an accusation: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus then promised that Lazarus would rise again. And Martha said, in effect, "Yes, we know—someday."

As Jews, Martha and Mary believed that someday God would bring about a resurrection of the dead, but that probably seemed so far off that it gave little comfort for the present. The promise of the resurrection can seem that way to us at times too.

The sisters also believed, however, that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. And when he did raise Lazarus (John 11:38-44), can you imagine the effects that had? What was it like for Lazarus after dying and then being raised? How was life changed for him and his sisters? I'm sure they saw Jesus in a totally different light.

During Lent, as we trace Jesus' path to Jerusalem and beyond, we're compelled to hear Jesus' wake-up call about the purpose of his coming and what that means for us still today. If our faith is foggy and distracted by grief or sorrow, he shakes us once again with these astonishing words: "I am the resurrection and the life."

This is one of the "I am" statements of Jesus, each of which anchors Christ's identity as the one true God: "I am the resurrection and the life." And he asks us, as he did Martha, "Do you believe this?"

Prayer

Jesus, give us firm faith that you will raise us too from death, because you are alive! Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional

Listen to the Music

*When they had sung a hymn, they went out of the Mount of Olives.
Matthew 26:30*

Music is a big part of my life. My mom was a singer she sung to my brother and I all the time. Being born in the '1940's, our nursery rhymes were "Ella Fitzgerald style." Needless to say, we liked her style and mom could even "beat."

I sang in High School, college and church. People often asked me why I didn't pursue singing more. Smitty and I were attending SLU and one night I was singing for an audience at the Student Union . When I went on stage, I couldn't remember the words to the song, so I left the stage. I promised myself that night, I wouldn't sing again, only in church.

When we became members of Aldersgate with Charlotte's insistence, I joined the choir. It was a wonderful experience. There were so many excellent singers. When we started praise band, I was chosen as one of the vocalist. We learned so much together. We attended workshops on Praise and Worship. I am ever thankful to God for teaching me to listen for His voices in music. The Holy Spirit began to work through me.

Not long after, my niece Kelly Vignes asked me to sing at her wedding. The choir director helped me practice for two weeks. I looked forward to singing for my niece and her husband. After the wedding, many family members were surprised that I could sing. My oldest son walked up to me and said, "You didn't sound like our Mom." I asked him who did I sound like and he said, "I sounded like an angel." At that moment, I knew God wanted me as a part of the choir. This was His perfect time for me, not mine.

Singing all these years is such a gift for me, but most of all my relationship with God has only deepened. Music fills my soul, comforts me and gives me peace. Our band sings for the glory of God and I cherish each musician. We are His family.

Music is not merely entertainment. It is a window into the soul through which God pours His love and mercy. With His music, I am wrapped in His arms in times of care and sorrow.

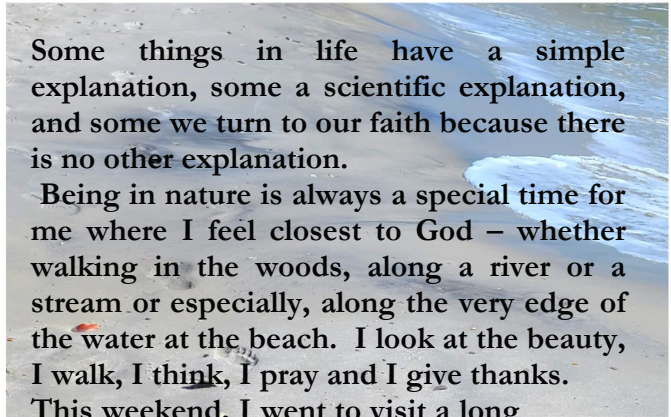
Prayer: Lord, help us to hear your sweet words through the music of your soul. May we carry Your lyrics for all the world to hear and may they comfort and give them peace.

Amen.

Cheryl Smith



Wednesday, March 30th, 2022



Some things in life have a simple explanation, some a scientific explanation, and some we turn to our faith because there is no other explanation.

Being in nature is always a special time for me where I feel closest to God – whether walking in the woods, along a river or a stream or especially, along the very edge of the water at the beach. I look at the beauty, I walk, I think, I pray and I give thanks.

