

Lent Devotions +

You have been gifted this Lent Kit as an invitation and means to join with your brothers and sisters at South Lyon First UMC to purposely walk toward Easter. Often, Lent has been about giving up, yet this year we are all being encouraged to add to our faith journey and to love a bit more than the day before.

This booklet provides daily devotions, except for Sunday's, written by many of you. Each devotion reveals ways that we have seen God's love in our lives. Each week there is an activity bag for your household to participate in a spiritual discipline to help with your faith journey during these next 40 days.

Our worship theme for Lent all the way to Pentecost is "**Love Your Neighbor.**" We are going to be digging deep into LOVE. We will look at what the Bible says about love, about how God has, is, and will, show love to humanity, and what that means for us as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is our hope and prayer that together we continue to be a beacon of God's love in our community as we find even deeper ways to love our neighbors.

We encourage you all to engage consistently in worship. We will continue to offer online worship at 10:00 am every Sunday. On Ash Wednesday at 7:00 pm, March 7 at 10:00 am, and April 4 at 10:00 am we will also offer worship in the parking lot. It will be nice to see one another from our cars as we sing together!

Starting the first Sunday of Lent, February 21, at 10:00 am we will also be offering in person worship with masks, social distancing, and following CDC guidelines. We pray that one of these worship opportunities allow for you to engage God in meaningful ways as we give thanks and praise to our ever present God.

We are the church. Even during a pandemic God continues to work through our hearts, hands, and feet. You are not alone! We pray this gift will bless you, encourage your faith walk, and help you fall deeper in love with God, yourself, and your neighbor.

Love and Peace in Christ, South Lyon First UMC.

Blessings, Rev. Mary

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Lent Kit Contents & Instructions

Week #1 Burlap Cross	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●Feel the roughness of the burlap and consider the rough places in your faith journey. Thank God for the journey so far and lean into God's grace as you journey forth.●Trace the cross with your finger and consider Christ's sacrifice for you. What is God asking you to sacrifice for the good of others?
Week #2 Love Your Neighbor Postcards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●Think of folks you haven't seen in a while or folks you know could use a boost.●Feel free to add color to the front & add your message to the back.●Deliver or mail (just add an address and stamp).
Week #3 Finger Labyrinth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●Use your finger to trace the path slowly.●Pray quietly or out loud as you go. <p>You can pray for others or yourself with or without words.</p>
Week #4 Random Acts of Kindness Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●Select ideas from the list & Love Your Neighbor
Week #5 Pretzel Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">●Make your own pretzels or purchase them pre-made. (Instructions & yeast provided)
Week #6 Journey with Jesus	<p>Come to SLFUMC for a drive-thru <i>Journey with Jesus</i>. Open Noon, Thursday, April 1 through NOON, Saturday, April 3.</p>

SLFUMC Lent Playlist

Compiled by David Bassin & Aynsley Fant

Use the camera on your phone or tablet scan the QR code or go to: <http://bit.ly/slfumcplaylist> to listen to our curated Lenten Playlist:



Danny Gokey—*Love God Love People*

Sara Groves—*Blessed Be the Tie*

NEEDTOBREATHE—*Brother*

Phil Wickham—*For God so Loved*

Gungor—*Beautiful Things*

Matt Maher—*Hold Us Together*

Mandisa (featuring TobyMac & Kirk Franklin) - *Bleed the Same*

Third Day—*Love Song*

For King & Country—*Proof of Your Love*

Brandon Lake—*Pour Me Out (LIVE)*

We the Kingdom—*God so Loved (LIVE)*

Christy Nockels—*By Our Love*

Ed Bolduc—*There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (Be Merciful)*

Gungor—*Us for Them*

Kari Jobe—*Reckless Love*

Everett Harris—*Give Me a Clean Heart (Virtual Choir)*

The Cambridge Singers, City of London Sinfonia—*Look at the World (J. Rutter)*

Marian Anderson—*He Shall Feed His Flock (Handel's Messiah)*

St. Olaf Choir—*Set Me as a Seal (René Clausen)*

Barbara Hendricks—*Give Me Jesus (arr.⁴Moses Hogan)*

Love in a Well

Patti Yerke

Originally printed in the *Michigan Christian Advocate*, June 2008

I am a long-term member of the mission team at South Lyon: First United Methodist Church. Back in September 2007 I was preparing to write the newsletter article for the October "Mission of the Month": our sister church in Liberia, Bethlehem Temple. As I was comfortably sitting at my computer sipping from an ice cold bottle of water, I read about the dire need for wells to provide clean water in Liberia. I also learned that it was a special focus of the Ann Arbor District to help our sister churches get these greatly-needed wells. The cost of the wells was estimated to be about \$1,500 to \$1,800 each. I knew this would be an ambitious goal, as our monthly mission appeal totals are not usually that high.

I decided that to really attract more interest in this appeal, I needed a visual reminder of our goal of providing a well for Bethlehem Temple. I thought that it would be great if we put a small decorative well in the church parlor and kept track of the total donations until we reached our goal. I ran the idea by the mission team members, and they also thought it was a good idea.

Being the procrastinator that I sometimes am, it wasn't until the week of my pulpit appeal that I started to look for a well. I really hadn't thought it would be difficult as I had

seen many wells in stores all summer. However, after I called seven garden and nursery stores in the area and they had no wells, I began to worry. I e-mailed all the members of the mission team but they were also unable to find one.

On the Friday before my Sunday appeal, I came home from work and told my 15-year-old son to come with me because we were going shopping for a well. He came very willingly, which was very odd as my son hates to shop. We drove to the first store and looked for a well but they had none. We drove to another store and looked for any type of well, but they had none. We then went to a third store, but by this time I was really beginning to believe that my idea of a "great visual" was not going to happen. I started looking at the buckets and urns, but was not yet ready to give up. So we kept driving. We passed a landscaping store that had some garden figurines in the yard. I decided to turn the car around, and as I did I said a little prayer. I asked the Lord to help me find a well for this project for Liberia. I joked to my son that I usually don't pray about shopping, but this was a special situation.

We entered the landscaping store, and I asked if they had any wells, of any type, size, and material, anything even resem-

Love in a Well (continued 2)

bling a well. The salesperson told me that they didn't and then asked another woman who had been working outside, but she also said they didn't. They could order me one, but it would take a few weeks. Since I didn't have time for that, I just asked if my son and I could go out into the yard and look around. As we were out there, the woman who had been working outside came up to me and asked what I needed this well for. I told her the whole story of our sister church in Liberia and their need for clean water and the idea of having a "great visual" for the appeal. She looked at me very strangely and told me to come around to the back of the building. Just five minutes earlier, she told me, one of her landscapers had returned from a job with an old well they had removed from a home where they were putting in new landscaping. The homeowner did not want it. One of the workers was going to take it to his home, but said we could use it for a while. There, lying on the ground, was a well. It was old and in poor condition, but it was exactly the type of well that we had been searching for. It was perfect.

I could not contain my joy and awe in what had just happened. I don't believe in coincidences; I knew that it was a "God thing." Through my tears and laughter I

immediately exclaimed to the workers and my son that God had just delivered that well. There were now three store workers there, all looking stunned and shaking their heads in amazement. I also then knew immediately why my son had come with me so willingly; God had wanted him to witness this first-hand.

We took the well home, and my husband replaced some of the wood and put on a fresh coat of paint. I thought it looked beautiful, and I couldn't wait until it was time for the pulpit appeal. I was also scheduled to give the children's message, and knew that I would not need to prepare for it. The message was ready.

On Sunday we brought the well into the parlor and set it up for all to see. We readied it for the donations that I prayed would come generously. I gave the pulpit appeal and the children's message for both services. I spoke from the heart and feel that I was truly God's vessel that day. By the end of the second service our congregation had already donated \$1,800. Enough for a well!

As the month went on, the story of the well — now dubbed "Patti's well" — continued to spread and move people.

Love in a Well (continued 3)

By the end of the month, our congregation had given more than \$5,500 to support our sister church in Liberia and its needs. We sent the money to our sister church knowing that it would be a long process, but eagerly waited for their response.

On Feb. 4, I received this e-mail: "Greetings and praise be unto the name of our God. I received from my District Superintendent's office the amount of \$5,500 USD ...I almost turned crazy with joy. Without hesitation, I ran to my church and announced the amount. The entire service turned into a singing and weeping service for that day. We stayed in service until four o' clock p.m. that Sunday.

"Our well project will be completed in the first week in February. I have purchased three cartons of Bibles. We are working on the finishing touches of the church. I must admit that our Wednesday and Friday prayers for this relationship have been answered by God. What a good God He is! This amount is truly a miracle. We have never received such a huge amount from the beginning of our entire ministry.

"May all of the donors be blessed, may you and your entire family be blessed and may God's name be praised.

"Thanks for everything. In Christ, I am, Pastor Garsuah Jimmie, Pastor, Bethlehem Temple UMC."

It was wonderful to receive this e-mail and be able to share it with others. I feel so greatly blessed to have been part of the story of this very special well from God, and know that it is a story that is meant to be told over and over.

My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus. Let glory be given to God our Father forever and always. Amen.

Philippians 4:19-20

Lent Day 1 **Welcome to Lent!**

Today is **Ash Wednesday**, which marks the beginning of Lent.

Tonight at 7:00 pm, we're celebrating Ash Wednesday. One service will stream on our YouTube channel, like our regular Sunday morning service. However, we are also celebrating a parking lot service at the same time. It will be nice to see one another from our cars as we sing together! No matter which service you choose, we hope to "see" you tonight.

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Blow the horn in Zion; give a shout on my holy mountain!

Let all the people of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming.