This weekend, I went to visit a long-time friend I hadn't seen in several years. An unexpected bonus was to be able to spend a little beach time Saturday and Sunday in Alabama and Florida. Sunday morning, I took a long walk along the beach by myself, stopping to watch the birds soaring in the wind and running along the seashore while dodging the waves. I looked at everything that had washed up along the way and how unique each thing was – all God's beautiful and unique creations accompanied by the beautiful green water, the strong breeze and the sound of the crashing waves.

I spent a lot of time not only thanking God for the day and for so many things, but praying for some special intentions. At one point, I stopped to look at all of the bird tracks in the sand and take a picture. I backtracked a bit to get some without the footprints of everyone that had walked on the beach that morning. At that time, I looked where I had just walked. As you know, footprints are always an indentation the sand and, depending on how deep the sand is, sometimes unrecognizable as just a deep indentation.

When I looked closely, my footprints that were just there had almost vanished but the other set of prints not only stood out but appeared raised and three dimensional. If you look closely at the picture, you can barely see my footprints. Many may find another explanation but to me, there was only one explanation – God was there walking with me as I talked to Him, thanked Him, and prayed.

Footprints in the Sand

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.

For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it:

"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Mary Stevenson

Thursday, March 31st, 2022

Jesus, dear Savior,
during these days of Lent,
I want to fast,
to repent and to pray.
Above all else I want
to stay in the circle
of Your love.

Walk with me and
surround me with
Your light; lead me and
guide me in Your footsteps.
During this season of Lent
help me to follow You
and imitate Your love.

May this cross remind me today
and throughout Lent of
Your great love for me.



Amen.

Friday, April 1st, 2022

Mark 15: 16-17

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him.

A few years ago, I had the privilege to visit Jerusalem and sit on a bench in the Antonio Fortress, the palace mentioned in this passage from the Gospel of Mark. This sacred spot is where the Roman soldiers took Jesus to “prepare” Him for His walk to the cross.

Sitting there, I was overwhelmed with a profound feeling of despair. For Jesus, this was the time when it would have become all very real. Being one with God, He knew what was to come. But sitting there, I could see his human-side coming through for a split second. See Jesus surrounded by the mocking guards and thinking, ‘this is going to be Bad’. Capital B Bad.

Yet, He trusted God and He followed through, all the way to the cross. Because He knew. He knew God was with him.

What trial can you and I possibly face that would be worse than walking toward certain, painful death? I can’t imagine and I hope you can’t either. But we do face trials every day. Family divisions. Health issues. Crime. All serious concerns that affect our lives today.

In the quiet of that imposing stone room, being where Jesus stood at such a dire time, I also sensed strength. The power God gave his Son to finish the job He sent Him to do.

That same gift is available to each of us to get through our own personal trials. All it takes is faith that He’ll be with us, beside us, for as long as we ask Him to be.

Suzie Hunt



Saturday, April 2nd, 2022

Redeemed by:

Big Daddy Weave

Seems like all I can see was the struggle

Haunted by ghosts that lived in my past

Bound up in shackles of all my failures

Wondering how long is this gonna last

Then You look at this prisoner and say to me "son

Stop fighting a fight that's already been won"

I am redeemed, You set me free

So I'll shake off theses heavy chains

And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

I am redeemed

I'm redeemed

All my life I have been called unworthy

Named by the voice of my shame and regret

But when I hear You whisper, "Child lift up your head"

I remember oh God, You're not done with me yet

So I'll shake off theses heavy chains

And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

Because I don't have to be the old man inside of me

'Cause his day is long dead and gone

Because I've got a new name, a new life I'm not the same

And a hope that will carry me home

I am redeemed, You set me free

So I'll shake off theses heavy chains

And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

I am redeemed, You set me free

So I'll shake off theses heavy chains

And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

Oh God I'm not who I used to be

Jesus I'm not who I used to be

'Cause I am redeemed

Thank God, redeemed

Sunday, April 3rd, 2022

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Be Prepared

I do not believe it is an accident that “Be Prepared” is the motto of the Boy Scouts AND the Girl Scouts; they are pretty good words to live by. I remember when I was in seminary and some “missionaries” from one of the neighborhood churches was making the rounds. When I opened the door to my apartment, they asked the question many have encountered before: If you died tonight, where would you be tomorrow?

My answer to them is the same as my answer to many evangelists who claim to know the exact time of Jesus’ return. I quoted Jesus to them - in particular, the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13). Half of them needed oil for their lamps; half of them were prepared. In other words: If you’re ready you’re ready, if you’re not, you’re not!

As we turn the corner into the last two weeks of Lent, the cross of Jesus looms on the horizon. The question of mortality - his and ours - may begin to make us squirm. I heard a song on XM the other day I became very familiar with in the 70s.

***So you run and you run to catch up with the sun but it's sinking,
Racing around to come up behind you again.
The sun is the same in a relative way but you're older,
Shorter of breath and one day closer to death. (Pink Floyd - Time)***

While there is some truth there, another truth is, as Paul says,

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Cor. 15:26)

Or, as Jesus said to Martha near the tomb of Lazarus,

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)

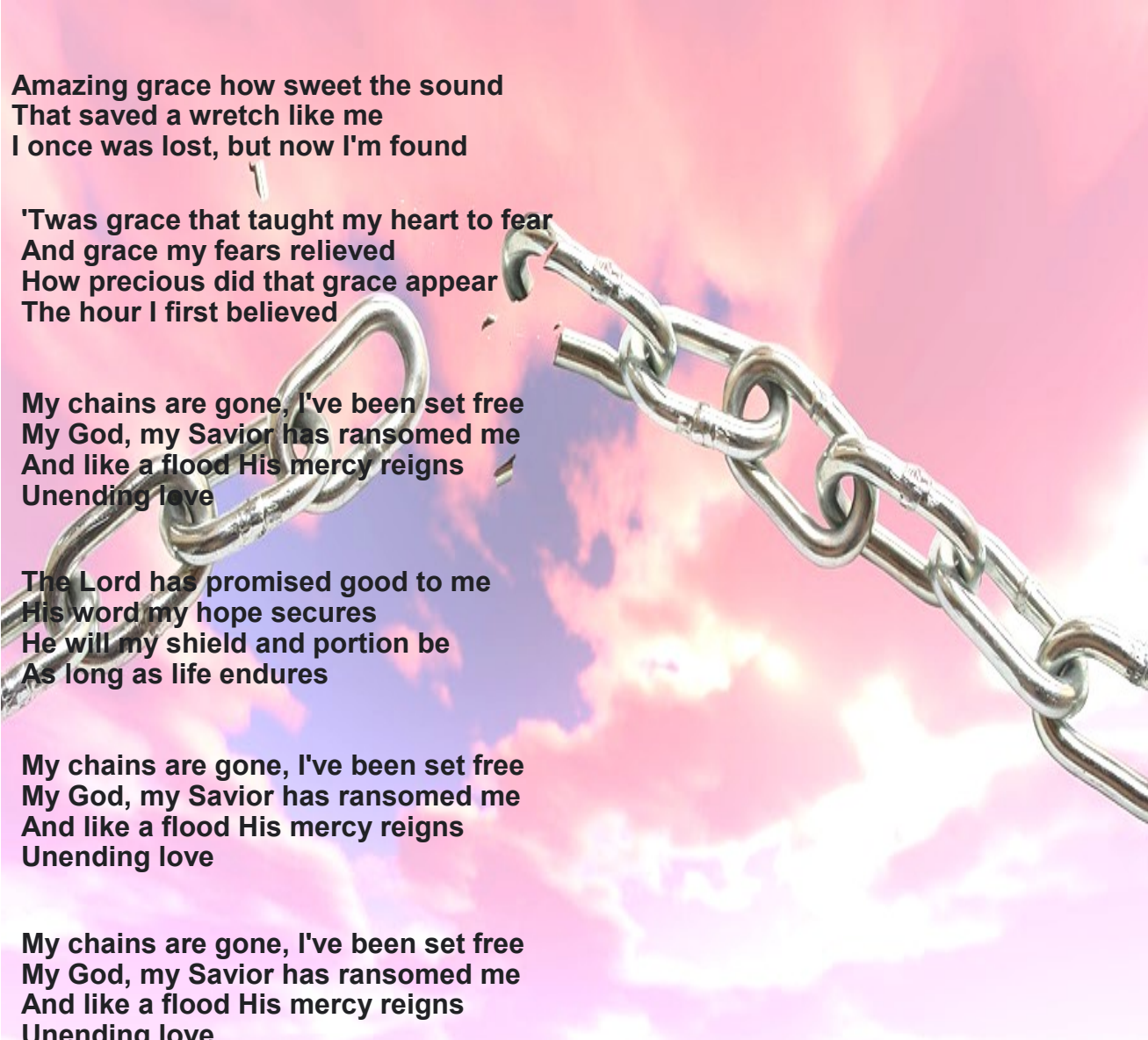
Do you believe this?