It is near—a day of darkness and no light, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Like blackness spread out upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes, unlike any that has ever come before them, or will come after them in centuries ahead.

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow; tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. Who knows whether he will have a change of heart and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

Blow the horn in Zion; demand a fast; request a special assembly.

*Gather the people; prepare a holy meeting; assemble the elders;
gather the children, even nursing infants.*

Let the groom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep.

Let them say, "Have mercy, Lord, on your people, and don't make your inheritance a disgrace, an example of failure among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

- Can repentance of heart be true without "fasting and mourning"? How?
- What would corporate repentance require for our faith community? Our nation?

Speak Lord, for your people are listening.

Cleanse our hearts.

Guide our steps that we might honor you in all that we say and do.

Amen.

Lent Day 2 Mind the Gap!

Dave Smith

Have you traveled on London's subway system and heard this admonition as you enter or exit a rail car? It's intended to remind passengers to be alert to the possible height differences between the floor of the station and the floor of the rail car. I now have a second reference for this phrase.

Our Encounters Sunday school class recently began a study of the book *Sermon on the Mount* by Amy-Jill Levine. Professor Levine teaches New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

The series of Jesus' teachings titled the "Sermon on the Mount" can be found in Matthew Chapters 5-7. It has been referred to by some biblical scholars as "King Jesus' inaugural address" in that it comes at the beginning of his ministry and explains what Jesus expects of His disciples.

In Levine's book, chapter 1 reviewed that portion of Jesus' teachings often referred to as "The Beatitudes." Beatitudes are blessings. There are nine blessings listed by Matthew, the first of which is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Levine shares a friend, Mike's, perspective on this beatitude. Mike describes the poor in spirit as "those who recognize the gap between what we have and what we should have. We may have a bank account, but we may not have compassion, generosity or love. We may have a watertight home, health care, and a car that works, but we may also have neighbors who struggle with paying the rent, putting food on the table, or getting to work. The poor in spirit are those who see what many don't, and they are blessed because they have this vision and because the vision compels them to act." Mike concludes by saying we need to "Mind the gap."

We ended the class that day by praying that God would show us ways to "mind the gaps" in our lives. Little did I know that, for me, it would happen quickly!

Later that Sunday I met up with a painting client's daughter to receive direction for a project I started the next day. The client was a friend and neighbor who had recently moved into assisted living. Her daughter contacted me to paint the interior of the condo in preparation for listing it for sale.

The daughter was apologizing for all of the furniture that would be in my way while painting. She explained they had tried to give it away, but no one wanted it. Even the garbage company would not take it! She didn't know what to do.

As I walked through the home and observed many pieces of furniture still in good shape, I began to mind the gap. I quickly remembered the furniture closet at God's Country Cooperative Parish in the U.P. Recently the director of the Parish (Randy) had told me on the phone that the big classroom that was full of furniture this summer is now empty. The pandemic economy had created overwhelming need and more furniture was desperately needed. I felt this furniture could bless several lives in the U.P.

I mentioned this option to my client's daughter, and she gratefully consented. The next day, I sent photos to Randy and he said they would love to have all of it! I arranged for temporary storage in one of our member's outbuildings and solicited volunteers to move it. Before long, some much-needed furniture will be traveling north to its new home. Talk about a win/win!

As we travel through this Lenten season, I pray that we may all be open to the opportunities God presents to us to Mind the Gap in His world!

Lent Day 3 Love is Friendship

Avery Bassin



Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work. If either should fall, one can pick up the other. But how miserable are those who fall and don't have a companion to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they can stay warm. But how can anyone stay warm alone? Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap.

- Who are the friends who show you love?
- How easy is it for you to allow to help you? Or, to let someone know you need help?
- Where would you be spiritually were it not for the help of others?

Offer a prayer of thanks for those who have loved you through your faith journey.

Lent Day 4

Love in the Condo Development

Laura Hatch

In 2019, I made a decision to downsize and moved into a condo. I now live across the street from a very caring neighbor who watches out for me.

This winter, a new snow removal company was putting down less snowmelt on our sidewalks and I fell on a patch of ice. I was ok and asked my caring neighbor, who was in charge of hiring the new company, to have the company put down a little more snowmelt.

The next day, the man doing the work came right over and said he was so sorry I fell.

This morning, the caring neighbor called me to ask if I was all right, because she had noticed that my garage door had been open all night! I had just forgotten to close it. It is so nice to know someone is watching out for me. I see her as a loving blessing from God.

*But look here: the Lord's eyes watch all who honor him,
all who wait for his faithful love,
to deliver their lives from death
and keep them alive during a famine.*

*We put our hope in the Lord.
He is our help and our shield.
Our heart rejoices in God
because we trust his holy name.
Lord, let your faithful love surround us
because we wait for you.*

Psalm 33:18-22

First Sunday of Lent, February 21

Love Your Neighbor—Signs of Promise

Lent Week #1

Today's Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17

8 God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "I am now setting up my covenant with you, with your descendants, 10 and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you. 11 I will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by floodwaters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. 13 I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures. 16 The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth's creatures." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I have set up between me and all creatures on earth."

Weekly Prayer Practice:

Burlap cross (located in bag for Lent Week #1)

Creative Connections:

Select a song from the Lent Playlist

Sing or look up the lyrics to offer as a prayer to start the day

Write/draw/paint/sketch your thoughts or response to the song.

Create your own rainbow out of found objects as a reminder of God's promise.

Find or create an image that expresses 'Signs of Promise'.

Lent Day 5 “Little Things...”

Bobbie Bushey

“Little things mean more than you will ever know,” is a quote from Gloria DeGaetano, founder of the Parent Coaching Institute. I was blessed to be taught by Gloria when I was going through my training to be a parent coach and learned so much about kindness and loving from her. I have come to believe that “little things” can change my day from cloudy to sunny. A nod, a smile, a kind word can change my mood and outlook on a day. So, when I read about a basket on Facebook in “The Kindness Pandemic,” my family decided we wanted to do this also.

It a “little thing.” We leave a basket full of snacks and drinks on a table on our porch. We had a sign that said, “Thank you for the delivery, please take a drink and snack.” But then other people and children in the neighborhood would ask if they could have a snack and drink. So long story short, we changed the sign to, “Everyone, please help yourself to a snack and drink.”

I don’t know who enjoys it more -- the people who take snacks and drinks or my family seeing people smile over a “little thing.” God works in wondrous ways. I have learned to apply “little things” in my life -- a card to a shut-in, a kind word to people even if I don’t know them, and a smile for all I see.

Romans 12:12-15

Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you’re in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God’s people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don’t curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying.

Lent Day 6 God's Love is a Seal

David Bassin

As I sat down to write this devotion and reflected on the theme of "Love Your Neighbor," I found myself returning to one of my favorite verses from scripture. Song of Solomon 8:6 says, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death." One of my first encounters with this text was in the University Chorale at Western Michigan University, where we performed René Clausen's choral setting (if you have never heard this, I would encourage you to seek it out).

As could be expected, many experiences in my life connect to music. I knew early on that music would be central to my life and by my teen years, I knew that religious music would be important to me as well. Following my Bar Mitzvah at age 13, I continued to attend synagogue, but did not feel enough connection to my Jewish peers in the congregation where my family belonged to join the High School Youth Group. God had other plans for me.

About two months before my 15th birthday, a family friend and neighbor asked if I could serve as substitute pianist at their church for a couple weeks prior to Christmas. I enthusiastically agreed, and after an organ lesson with my band director's wife, I played a couple services. Following this short substitute stint, I was hired and served the remainder of my high school years.

During these same years, I participated in two life-changing trips to Israel, both with the local Jewish community. As a Jewish teen with ties to the Christian church, these trips had a real impact on me that I never could have expected, bringing me closer to God and imbedding in me the love God has shown me through my life.

As I went to college, the time constraints imposed on me by my studies caused me to close the book on church music for the time being, but when I moved back to Southeast Michigan for my graduate studies, a loving church took me in to be their organist, and eventually music director. It has always been important to me to live my Jewish faith, and as I interviewed at multiple churches, I found that every time my faith background came up and I revealed my Jewish background, the interviews, often going very well, would turn colder and I would not get the position.

Only one church, South Lyon FUMC, did not ask about my faith background and I have now been on staff here for 17 1/2 years. When Fallon and I got married here, we were allowed to incorporate Jewish and Catholic traditions in the Methodist Church, something that meant so much to us on that day and throughout our marriage.

When God was set as a seal on my heart, I did not know the journey my faith would take, but love is a strong force and God's love has carried me through so many situations. I am grateful to be a part of this loving church that has truly accepted me for who I am and has allowed me to grow in my skills, my personal life and my faith.

Lent Day 7

Love is Sending Valentine's

Matthew & Ben Kneifel



Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

- How have you been sparked to love and do good deeds by others in our community?
- Whose exhortation, example or encouragement means the most to you?
- In what specific ways can you spark another Christian on toward love and good deeds?

God of love and grace, thank you for the faces that come to mind in response to these questions. Your blessings are rich. Nudge my heart to notice those around me for whom I can be an encourager in your name. Amen.

Lent Day 8 God's Blessings

Mary Parzuchowski

Most of us have been in a position where we feel alone and drowning. That was me and Scott when we first came to South Lyon area.

We walked into SLFUM church and felt like we had people all at once. My kids were little so let's say over 20 years ago.

We purchased a house that I would say was beyond our means. There were many times I didn't know how we would feed the kids or pay the bills. I'm guessing most new couples go through this. But I remember one difficult year and we were cutting back on everything, really no money for Christmas gifts for the kids.

I said prayers and asked that God would provide, and give us work and a way to pay our bills. I asked for prayers in my choir group. Some of the best most loving Christian people around are in our choir.

During the last practice before our Christmas musical, I found an envelope on my chair with no explanation, but some cash to buy a few gifts for my kids -- along with this huge blessing. Never knowing how but we were able to make it through the winter, each month the money we needed somehow was there to pay the bills.

I prayed each day and thanked my God each day. Scott and I agreed our church has the kind of people we needed in our life. Our faith grew and we knew all things are possible because of God.

*But your loyal love, Lord, extends to the skies;
your faithfulness reaches the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the strongest mountains;
your justice is like the deepest sea.
Lord, you save both humans and animals.
Your faithful love is priceless, God!
Humanity finds refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the bounty of your house;
you let them drink from your river of pure joy.
Within you is the spring of life.
In your light, we see light.*

Psalms 36:5-9

Lent Day 9 Give Me Jesus

Use the camera on your phone or tablet scan the QR code or go to: <http://bit.ly/slfumcplaylist> to find *Give Me Jesus* on our curated Lenten Playlist and give it a listen before reading on.



Scripture Reading: Psalm 42

The Psalmist describes his thirst for God much like the chorus of this familiar spiritual pleads:

*Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus.
You can have all this world
But give me Jesus.*

In this season of Lent, may this be the cry of our hearts. When we arrive at the end of ourselves. When we finally acknowledge all our attempts to satisfy our hearts with anything and everything but God have failed. And we cannot truly love ourselves or others without God's love coursing through us. May our hearts cry out and plead for what we need: the love, grace and mercy of our faithful and forgiving God. Friends, received it with confidence.

May our song today, and everyday be "*Give me Jesus*".

Lent Day 10 Love in the NICU

Joanna Firestone

I'm not at all crafty. I marvel at people who can deftly wield a glue gun. Or sew a straight seam. Or knit or crochet something beautiful. When I pass by the Stitchers for Christ working in the church parlor, it's like watching musicians in a small ensemble. But they're not making music. They're sharing God's love.

In 1994, my husband and I found ourselves with no nearby family, living in Illinois, and suddenly parents of a two-pound, 13-weeks-early baby boy. For nearly 10 weeks, Baby Matthew lived in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of Rockford Memorial Hospital. The NICU was a large, noisy, brightly lit place where monitors beeped constantly to alert nurses of low oxygen sats, bradycardia (slow heart rate) and babies whose little feet needed to be tickled, to remind them to breathe.

The incubators in which the tiny babies were confined were moved around the room regularly to accommodate new ones, and help signify who was improving -- and who was not. Each was topped by a unique shawl or blanket, to deaden the sound and block out some of the bright lights. They were crafted and donated, anonymously, by members of a local church. Every morning, after washing hands and arms to the elbow and donning scrubs, gloves and masks, we would enter the NICU and scan the room for the baby blue and almond-colored shawl that identified our precious little son.

I recently went on a pandemic-inspired, deep housecleaning binge. The kind when you get all the way to the back of the closet, or to the bottom of a drawer that hasn't seen the light of day for a decade. And there it was: the beautiful, baby blue and almond-colored incubator shawl. I lifted it to my nose, half expecting to inhale that wonderful, indescribable new baby smell. It was gone. But what remains in my heart is the indelible image of someone, sitting in a church parlor, crocheting an incubator shawl for an unknown baby and his parents.

I wonder if that person ever wonders what happened to the shawl. I hope God whispers that it's still doing what it was created to do all those years ago: share his love.

1 John 3:1

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us
in that we should be called God's children,
and that is what we are!
Because the world didn't recognize him,
it doesn't recognize us.*

Second Sunday of Lent, February 28 Lent Week #2

Love Your Neighbor—From Generation to Generation

Today's Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7, 15, 16

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. 2 I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." 3 Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. 5 And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. 6 I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you.

15 God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you will no longer call her Sarai. Her name will now be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and even give you a son from her. I will bless her so that she will become nations, and kings of peoples will come from her."

Weekly Prayer Practice: Breath Prayer

Choose a word or brief phrase to repeat in one breath. If it is a phrase, say one part as you inhale and the rest as you exhale. You can say breath prayers out loud, in a whisper, or silently. Breath prayers are wonderful as a calming, meditative practice.

Suggestions:

Romans 8:38-39 Inhale: Nothing can separate me
Exhale: from God's love

2 Corinthians 12:9 Inhale: Your grace
Exhale: is enough for me

Creative Connections:

Select a song from the Lent Playlist

Sing or look up the lyrics to offer as a prayer to start the day

Write/draw/paint/sketch your thoughts or response to the song.

Find or create an image that represents God's covenant.

Find or create an image that expresses 'From Generation to Generation'.

Lent Day 11 Love is Ringing Bells

Molly Maguire

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'



"Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

40 "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'

Matthew 25:34-39

- When have you been hungry, thirsty, a stranger, in need of clothes, sick, or imprisoned, and someone reached out to you? How did it feel?
- In these six areas, where do you find yourself serving most naturally? In which areas do you have the most trouble reaching out?
- How is God calling you to serve today?

God of compassion and mercy, help me to see the needs of those around me. Help me to be generous in love, as you have been generous with me. Amen.

Lent Day 12 Love for All Ages

Rev. Tom Hart (Retired)

I had the privilege of serving parishes in rural areas, small towns, suburbia, and Detroit. Each congregation blessed me with many examples of God's love. This incident happened at St. Timothy U.M.C. in Northwest Detroit on a Holy Communion Sunday. The congregation was composed of a variety of ages, color and even nationalities.

The congregation came forward after the Invitation for Communion and knelt at the altar. Some remained standing if unable to kneel. As they came forward, it happened that an elderly, childless, white couple living in their home near the church for 60 years stood next to a young African-American mother with a small child. The couple was standing due to age and the young mother was also standing because the infant was "fussy." As I served the elements at the altar, I thought of how wonderful it was for God's love to be shown in a variety of ages and colors.

The elderly woman standing next to the young woman and child accepted the bread, as did the young mother. The small infant stopped fusing as she looked at the elderly woman and me. Then the child surprised me by reaching for the bread. She put the bread into her mouth as natural as can be. There was no way I was going to not serve the child.

I know there are theological issues about the age youth should be involved in the sacraments. At that moment, I felt I had experienced Heaven.... God's love on earth.

Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your young will see visions.

Your elders will dream dreams.

Even upon my servants, men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

*I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.*

*The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood,
before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.*

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Acts 2:16-21

Lent Day 13 Love in the Family

Molly Klemens

My dad died of Lewy Body Dementia at the age of 67. It was a devastating disease that robbed him of his brilliant mind, his wry sense of humor, and his mobility. My mother was also robbed of a partner. She became more his nurse and caregiver than his spouse. Although I had always thought my dad would work up until the day he passed away, they should have been enjoying retirement at this point. But instead, each day was long, difficult, and very unpredictable.

She went through several stages of emotions throughout his decline. During one period, she was very angry with my dad (not because of his illness, but other circumstances). She was also exhausted: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But she came through that stage and entered into a state of graceful acceptance. She took care of my father with patience and unconditional love from that point on.

This agape love was not lost on others. Near the end of my father's life, as his condition precipitously declined just before he went into hospice, a repairperson came in to fix the internet connection. My mom was busy taking care of my dad while the gentleman worked on the cable. After he was done, he told my mom that he had left directions for the internet in the manual.

After he left, she discovered that the repairperson had left the following note in the manual:

A photograph of a handwritten note on a piece of paper. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The note reads: "I pray if I ever fall ill my wife can help me with as much love and grace as you do with your loved one. -Larry". The paper is slightly aged and the lighting is somewhat dim.

By changing her attitude, my mom was a blessing not only to my father, but also to herself. She knew that she had taken care of him lovingly and unselfishly. The repairperson showed love to a stranger by taking the time to acknowledge her loving service. His kindness also meant a lot to me, because I knew how much it meant to my mother.

Take the time. Take the time to say what your heart is telling you to say. You have no idea what it might mean to someone else, even a complete stranger. God works in our hearts this way. Listen to the "God nudge."

Lent Day 14 Love is Generous

Kendi

During the youth Christmas party, four months into my first gig as a youth choir director, with little thought and no preparation, I offered to host an impromptu junior high gals' sleepover. That night. Because I'd learned there was no school the next day.

Four girls took me up on the offer. As we waited for their moms to bring toiletries and sleeping bags, we helped clean up. Trying to keep the panic from showing on my face, all I could think as I gathered abandoned plates and napkins was: What have I done? I didn't have snacks on hand, or food for breakfast. I barely knew these girls. What if they were bored at my house? How was I going to fit four girls, myself, and their stuff into my Nissan Sentra?

As we walked the garbage out, the youth director, Lori, asked for my keys. When I handed them to her, she replaced them with the keys to her van and \$20, telling me we'd swap vehicles back the next day -- and that breakfast for all of us was on her.

While the girls were loading their overnight things into Lori's van, one of the moms handed me a box of snacks and a couple 2-liters -- goodies, left over from a recent gathering, that she didn't want to go to waste.

I'm not sure what I was worried about. The girls made their own fun that night. Singing along to musicals on DVD, a dance-off, laughing until they couldn't breathe and finally falling into sugar comas. I left them asleep on the living room floor and headed to my own bed in the wee hours of the morning.

A very few short hours later, I got up and headed to the kitchen to start preparing the breakfast items we'd picked up on the way home the night before. The girls were still asleep. But the small, undecorated Christmas tree they had teased me about the night before now sported a popcorn garland and small ornaments fashioned from the neon note cards I used for my studies.