Richard Hooton



Monday, April 4th, 2022

Amazing Grace, My Chains are Gone By: Chris Tomlin

A broken metal chain is shown against a background of a sunset sky with soft, glowing clouds. The chain is broken in the middle, with one end hanging down and the other end extending upwards and to the right. The sky transitions from a pale yellow near the horizon to a soft pink and purple at the top.

**Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found**

**'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed**

**My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love**

**The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures**

**My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love**

**My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love**

**The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God who called me here below
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine
You are forever mine**

Thank you Lord for setting us free and breaking our chains! For giving your Son to die for our sins on the cross! We are thankful for your promise of salvation and being forever ours.

Hope on Little Legs

Scripture Reading — Matthew 19:13-14

People brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.

At a certain point in Sunday morning worship services our congregation's young children make their way up to the front. When they arrive, I lead them in a short prayer and then send them off to a time of worship in which they praise God and learn at their level of understanding.

It's fun watching them wander, run, walk, and trip up to the pulpit area. Some come all by themselves. Some come clutching an older sibling. And some come in the arms of their parents. It is also fun watching the people in the congregation as the children come down the aisle. Many have delighted grins on their faces as they watch the weekly processional—they are more engaged and excited at that point than at any other time in the worship service! They are seeing hope-on-little-legs, and it does their hearts good.

Jesus made room for children on his lap, and the church is called to cherish and make room for children in its life.

It's not that children are innocent. Instead, their neediness teaches us about our neediness. Their readiness to follow teaches us what real humility looks like. Their capacity for wonder and joy teach us the nature of genuine worship. They point us to God and give us the hope and trust that he loves us too!

Prayer

Thank you for your love of our children, dear Jesus. Make us like them in every way that gives you pleasure! We pray with great hope for your work in us, whether we are big or little. Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional



Wednesday, April 6th. 2022

A Moment of Truth

I read one of my morning devotionals today and had one of those 'ah-ha' moments that always make me wonder what other, simple, truths I've missed in my life. You see, I love my children. I mean the deep, feel-their-pain, kind of love. I feel so much pride when they do well that I often cry because of my love for them.

Oh, not the boastful kind of pride but, rather, the kind that springs from the heart when they 'get it right' in their life-decisions. I feel disappointment, but never stop loving them, when they don't get it right.

I realized that my Heavenly Father loves me the same way...only on a much grander scale!

Friend, we are His children and He loves us, in spite of all our ugliness and sin, in such a way that you and I cannot and will not ever comprehend. He will always love us unconditionally. He will never lock the door behind us when we're willful and turn away from His path. He will never hit the 'ignore' button and not take our calls. He will never write us out of His will.

You will always be welcomed back to His open arms (though the punishment may sting a bit). You will always be heard when you fall to your knees and call out to Him in prayer. And you will always have the promised inheritance of eternal life, mercy, grace and forgiveness that has been yours since you accepted the truth of Jesus' death on the cross. Nothing will ever take His love from you. You are a child of the most-high, God, and He will never stop loving you unconditionally...nothing you do can change that!

Source: Short daily devotionals

Photo credit: Jane Aucoin



Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:39

J. Aucoin

“God So Loved The World”

When I was 15 years old, I was at home one evening by myself while my parents and younger brothers were at a school function. It happened to be a stormy night with thunderstorms and lightning all around. I was sitting in a rocker in our den enjoying a Billy Graham Revival on TV. (Remember there were not as many channels in 1969 as there are now.) Billy Graham had preached his sermon and was reminding his audience that God loved everyone and had sent His son Jesus to save us. All we had to do was believe in Him to have eternal life. I watched as men, women, and teenagers made their way down the aisles to accept Christ as their Savior.

I had already given my life to God when I was 12 and had been baptized. But I had been having doubts that maybe I just thought I was saved, but really wasn't. Maybe I hadn't done everything I needed to do to deserve to be saved? How could I be sure that I was really saved? What if I just thought I had been saved but really wasn't? How was I supposed to know if I was saved or not? What if I died but was not really saved like I thought I was? All of these questions were going through my mind as I sat there watching the end of the revival.

All of a sudden, there was a big flash of lightning and a loud crack of thunder as the lights went out and the TV went blank. It was pitch black. Remember, I was home alone and now I was sitting in a dark house without any electricity. I was scared!!