While the gals ate breakfast, I examined the new tree décor and thanked them for their thoughtfulness. Soon after, Lori arrived with my car and drove the girls home in her van. In the almost too quiet following their departure, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. What I thought was an impulsive invitation had been God-arranged. The opportunity to connect with those gals was priceless. God loved me and provided things I didn't even know I needed, through the generosity of others.

Know now then that the Lord your God is the only true God! He is the faithful God, who keeps the covenant and proves loyal to everyone who loves him and keeps his commands—even to the thousandth generation! Deuteronomy 7:9

Lent Day 15 Love is the Big 10

Mallory Mytty

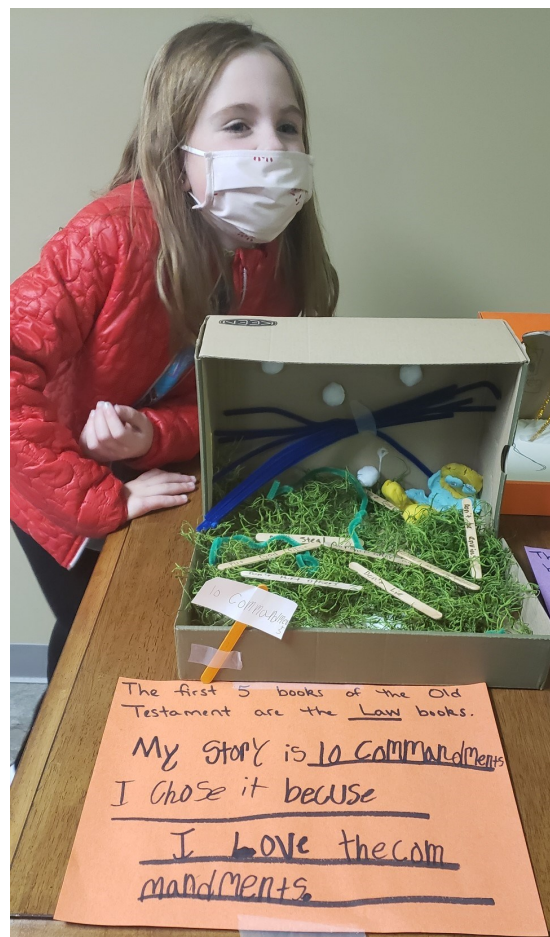
This is Mallory with her diorama of the 10 Commandments. She created it in Kid's Connection last fall as they studied the Old Testament on Sunday nights.

She wrote: *The first 5 books of the Old Testament are the Law books. My story is 10 Commandments. I chose it because I love the commandments.*

In the Bible story of Moses and the Ten Commandments, the moral laws of God are solidified into ten great mandates. These commands form the basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God.

The God who had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt now called them to be wholly devoted to him alone. Only through obedience to God's laws could Israel fulfill its role as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God gave these laws to Moses and the people on Mount Sinai. They were written on tablets of stone. The Ten Commandments serve as a guide for living in a way that demonstrates love for God and leads to a deeper experience of God's love.



God's Big 10:

1. Love God more than you love anything else.
2. Don't make anything in your life more important than God.
3. Always say God's name with love and respect.
4. Honor the Lord by resting one day out of seven.
5. Love and respect your adults.
6. Never hurt anyone
7. Always be faithful to your spouse.
8. Don't take what isn't yours.
9. Always tell the truth.
10. Be happy with what you have. ²⁴Don't wish for other people's things.

Lent Day 16 God's Precious Love

Heather Fazio

When I received an invitation to share a story about how I have channeled, received or witnessed God's love being shared, I thought it was such an honor. God gave me a glimpse of who He was when I was 16 years old. Now that I am in my 40's, I have witnessed several ways in which He has made His loving presence known.

The story I thought I would share involved a card that was sent to me by a friend. However, as I was looking around the house to find it, I kept running into love notes from my beautiful daughter Olivia. Every time I thought I had finally found the card, I would find another hand drawn note from my lovely lady. After running into more than 50 cards, well wishes written on Post-it notes, drawings turned into paper air planes etc. I realized the love story God wanted me to share was the one I have with Olivia.

My precious young lady was born in August, 2009. My husband and I had been married for 5 years when I became pregnant. I was so excited about the news because my doctor had told me a couple years prior that I may not be able to have children. Olivia was an answer to my prayers. Unfortunately, my husband told me he had fallen out of love with me during the pregnancy. Two and a half years of marriage counseling ended in divorce. I thought my life would never be happy again. But as Joyce Meyer's says... there can always be a "but God..."

Olivia is sunshine that cannot be contained when she is in a joyous mood. She is exceedingly kind, a lover of music and very competitive when it comes to pillow fights. She loves to dance and sing around the house, make forts in the living room and cherishes Friday movie nights.

Olivia is a people person; she always wants to know what our family and friends are doing. She has a deep desire to be a part of the action. When she was given the choice to plan a Disney World vacation or go on the annual family road trip last summer, she chose family. Family is her #1 priority. Fishing with Papa and swimming with her cousins is an annual ritual.

We have learned through the years that God answers our prayers in three ways: yes, no or wait. Although I prayed for several years that I would receive a child, I now believe God waited because He knew what was ahead on my journey. I am so incredible grateful for the gift of being a single mom. She was the reason I look(ed) for joy each day after my divorce. She brought life to my soul when I was sad and is the reason I aim to be filled to overflow each day. Thank you Lord for reminding me of my most precious gift; my amazing daughter Olivia.

Third Sunday of Lent, March 7

Love Your Neighbor—Faithful Living Together

Lent Week #3

Today's Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 You must have no other gods before me. 4 Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the Lord your God, am a passionate God. I punish children for their parents' sins even to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. 6 But I am loyal and gracious to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance; the Lord won't forgive anyone who uses his name that way.

8 Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. 9 Six days you may work and do all your tasks, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. 11 Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you. 13 Do not kill. 14 Do not commit adultery. 15 Do not steal. 16 Do not testify falsely against your neighbor. 17 Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

Weekly Prayer Practice: Finger Labyrinth

(located in bag for Lent Week #3)

Creative Connections:

Select a song from the Lent Playlist

Sing or look up the lyrics to offer as a prayer to start the day

Write/draw/paint/sketch your thoughts or response to the song.

Summarize the Big 10 & state them positively (i.e. "do" instead of "do not")

Find or create an image that expresses 'Faithful Living Together'.

Lent Day 17 Love Your Neighbor

Cherie Trembath

I became a physician because I felt called to care for people in their times of need and because I loved science. In my career, I loved the friendships and connections gained through years of providing medical care to my patients. I also had pride in my ability to be an independent, self-sufficient woman, seldom asking for help. When I had emergency gallbladder surgery at age 60, I learned a profound lesson on receiving and loving.

After 24 hours of waiting in the ER and then surgery, I woke up in the morning to a room that was very sterile, gray except for one large pot of poinsettias. My body felt stiff and bruised, and carried that peculiar surgical stink of antiseptic and an unwashed body. Soon, a young patient care technician came in very cheerfully, breaking the sense of dreariness, and offered to help me get to the shower. I felt about 160 years old instead of 60 as she walked me across the room. As she left, she said, "Call me to wash your feet and back if you want." That seemed a little too vulnerable. I did not call.

She came back in a few minutes, again offered to wash my back, which I accepted. I figured out by then that all I could really do is sit and let the water stream over me. In an amazing act of kindness, she knelt, gently lifting, first one foot then the other, lovingly soaping, rubbing and rinsing. After helping me to a chair, seated on the floor before me, she massaged lotion into my calves and drew on warm, cuddly socks.

I was astonished as I received her service, "You are doing our Lord's work!" She replied with a small, quick upward smile, "I'm young, I'm athletic, I can do this."

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

1 John 3:18-20

Lent Day 18 Love in a Pandemic

Rev. Mary McInnes

In the Word, water, wine and bread—and now through us—Christ pours out his love for all the world. John 13:1-17

In these last hours, Jesus works intently to show and form his disciple by his love. Christ is pouring out his love for us and for the world.

He first pours this love out upon his disciples by washing their feet. Their master and teacher is now the one who kneels before them. They do not know what he has done to them, or will do for them, nor will they until his resurrection. He is expressing his deep love for them; it is a tangible experience of that love for them to cling to in the days ahead that will stir up doubt and fear. As he pours the water over their feet, he pours out his love over them.

In September, I found myself at a low point. We were into the sixth month of a pandemic that I thought would be behind us. Being in ministry (even with a wonderful congregation and gifted staff) during this time was hard. I began to wonder if I was good enough to do what God needed and what the church I served deserved.

I decided to take a three-day weekend with the family to reenergize and gain focus and creativity for the fall. While away, my dad died. If that was not difficult enough, my mother, brother, and I all tested positive for COVID-19 and it was the sickest I had ever been in my entire life. I had constant muscle spasms in my ribcage for three weeks, I could barely walk 10 feet without needing a nap, and my brain was so foggy I wondered if I would ever think clearly again. I returned home to continue to heal, regain my strength, and work. I started every day with prayer, took one day at a time, one task at a time, and even this was a struggle in those first few weeks back.

I was not prepared for God's love to suddenly show up in ways that took my breath away. My South Lyon First family became God's love made tangible for me. There was an outpouring of love through letters, gifts, and encouragement. Every gift felt like extravagant love that I did not deserve. It felt like Jesus washing my feet. From amazing Italian desserts to a hand painted mug, calming oils to books, pictures from children to stickers for my planner, chalk messages to texts, a t-shirt to flowers, wine to a "thankful" pumpkin wall hanging....all felt like extravagant love from God that was poured out on my soul, that gave me hope, that helped to heal me.

In scripture, Christ pours out his love upon us as he did for the disciples. You modeled this for me. Thank you for being the heart of God. We are Christ's own and loved to the end, we are given a new commandment: to love as Christ has loved us. I want to love as Christ loves, I want to love extravagantly like you.

Loving God, This day, this week, this whole life is an outpouring of your love. All that you have done through Christ has been done in that love, poured out in water, in wine and bread, in Word, in death, and now through us, in order that all may know that we are your own, loved without end. We were made and saved in love, by love, for love. That love was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen

Lent Day 19 An Open Door

&

Morgan Lechrone
Chuck Musselwhite
(printed with permission)

Use the camera on your phone or tablet scan the QR code or go to: <https://youtu.be/sOGsgemkXmM> to view Morgan's brief dance before reading on.



An open door intrigues me. Curiosity always gets the best of me, and I want to look what's behind it. Most of the time it amounts to nothing, but sometimes you get a pleasant surprise. God will open a door that he wants us to walk through. He has our best interests at heart and wants us to take our next step of faith.

I know your works. Look! I have set in front of you an open door that no one can shut. You have so little power, and yet you have kept my word and haven't denied my name.
Revelation 3:8 CEB

John is writing to the church in Philadelphia. They are a struggling church and are worn out over the battle to follow Christ and make him know. Jesus is letting them know that he sees their works and they are not forgotten. Most people's discouragement comes from feeling alone and being exhausted from the daily grind of life. Isn't good to know that God sees our good works?

What made this church stand out from the other six was that they were a church full of love. They spent their energy on the right things, serving one another. The world has fed us this lie that if you are loving to others your life is full of energy and purpose. The truth is that loving others can be exhausting and unrewarding. When you help others, they may not return the love or even say "thank you." That is why we need to be full of the Spirit so that our love is unconditional.

Because of their faithfulness to serve and their commitment to God's word a door has been opened that no one could shut. An opportunity was made available that was only possible through the miraculous work of our loving Savior. Nothing the world could do could close that door. When God opens these doors, we need to walk through them. That door may open when we least expect it and have little strength to go through, but we need to be faithful and follow Him. You won't regret it, and it will open a whole new world of opportunity.

Lent Day 20 Love Abroad

Jill Woodward

"Love your neighbor as yourself," (Mark 12:31) can be a very hard task sometimes, especially when you are introverted and afraid to talk to strangers. This was me, so why did I go on a mission trip to a foreign country with people from another state? Because God called me and I obeyed.

I don't think I talked much to my teammates on our first day there. On the second day we visited a small town on the Pacific coast and I separated myself and sat on the beach to write in my journal.

I was soon joined by a young boy named Francisco. He was trying very hard to speak to me and I was trying very hard to ignore him. I was afraid. That's when I remembered the verse: "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love and sound judgement." (2 Tim. 1:7)

My attitude quickly changed. Francisco and I started writing down our conversations. I didn't speak Spanish and he didn't speak English, but he could write in English, and this is how we "talked" for most of the afternoon. By Francisco's act of reaching out in love to me, his patience and determination to get me talking, I lost my fear and this mission trip became the start of many trips over many years.

Jump ahead to my first mission trip to Liberia, where I couldn't wait to "love on" the people and children I would meet. (To 'Love on' I mean meet other's needs: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. 1 Cor. 10:24) The first day, our team went to a soccer game and the children surrounded us and wanted to play, have their photos taken, sit in our laps, and love on us, and we were very happy to love on them right back. The mothers were NOT so happy and tried to shoo the children away, but we quickly told them it was all right. ("Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matt. 19:14 GNB)

I don't think we saw much of that soccer game but we did have one of the best days of our lives. We came to Liberia to bring hope of clean water and to love on everyone -- and that included the children. We may have had only two hands, each, but it was enough to hold eight little hands if necessary; it was enough to hug two or three children at a time; it was enough to share God's love with the children of Liberia. And that is what we are commanded to do: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Lent Day 21 Love at a Wedding

Rev. Pauline S. Hart (Retired)

It was 1981 and Tom and I attended a clergy and spouse meeting for the Ann Arbor district. During the meeting I visited with a friend who was excited about her journey into serving as a local pastor. On the way home, I told Tom that I was thinking about becoming a local pastor in the United Methodist Church. Tom said if I was serious about that, I should go to seminary to become an ordained elder. The next day, I called United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio and started my application.

From the beginning, Tom has been my biggest encourager and supporter. After 3 years of seminary, I was appointed to Waterman-Preston UMC in Southwest Detroit while Tom served West Bloomfield UMC. We tried to support each other as best we could. Tom was there when I officiated at my first funeral. As for weddings...no problem. I had helped Tom with many weddings. So, when my first wedding came, and Tom could not be there... well, that was okay.

The wedding ceremony went as planned. Afterwards, as the bride and groom were greeting their guests in the back of the sanctuary, I stood in the lobby. While I was standing there, a man came up to me full of rage and anger. He was angry that I was a woman and according to him I had no business officiating at a wedding. His words were loud and harsh. Before he was done, I was grouped with all clergywomen everywhere and with the National Council of Churches. I just stood there, knowing there wasn't anything that I could say.... anything that the man would want to hear. As I stood there, I just wondered how this was going to end.

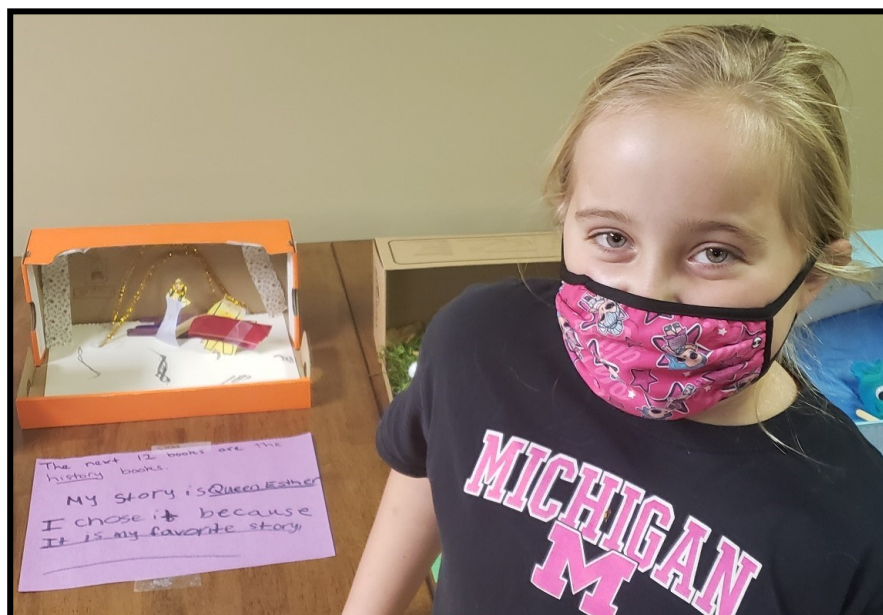
The man kept going on. But as I stood there, I felt something, someone, pressing against my clergy robe. I looked down and there was a little girl standing next to me...6 or 7 years old. Later, I wondered if she was the man's granddaughter. Like myself, the girl didn't say a word. After the girl came to me, the man stopped shouting and walked away. In that moment, I was aware that I was standing in the presence of God.... a presence that has been with me throughout my journey in the ordained ministry.

*I will make the blind walk a road they don't know,
and I will guide them in paths they don't know.
But I will make darkness before them into light
and rough places into level ground.
These things I will do;
I won't abandon them.*

Isaiah~~3~~42:16

Lent Day 22 Love for a Moment Like This

Leah Sain



This is Leah with her Queen Esther diorama. She created it in Kid's Connection last fall as they studied the Old Testament on Sunday nights.

She wrote: *My story is Queen Esther. I chose it because it is my favorite story.*

The story of Queen Esther is one of the Bible's most dramatic – a new young queen, an evil adviser to the king, a king prone to fits of rage, and a big dilemma for Esther! The basic plot: King Artaxerxes gets very angry as his queen, Vashti, and banishes her. He chooses the beautiful young Jewish woman Esther to be his new queen, but he doesn't know she is Jewish. Her Uncle Mordecai refused to bow down to the king's new adviser Haman, who got so angry that he wanted Mordecai and all of the Jewish people killed. Queen Esther knew she could stop the massacre by telling the king she was a Jew – and after inviting the king and Haman to two dinner parties, she finally worked up the courage to tell him. And King Artaxerxes got very angry ... at Haman! Haman was killed, the Jews were saved, and Esther became a hero to her people.

In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows?

Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family." Esther 4:14 CEB

- When have you stepped out in faith? What was at stake?
- How is God calling you to ³²love your neighbor today?

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14

Love Your Neighbor—Choose to Give Thanks

Lent Week #4

Today's Scripture: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

1 "Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever!"
2 That's what those who are redeemed by the Lord say, the ones God redeemed from the power of their enemies, 3 the ones God gathered from various countries, from east and west, north and south.

17 Some of the redeemed were fools because of their sinful ways. They suffered because of their wickedness. 18 They had absolutely no appetite for food; they had arrived at death's gates. 19 So they cried out to the Lord in their distress, and God saved them from their desperate circumstances. 20 God gave the order and healed them; he rescued them from their pit. 21 Let them thank the Lord for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all people. 22 Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices and declare what God has done in songs of joy!

Weekly Prayer Practice & Creative Connection: *Coloring In Prayer*

Warm up by drawing some doodles, squiggles, lines, circles, dots, etc.
on a piece of blank paper.