I started praying! And then I felt God in the room with me. Not only did He calm my fears of being home alone in the dark, but a peace came over me. I immediately knew that I was saved and that I did not have to worry anymore. I knew I was in God's arms forever.

The electricity was off for about 15 minutes and the Billy Graham Revival was over when it came back on. But during that time, God assured me I was saved and I have never doubted it since!

Cindy Kemp

“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes”

Friday, April 8th, 2022

*Below, please find a "Prayer for the New Year."
This prayer comes from the United Methodist
General Board of Church and Society website.
Today I share it with you (with a few adaptations).*

A Prayer for the Lenten Season

**Holy God,
who calls the worlds into being,
who calls us into Christ's church,
we thank you for the mission of the church
that gives life to all the world,
for the ministry of the church
to which every Christian is called.**

**We thank you for pastors and people
who seek to serve you faithfully
in the midst of despair and destruction,
in a world of chaos and confusion.**

**We confess, O God,
that sometimes we forget
that You have created us,
so we wander away
from your Son's teachings and example.
Thus we abuse your creation,
the sustaining gift You have given to us.
Recover in us a sense of awe and responsibility.**

**We live by teachings, hopes and dreams
that are rooted in Scriptural holiness.
Yet we confess that we condone torture
against those we perceive to be our enemies.
We hide our eyes from the deaths of those
we deem to be foreigners,
and we think peace is an unattainable ideal.
Reconcile in us what we expect with what we do.**

**We thank you for the ministry
of the United Methodist Church,
for our heritage of justice and peace,
our concern for the homeless,
the helpless and the harassed.
Our mother, the Church,
has nourished us, taught us,
reprimanded us and sent us
into the world to serve faithfully.**

**We pray, dear God,
for those who are survivors of storms
and floods and earthquakes,
of violence, domestic and random acts,
for all who are experiencing heartache
and suffering of any kind,
for all who live in fear and doubt,
Empower us to help restore them
to well being.**

**We confess, O God,
how self-satisfied we so easily become.
Our comfort and contentment
often prevent us from showing mercy.
Forgive our neglect and strengthen us to serve.
As we pray so easily and so often
that You will forgive us as we forgive others,
help us to recognize our sins,
our shortcomings and our self-righteousness.
Bring us from arrogance to empathy,
from indifference to enthusiasm,
from fear to faithfulness.**

**One more thing:
Do not let us utter words of agreement
too easily, too quickly.
Focus our eyes as well as our hearts
on what you desire for us.
Challenge us to move
from complacency to commitment,
from clichés to compassion
and from old habits to new opportunities.**

**We pray all this through the Spirit
of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.**

by Jim Winkler

Blessings

Saturday, April 9th, 2022

I am waking this morning to another dreaded anniversary, the loss of my daddy! Another year has rolled around, 8 years to be exact. The years don't stop passing!

Have you ever had an event or tragedy happen in your life that you will NEVER, ever forget the details of? For me, that day is April 9th. It will forever be etched into my mind.

My daddy had back surgery at the end of February, 2014. A few days later, he ended up in ICU due to a massive heart attack. This was such a shock to everyone because he was such a healthy man. I was a daddy's girl and he was everything to me, so I knew he would pull through!! We had so many people praying for 6 long weeks, I knew God would heal my daddy. God did heal my daddy, the ultimate healing took place!! In fact my daddy knew this would happen. My daddy told me about a vivid dream where God told him, he would be healed. My last visit with my daddy was surreal, many things were said.

Seriously hard things I didn't want to hear. I remember every word spoken, down to how he wanted his funeral handled! He even told me I would have to take care of my mother because she couldn't handle him being gone. He was ready to meet Jesus face to face! We said our last goodbye, even though I didn't know it. Down deep inside, I did, I cried all the way home from the hospital visit!!



On the night of April 9th, 2014, my mom called me hysterical. All she could say is, "he is gone, Cecilia, he is gone!!" I was numb, cold and didn't know what to say. God knew I was angry with him, I had an 8-year daughter that thought Poppi walked on water, because he did. The stages of grief have been such a roller coaster. But through it all, my God makes no mistakes. My daddy was an amazing Christian man and was LOVED by all who knew him. He had over 200 Gideon Bible's donated in his memory! What a testament to a great Christian life my daddy led. I take great comfort that I WILL see him again one fine day. When I sit back and think on the week my daddy passed, it was Holy Week. All these events were during Lent and happened just as the Lord planned. What an amazing Homecoming my daddy had! I could just imagine the Easter Celebration that was going on in Heaven!!!