When ready follow these directions:

- Take a deep breath and slowly exhale. Repeat a few times. You may want to light a candle (or turn on a battery candle) as a visual reminder to be quiet and in prayer.
- Write God or a favorite name for God (i.e. Gracious God, Loving God, Creator, etc..) somewhere on the paper and doodle around the name.
- Take turns sharing a prayer request or praise. Set a timer for about 3 minutes (you can adjust the amount of time depending on age or attention span).
- Write down the praise/prayer either with words or a picture and then doodle around it while praying or praising God for the request. Repeat step 3 as many times as desired.
- When you are ready to end, write Amen or your favorite prayer closing somewhere on your paper. To learn more about Praying in Color, visit prayingincolor.com

Lent Day 23

Lynn and Ken Kneisel

Love is a Milkshake & a New Hairdo

God's love manifests in many ways, from the profound to the detailed. It even comes disguised as a milkshake.

It was the morning of Aug. 14, 1965... a special wedding day! The bride, having been brought up in a frugal home, had planned to sew her wedding gown, until she found one on sale for \$29.95 ... such good news! She also had never had her hair styled, or even cut, in a hair salon; but she had seen a photo in the newspaper of a hair style that she thought would be lovely for this day, so she took the photo to a nearby salon, where the stylist said she could do the bride's hair to match the photo.

Well, on this very hot August day, the result of the stylist's work was the proverbial "brown football helmet" look ... a total disaster in the eyes of the nervous bride. She went home in time to receive a phone call from the groom's brother, who was to be an attendant at the wedding at 6:30 PM. He had been asked by the groom to see how the bride was doing on this special day (following the tradition that the groom must not see or talk to the bride on the wedding day).

When the brother learned of the hairstyle disaster and was told by the bride that the wedding "would not take place" with her hair looking so awful, he told the groom, who replied, "Go get her a milkshake. That will help. And tell her the wedding is on!"

Meanwhile, the bride's younger sister, who was on a swim team (where all the girls took turns "doing" each other's hair after swim meets, to counteract the effects of chlorine from the pools), called her friend/teammate with a plea to help out. The friend rushed over, combed out the awful "hairdo" and performed some emergency repair with God-inspired skill ... so now the wedding could take place!

The milkshake arrived in the midst of this styling session, the groom's thoughtfulness was taken to heart amid tears of joy and love, and the tangible expression of his love was greatly appreciated. The wedding was a beautiful beginning to a new life together, even as the temperature in the church was 106 degrees and the candles melted in a humorous manner that is remembered almost 56 years later. The "God-inspired" milkshake has been part of each celebration ever since, and God's love still buoys the couple.

*Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God,
and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God.
The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love.*

Lent Day 24 Christmas Angels

Diane Thompson

Isolated since March 2010, it was understandably hard to come into contact with "live" people. In any case, "Love your Neighbor" definitely has meaning when it comes to Gary Moore (my best friend), my pinochle girls, Lynn Kneisel, and Lynette.

Gary has been a true neighbor and friend. He goes out of his way to insure my safety and well-being...snow removal, Jack-of-all-Trades with my household problems, singing Happy Birthday, picking me up when I have been stranded, airport driving to-from, always a HEL-LO, and much more.

My pinochle girls made special trips from Livonia to bring me home-made cookies and caroled at my front door (with twinkle lights) for Christmas.

Lynn graciously provided a turkey dinner for Thanksgiving. Also, she and Lynette made a special effort in COVID-19 times to help me with my sewing machine. My other three neighbors brought me Belgian chocolates, more home-made cookies, and snow-blown by drive-way.

The Apostle James said: "Just as the body without spirit is dead; so faith without works is dead." I have been the recipient of faith and good works. Jesus's presence was warmly felt as I shed tears. Needless to say, I had one of the best holiday seasons. I was and am filled with uplifting gratitude, thankfulness, blessings, and love.

1 Peter 4:8-10

Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins. Open your homes to each other without complaining. And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts.

Lent Day 25 **Jonah & the Whale**

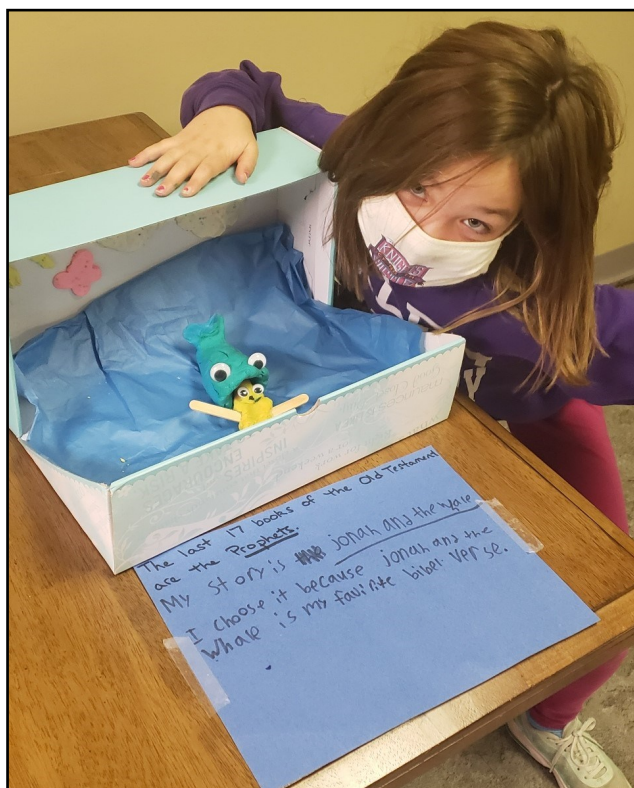
Molly Maguire

This is Molly with her Jonah and the Whale diorama. She created it in Kid's Connection last fall as they studied the Old Testament on Sunday nights.

She wrote:

The last 17 books of the Old Testament are the Prophets. My story is Jonah and the Whale. I chose it because Jonah and the Whale is my favorite bible verse.

The story of Jonah and the Whale is recorded in Old Testament book of Jonah; just four short chapters. Although the wicked city of Nineveh deserved to be crushed immediately, God was patient towards them. A reluctant prophet, Jonah originally ran from God & spent three nights in a whale before delivering a message of repentance to the nation of Nineveh. A beautiful demonstration of God's love, mercy & grace.



When have you felt like Jonah—far from God, enmeshed in a situation beyond your control? How then was your life brought “up from the pit”? Where in your life are you desperate enough to pray **WITH** hope, as Jonah does?

In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. Jonah 2:2, 3, 8, 9

Lent Day 26 Love from the Lunch Lady

Jen and Scott Denny

We didn't see it coming. Suddenly, our happy-go-lucky son could not get out of bed. He could not go to school and could not find joy in anything. Every morning began with a phone call and the threat of truancy. We sought professional help, but no one could offer understanding or hope for an end to the madness. We struggled for months through changes in medication and therapy. Finally, he worked up the courage to enter back into his anxiety ridden environment. Of course that led to disaster, more detachment, and more anxiety.

He struggled. Our hearts broke. Nothing made sense. After many months, none of us wanted to get out of bed. Ultimately, his therapist prescribed a plan for desensitization that forced him slowly back to school.

Lunchtime at school is often the best or the worst part of the school day. When we have a break in our day to hang with friends, it is a breath of fresh air, but very often, we are not on the same lunch schedule as our friends, and as luck would have it, that was the case for our son. Seriously! Why?

Fortunately, God sent the lunch lady. She was armed with faith, a view, and a warm heart. She could see our son struggling during a time of day when we could not see him or support him. One day, he came home with a story and a smile. She had offered to pick him up the next morning and drive him to school with warm homemade cornbread (his favorite). He actually set his alarm for the next morning!

When the next morning came, he couldn't do it, he was once again paralyzed. She called us to apologize. She felt she had failed her mission, but she was wrong. Her act of love gave us all hope. Hope gave us all the strength to continue the fight. He eventually fought his way out of the darkness. Many years have passed, but we will never forget her or her act of kindness ... her love (and cornbread) are still his inspiration to help other people today!

Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others.

Lent Day 27

Love from Our Congregation

Tina Sain

We definitely have been on the receiving end of God's love delivered through people countless times. The two times that come to mind for me are both related to finances.

Once was when I was not working outside the home and because of circumstances that I can't remember, Kirk had to miss about a week of work, for which he wouldn't be paid. I was incredibly stressed about how we were going to pay our bills on half the usual check that we depended on. Before bed one night, I gave it over to God and said I didn't know what to do. The next morning, I had a plan for prioritizing what bills would be paid and was feeling some peace. Then, Kirk's boss ended up paying him for the time he missed, and we didn't even need my plan or to pay any bills late. It showed me, yet again, that God provides for us.

Another instance was probably four or five years ago, when I was either not working or was only working part time. Again, we were living paycheck to paycheck and things were tight. One day, Michelle Walkup reached out and said that someone dropped something off for us at the office and asked me to come up and collect it. When I got there, she told me that it was an anonymous person and handed me an envelope. When I opened it, there was \$1,000 in it for our family. That money was a life saver and it drove me crazy that there wasn't anyone for me to thank. I think of that person (those people) often in appreciation. To me, that was the epitome of God's love. They gave a lot and made sure that they could not be given credit for it from the people they gave to -- just like how we can try to thank God and love others as he loves us, but we can never really thank him for the love he so freely gives us.

The person whose help is the God of Jacob—

the person whose hope rests on the Lord their God— is truly happy!

God: the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,

God: who is faithful forever, who gives justice to people who are oppressed,

who gives bread to people who are starving!

The Lord: who frees prisoners.

The Lord: who makes the blind see.

The Lord: who straightens up those who are bent low.

The Lord: who loves the righteous.

The Lord: who protects immigrants, who helps orphans and widows,

but who makes the way of the wicked twist and turn!