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens; there is a time for everything ... a time to mourn and a time to dance... — Ecclesiastes 3: 1-4

Philippians 4:1-3 I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

Cecilia Richards

Sunday, April 10th, 2022 Palm Sunday

Seeing Jesus Today

Sir, they said, we would like to see Jesus. John 12:21b

There is a wonderful praise chorus in the United Methodist Hymnal (#349) "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace."

We can see Jesus today, just like his followers have witnessed Him through the ages.

Where do you see Jesus?

Here are some of the places that I see Jesus, today.

In my father's hands clasped in prayer.

In the eyes of the people I baptize.

In the bags of groceries we collect for the food bank and the blessing box.

In the hymns and praise songs we sing as a congregation.

In the scripture I read during my morning devotional.

In my husband's voice as we pray together.

In the car line each afternoon at Apple Tree.

When the sun comes up in the morning and sets each afternoon.

I see Jesus all around me. In the church I serve. In the creation He made. In the people I meet. Jesus is graciously woven into this great tapestry we call life.

I can also see Jesus pointing out all the hurt places in this world. We live during war torn, weary, and divided times. There is a spiritual drowsiness in our world that can blind us to the will and way of Jesus.

Part of our journey of faith is to recognize that the great joy and beauty in this world co-exists with the great sadness and suffering. Jesus experienced it all during his life. His primary mission was to help transform the hurt places into something new. We join in this mission when we can see Jesus, see the world as he sees it, and act accordingly.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, open our eyes and help us to see you; and to see what you see. May we be of service wherever we go and in what we do. Amen.

Francey Hooton



Words

Scripture Reading — Luke 19:45-48

All the people hung on his words.

—Luke 19:48—

On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of the crowd, celebrating him as their promised King. On Monday and Tuesday he taught in the temple, frustrating the religious leaders, who wanted to kill him but were unable to “because all the people hung on his words.”

Within five days he hung on the cross because of their words. By that time the people didn't want him anymore. “The whole crowd shouted, ‘Away with this man!’ ... They kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ ... With loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed” (Luke 23:18-23).

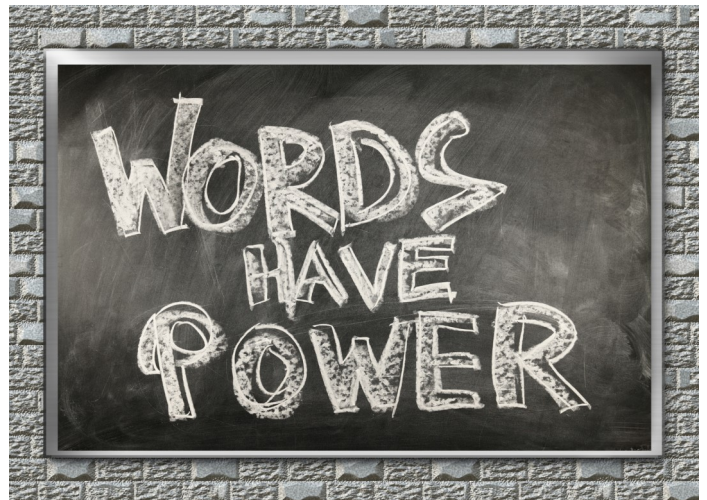
My words also bear responsibility for Jesus' death. Have my conversations always been “full of grace” (Colossians 4:6)? Am I consistently “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)? Is what I say “helpful for building others up according to their needs” (Ephesians 4:29)? Does my “gentle answer” turn away wrath—or does my “harsh word” stir up anger (Proverbs 15:1)?

Our silent and gracious Savior took our sins on himself, and we are healed by his saving work, in which he declared once for all, “It is finished.” May we be finished with words that hurt, and may we give our tongues to words that heal.

Lent is a good time to review how we use our tongues, and in our reviewing, to repent.

Prayer Jesus, as we approach the week of your passion, speak to our hearts about what our mouths speak to others. In your name we hope. Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional



Tuesday, April 12th, 2022

Name Above All Names

By Kent Van Til —

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Exodus 20:7

God created the universe and claims us as his own. God is the holy and perfect One whose name is above all names. No other name should be so highly honored.

God is also the one who loves us perfectly. God cares for us and provides for us each day. God is faithful and always keeps his promises.