The Lord will rule forever!

Zion, your God will rule from one generation to the next!

Praise the Lord!

Psalm 146:5-10

Lent Day 28 Love is a Good Shepherd

Travis Harvey



This is Travis with his diorama of the 23rd Psalm. He created it in Kid's Connection last fall as they studied the Old Testament on Sunday nights.

He wrote:

The five middle books [of the Bible] are Poetry. My story is The Lord is My Shepherd. I chose it because it is a favorite Psalm.

Before David became king of Israel, he was a shepherd. He took care of and protected flocks of sheep, and he wrote this psalm describing God as a shepherd and God's people as His flock. Through this beautiful metaphor, Psalm 23 gives us invaluable insights into the character of God and his love and plan for all God's children.

Psalm 23 CEB

The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.

He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—they protect me.

You set a table for me right in front of my enemies.

You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

*Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live.*

- Has God rescued or protected you with his "rod and staff"?
- What "grassy meadows and restful waters" has he brought your way?
- What would you like your cup to overflow with?

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 21

Love Your Neighbor—A Heart for God

Lent Week #5

Today's Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. 32 It won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 They will no longer need to teach each other to say, "Know the Lord!" because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.

Weekly Prayer Practice:

Pretzel Prayer (located in bag for Lent Week #5)

Creative Connections:

Select a song from the Lent Playlist

Sing or look up the lyrics to offer as a prayer to start the day

Write/draw/paint/sketch/dance your thoughts or response to the song.

Create or find an image that represents God's forgiveness.

Create or find an image that looks like forgiveness feels.

Find or create an image that expresses 'A Heart for God'.



Last fall, the youth created this tree in the Fellowship Hall and each week leaves were added, each representing something they were thankful for. They noticed the more thanks they offered to God, the more content they were.

Make a list of your blessings today and
offer a prayer of gratitude to God
for all his good gifts,
the best of which is **LOVE!**

Restaurant Kindness Remembered

The years go by but special surprise acts of kindness are never forgotten. In the 90s Brian was working many hours and was frequently away on international travel for his automotive job. Allison and Kristen were very young and I was quite busy managing life. During one of the periods when Brian was gone, I took the girls to a restaurant near Livonia Mall after an outing of numerous errands. It is true that eating out with small children can be stressful—salt and pepper shakers to play with, sugar packets and creamers to stack, silverware to drop, tall glasses to accidentally knock over, bibs to get on, food to cut, and then the “I have to go!”.....In that experience I remember quickly grabbing my purse and the diaper bag and Kristen out of the high chair then guiding Allison through the place to the bathroom, all the while thinking, “I hope they don’t decide we are done and clear our plates!”

After we got back to the table and resettled and finished our meal, I asked the waitress for my bill. She smiled, handed me a small card that I still have in my jewelry box today, and said, “Your bill was paid by a couple who think you are a patient mom—they gave me this to give you”—The printed words on the card read Nice Things Happen To Nice People.

I was completely surprised and filled with many emotions. This act of kindness and love for others, even complete strangers in a nearby booth in a restaurant, and long before ‘Random Acts’ got big, has stayed with me for 25 years.

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with compassion,
kindness, gentleness, and patience.”*

Colossians 3:12

Lent Day 31 *Give Me a Clean Heart*

Use the camera on your phone or tablet scan the QR code or go to:

<http://bit.ly/slfumcplaylist> to find *Give Me a Clean Heart* on our curated Lenten Playlist and give it a listen before reading on.

The words are simple:

Give me a clean heart, so I might serve thee.

Lord, fix my heart, so that I may be used by thee.

Lord, I'm not worthy of all these blessings.

Give me a clean heart and I'll follow thee.

And I'll follow thee.



Echoing King David's prayer in the 51st Psalm, this text comes from a familiar Lent text.

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

In this rich virtual choir piece by Everett Harris, one can heard the dissonance in the chords as they journey toward resolution, paralleling our hearts propensity to wander even as we seek to be resolved in Christ.

Take a few moments and invite God to search your heart and confess anything keeping your heart from resting peaceful in Christ. Thank God for his faithfulness.

Lent Day 32 Love is Giving

Damon McInnes

As an adult, I can look back on life and recall God's love and unselfishness working its way through people I've known, and still do. Matthew 25:37-40 makes me think about the way God's love showed up in my life when I was a child.

My second oldest brother and his wife lived in a lower middle-class neighborhood in Burton, Michigan, and he had a "great" job at the AC Spark plug plant in Flint. They were excellent managers of the money. As hard as they tried, they were not blessed with children until their early thirties.

With them being 18 years older than I, who was 11-12 years old at the time, my parents were going through a divorce. Little did I realize that was that one of the reason they kept me with them so much when I was younger was to keep me out of harm's way as far as the nastiness my parents were going through.

And they just loved having me around, as they had an immense love for children.

An empty lot across the street from their house was a hangout for all the local kids to play kickball during the day after school and even more in the summer. So the ball would frequently end up in their yard and opened an opportunity to get the McInnes's involved.

Many of those kids were a lot less fortunate than most -- and they could tell. I recall frequently them offering those kids food, sweet cold treats, a dip in the pool and the time to listen to them, even if it was only the woes of their hard family life. They became known as the aunt and uncle of the neighborhood. They were never turned away.

I believe even though my sibling and his wife were not religious, nor attended church, it didn't mean they didn't believe in God. They believed in kindness, generosity and love for those kids, as well as myself. They never judged those children or their parents. I know they had a big impact on my life and were always there for me even as an adult. I spent a good many joyous time at sleepovers, vacations, camping trips, canoeing and holidays with them.

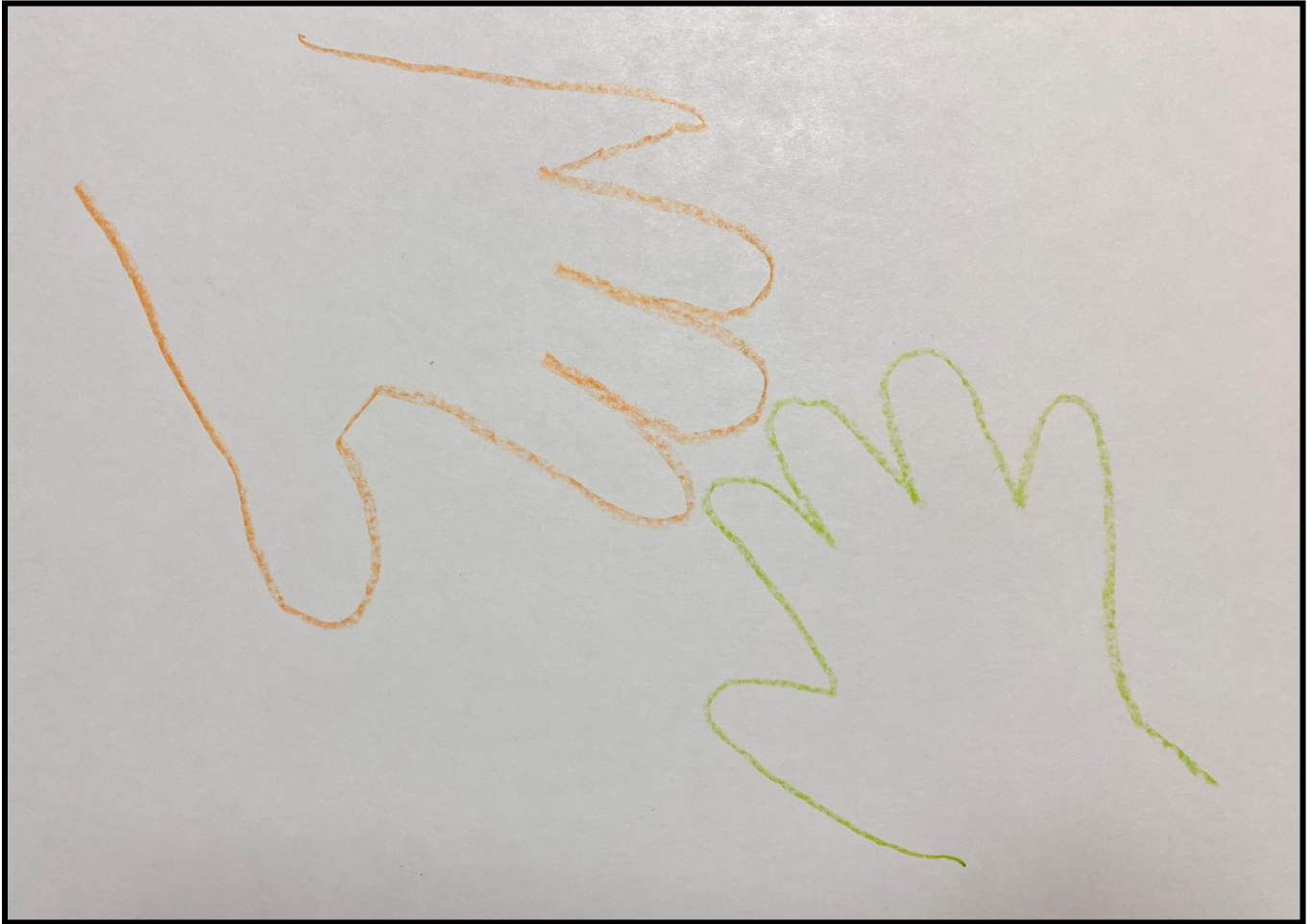
"Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

"Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'

Lent Day 33

Love is a Helping Hand

Matthew & Ben Kneifel



Hebrews 6:9-12

But we are convinced of better things in your case, brothers and sisters, even though we are talking this way—things that go together with salvation. God isn't unjust so that he forgets your efforts and the love you have shown for his name's sake when you served and continue to serve God's holy people. But we desperately want each of you to show the same effort to make your hope sure until the end. This is so you won't be lazy but follow the example of the ones who inherit the promises through faith and patience.