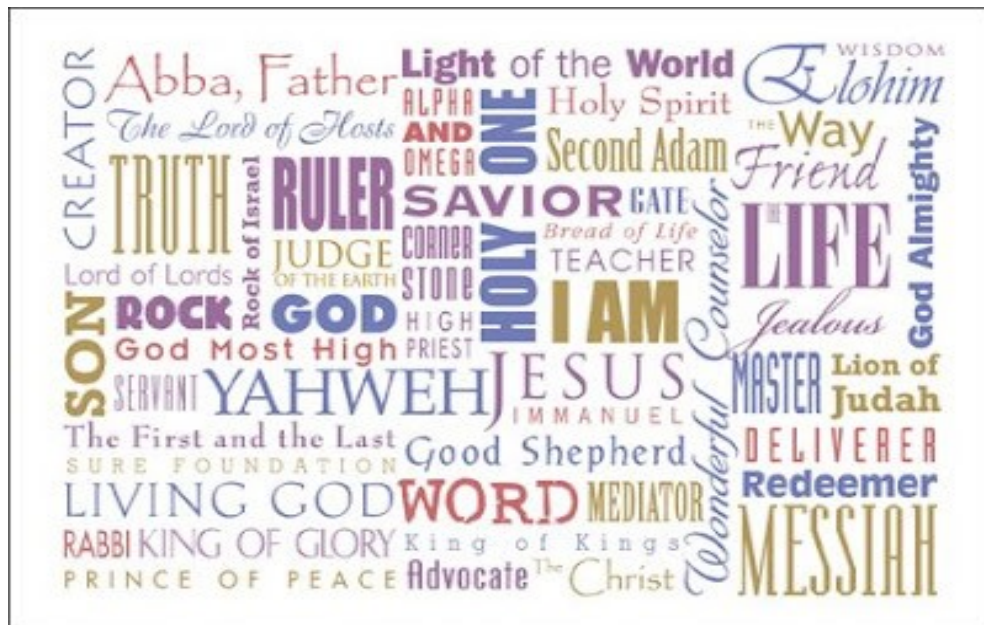
Why, then, would we disrespect God by misusing his name?

I had a Jewish student who would write only “G_d” on her papers so that she would not use the full name for God. That kind of respect for the name of God may be extreme, but in our culture today people have often swerved to the other extreme. For example, the letters OMG have become a social meme. This is used like an exclamation point in conversations that are trite, even narcissistic. Using God’s name in such contexts is disgraceful to the one whose name is above all names.

One day when someone said, “Oh, my God!” I asked them, “What if God comes and calls you to account for that? You’ll be in a world of trouble then.”

Let’s give honor to the Lord our God in all we think, say, and do.

Forgive us, Lord, if we have misused your name. Help us to call each other to account when we do. Help us to honor your name so that others can see that we love and -honor you. Amen.





But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5

We are quickly heading towards the most holy day in the church year – Easter. The day Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave. This is the day separates Christianity from all other religions. And yet, I sometimes think Christians don't grasp what Jesus did for us.

Most of us have never experienced the hopelessness of a life behind bars. A life full of promise cut short by a heavy sentence. We've never heard the stern voice of a judge condemning our actions and proclaiming our punishment. We've never had to feel the emptiness of a jail cell; the loneliness of being cut-off from our loved ones; the fear and despair and intense regret caused by our bad choices. But that is the reality of our life without Jesus. Our sins had condemned us to death. Put it into the here and now. Imagine you are in prison knowing your execution day is set. Now you wait for the inevitable. Imagine the hopelessness, the despair, the regret, the fear. And then, one day, someone comes to your jail cell and says you are free to go. Free to hug your children and spouse. Free to feel the warmth of the sun on your face. Free of the fear of punishment. Free to fully experience all the joys of living. Why? Because someone took your place. Someone took your misdeeds as his own and was punished for you. Imagine not only the relief but the overwhelming gratitude you would feel for this person. Wouldn't you want to know why they would do this for you? Wouldn't you want to know more about him? Wouldn't you want to love Him as He loved you? This is what Jesus asks of us. Love Him. Follow Him. Trust Him. Praise Him. You are free. Happy Easter.

Dear Lord, help us to remember the price that was paid for our sins. Help us to remember, not so that we may feel the burden of guilt, but the peace that comes with knowing that we are free. Give us the spirit of gratitude that will lead us to want a deeper relationship with the One who saved us from the punishment of our sins. Give us a spirit of love that only comes from understanding the depth of Your love for us. It is always in Your Son's name that we pray. Amen

Dana Fatic



Thursday, April 14th, 2022

Maundy Thursday

What important and life-altering lesson have you learned from the school of suffering? How have these changed you? In what ways have you run from your suffering and how have you embraced it?

Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like Him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want!

1 Peter 4:1-2

Since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer too! For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. And you won't have to spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God.

Prayer– Praise God for the magnificence of His glory that outshines our suffering and makes it worthwhile. Thank God for lovingly and carefully refining you, through the process is sometimes painful. Petition God to show you what it is He wants to do in you or through you uniquely because of your suffering!





Friday, April 15th, 2022

Good Friday

What's So Good About Good Friday?

Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. — John 19:30

Today's reading is long, but it raises the question *Would anyone there that day have called it a "good" day?* The high priest Caiaphas and the Pharisees got rid of a popular, influential preacher—but at what price? Pontius Pilate, the hard-bitten Roman governor, reluctantly allowed Jesus to be crucified to appease the mob and their leaders demanding Jesus' life. Pilate turned him over to the execution squad, for whom this was just another death sentence along with two others that day—until the centurion realized they'd killed the Son of God (Matthew 27:54)!

If the disciples called it "good," it was only after encountering the risen Christ (John 21). And would Jesus say that Friday was "good"? The scene at Gethsemane the night before was agonizing, as Jesus begged his Father to spare him from his awful mission. Maybe later, back in heaven with God, he could finally say, "Yes, Father, that was a good day."

The term "Good Friday" first occurred in the fourth century. Some think it was originally called "God's Friday." Today we can call it "good" if we appreciate the fact that Jesus' trial, punishment, and death brought our salvation. These truths are seen through the spiritual spectacles of faith. So in that sense it truly is "Good Friday"!

Is this Friday good for you?

Prayer: On Good Friday, blessed Jesus, we lament the sin and evil that made this horror necessary. But we are also grateful for your sacrifice. Help us prepare for resurrected living. In your holy name, Amen.

Source: The Daily Devotional



Saturday, April 16th, 2022

***Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and
wait for the Lord.*** ***Psalm 27:14***

We can be impatient, very impatient.
We want things now.
We don't want to wait.
Our lives are filled with instant gratification and so waiting
can be difficult.
Why is this?

Is it because we don't know what to do in the "wait"?
Are we afraid if we don't "wait", we will miss something?
Are we uncomfortable waiting?

How can we change our mindset on waiting?

Take a moment to slowly read the excerpt below from a bible
commentary written on this verse:

*Wait at his door with prayer;
wait at his foot with humility;
wait at his table with service;
wait at his window with expectancy.*

How will you wait during this Lenten season?
God is good in the wait.
Take heart that God waits for us!

Sunday, April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday!

He has Risen!

Resurrection: Easter 2022

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20:18

Each year we begin Lent on Ash Wednesday with the solemn reminder that we indeed are created from the dirt. And yet we are the crowning achievement of God's creation. God has breathed life into each one of us. We are created in the image of God, and we are on a journey of faith becoming more and more like Jesus. This happens when we listen to the Holy Spirit who is sealed in our hearts at the time of our Baptism.

During Lent we pay attention to the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. We experience his teaching, preaching and healings once again. We take our place within this ministry. We touch our purpose once again as we join with his Disciples on the journey of faith.

Each year this journey always leads us to Jerusalem and the Cross.

We witness the crowd crying Hosanna in praise and exultation. Within a week we see that same crowd turn and scream Crucify Him! On Good Friday all seems lost when Jesus dies on the cross. On Saturday we are left in stunned silence, reflecting on how it is possible that humanity could be so cruel and get it so terribly wrong.

Then as the sun rises on Sunday, hope is reborn. We witness Mary going to the tomb of Jesus. She goes to prepare his body for burial. Through her faithfulness she discovers Jesus is not there.

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

The disciples wrecked with grief still do not get it. But Mary stays in the garden until she encounters the risen Lord. Mary stays in the garden until she hears the Lord saying her name. Happy Easter!!! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!!

Mary preaches boldly, "I have seen the Lord!" May we hear his risen voice and praise him with the same joy and enthusiasm of Mary this Easter and all of the Easters of our life! Thank be to God! Amen.

Francey Hooton