Thank you God, for loving sisters and brothers on this faith journey. Draw close to me today and show me how to love those I encounter today. Amen.

Lent Day 34

Debby Devereaux

Love Grows in a Vegetable Garden

In March 2020, special friends of ours planted the seed idea that we should have a shared garden. Our property provided a perfect spot for this idea to grow into a fenced garden.

Thus began the Smith-Devereaux Pandemic Garden. With the men tilling the soil, getting the supplies for and constructing the fence, and the women planning the layout, buying seeds and seedlings, etc., we were on our way.

We had to secure the area from deer, rabbits, etc., so the fence had to be electrified. This made it necessary to bring in another SLFUMC member with the appropriate skills to make this possible.

Finally, we planted seeds, weeded, watered and eventually harvested. All of this provided activity for us to have fellowship together for much of the summer in a socially distanced, safe place. We finally harvested fresh food that we could enjoy and share with friends. The garden was moderately productive, providing us with tomatoes, onions, potatoes, zucchini, butternut squash, radishes, flowers etc. However, the greatest blessing was the activity that made the days of the pandemic more tolerable.

*The truly happy person doesn't follow wicked advice,
doesn't stand on the road of sinners, and doesn't sit with the disrespectful.
Instead of doing those things, these persons love the Lord's Instruction,
and they recite God's Instruction day and night!
They are like a tree replanted by streams of water,
which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade.
Whatever they do succeeds.*

Psalm 1:1-3

Sixth Sunday of Lent, March 28, Palm Sunday

Love Your Neighbor—A Joyful Heart

Lent Week #6

Today's Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

When Jesus and his followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gave two disciples a task, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'Its master needs it, and he will send it back right away.'"

4 They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. 5 Some people standing around said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone. 7 They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. 9 Those in front of him and those following were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!" 11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After he looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, he returned to Bethany with the Twelve.

Weekly Prayer Practice: Choose your favorite from the last 5 weeks:

Burlap cross, Breath prayer, Finger Labyrinth, Coloring in Prayer or Pretzel Prayer

Creative Connections:

Select a song from the Lent Playlist or a favorite Hymn

Sing or look up the lyrics to offer as a prayer to start the day

Write/draw/paint/sketch/dance your thoughts or response to the song.

Create an image of a word or phrase that speaks to you from today's scripture.

Find or create an image that expresses 'A Joyful Heart'.

Lent Day 35 Love Helping Neighbors John Hoard

Now that I am retired, I have begun to volunteer at Active Faith. Once or twice a week, I help by packing food to meet requests of clients. The clients pick up the food at Active Faith, or in some cases it is delivered to their porch.

This gives me a chance to feel that I am doing some good for those in the community who need help in these challenging times. I am very fortunate in being able to do so.

Last summer, I also helped in delivering summer lunches from our church to kids who needed them.

Jesus said "the poor you have with you always," but at least we can help feed some of those who need help. Of those to whom much is given, much is expected. I am glad for the opportunity to help out.

Matthew 26:6-13

When Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease, a woman came to him with a vase made of alabaster containing very expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' head while he was sitting at dinner. Now when the disciples saw it they were angry and said, "Why this waste? This perfume could have been sold for a lot of money and given to the poor."

But Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said, "Why do you make trouble for the woman? She's done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me. By pouring this perfume over my body she's prepared me to be buried. I tell you the truth that wherever in the whole world this good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

Lent Day 36 Beautiful Things

Adela Hufford
Used with Permission

Use the camera on your phone or tablet scan the QR code or go to: <http://bit.ly/slfumcplaylist> to find *Beautiful Things* by Gungor on our curated Lenten Playlist and give it a listen before reading on.

Scripture Reading: John 11:1-45



Music evokes deep emotion for me. Listening to a song can pull me back in time to a specific moment in my life, similar to how eating something can instantly transport me to a memory. Music can fuel my current mood, or has the power to change it. And song lyrics can oftentimes better articulate exactly what I'm feeling.

There are songs that I keep on repeat because I want to continue feeling the emotion(s) long after the moment has passed. *Beautiful Things*, by Gungor, is one of those songs. This past summer I experienced death both figuratively (through an abrupt change in vocation, and thus death of an identity) and literally (the death of a parent). I played that song over and over. The lyrics were an expression of how I felt: grief, sorrow, death, wondering, hope, life.

"You make me new, you are making me new."

In today's scripture from Romans the Apostle Paul shares that focusing on ourselves (the mind that is focused on the flesh) keeps us from focusing on God. It leads us to a dead end. But focusing on the Spirit of God allows us to have life.

"Could all that is lost ever be found? Could a garden come out from this ground, at all?"

Today's scripture also looks at the story of Lazarus in the Book of John. Lazarus has died and his sisters, Mary and Martha, are in a state of mourning. Martha tells Jesus that if he had been there, her brother wouldn't have been lost to death. She misunderstands Jesus and assumes that his declaration of being the resurrection and life was referring to end times. But Jesus responds, I am the resurrection and life. Right now. "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

"Hope is springing up from this old ground, Out of chaos life is being found, in you."

Beautiful Things is back in regular rotation during this season of Lent. Leaning in again on these lyrics and these passages to help guide my understanding of death and the promised life that follows.

Lent Day 37 Love is and Embracing Heart

Kendi



This beautiful work of art was visible from my office window at the church I served before South Lyon First. Over the years I watched folks approach it, picnic under it, and several engagement pictures taken with it. When I think of loving my neighbor, this image always comes to mind.

"Embracing Heart" (2014) sits in front of Knox Church, and is one of their key identifiers in Overland Park, Kansas. Created by award-winning artist David Platter, it is based on the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). "...but while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." One of the hands in the sculpture represents the father, the other hand is the son — designed in a way that represents all of us.

The heart is a universal symbol of love, and the artist considered it a symbol of unconditional love and compassion with the combined imagery of the arms. And that is what we hope everyone who sees the sculpture feels: unconditional acceptance and love welcoming you home.

Lent Day 38 Love at SLFUMC

Stu Baker

My reflection on our Lenten theme of Love Your Neighbor focuses on witnessing God's love in those who I have observed operating as the Face of Jesus in our church. They are witnesses for Jesus' greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22: 37-39

I think of Dave Smith, who tirelessly works to support our outreach to God's Country Cooperative Parish. He not only coordinates our annual trip to the U.P., but also is in constant communication with Missionary Randy Hildebrandt regarding on-going needs at GCCP and responds to those needs as well as organizing special project trips in addition to the July mission trip. Next, he also directs our United Methodist Men by coordinating monthly breakfast programs and local service projects that our men can take on in service.

His devotion speaks to his character and his dedication to serving others in all he does and by doing so he is performing work as a servant of Jesus. Dave is a servant leader. He pays attention to needs that he observes and then figures out how to address them. By doing so, he is modeling for us how to live in the Kingdom of God.

Our Seekers Sunday school class is reading Sermon on the Mount – A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven by Amy-Jill Levine. In the introduction under "Getting on the Path" she writes:

The Sermon on the Mount tells us what we need to do in order to have one foot in the kingdom of heaven. More than that, it tells us that this kingdom is already available to us, already manifested when we enact God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. What Jesus does in a splendid way is model how we see the kingdom when we may not have realized it has been there, beckoning to us all along.

Jesus sets the model. And now that the model is set, he says to his disciples, "OK, let me show you how to do it. Here's your beginner's guide to walking as if you live in the kingdom of heaven. Here's your beginner's guide to seeing that if you just open your eyes and use your hearts, you will find that you are already there.

I have lifted up Dave Smith in this devotion as an example of many of our congregants who are "Getting on the Path" and reaching out in love to our neighbors that hopefully inspire those who we touch as well as inspire each of us to do more.

Lent Day 39

Kimberly & Dave Ascher

In October, 2020, the entire region had been seemingly controlled by COVID-19 for seven months, and it was really beginning to get to us. Yes, we had been participating in the church's online worship. Yes, we had been engaging with our Sunday School class each week, but something was still missing. Our daughters were back on their college campuses, and we missed our church friends. We missed the mutual love that had been a part of our lives for so long. We missed the endearing times to just look someone in the eyes and listen to their heart or to have them listen to our hearts.

Have no fear! Kim and I decided to mask up and deliver some extra love to our friends. A quick (and ultra safe) trip to Costco for some flowers topped off with homemade cookies from "Grandmom" Sandy Stewart and some labels and ribbon turned into a day we will never forget.

We toured the greater South Lyon (and Whitmore Lake and Novi) area on some roads we had never visited in the past to drop off packages to more than 20 homes of loved ones. In some cases we had to leave the gifts on the empty doorsteps, but we were able to chat with most people. It was amazingly emotional to see people face to face. The surprise on their faces inspired us to keep going for almost 8 hours that day.

What lessons did we learn? First, never underestimate the power of seeing people face to face. Next, while we thought we were spreading love and cheer, we were actually collecting even more in order to share with others. Finally, God's love transcends a pandemic. We learned to not wait for a virus in order to share God and love. Our only regret is we couldn't get to even more homes. Life, sweet, dear friends, is oh so good! **We love you.**



Lent Day 40 The Easter Egg Hunt

Joanna Firestone

The children – hundreds of them -- stood at the starting line, clutching their empty Easter baskets and almost vibrating with excitement. “Ready! Set! Go!”

They thundered into the open field, which had been seeded with a thousand brightly colored plastic Easter eggs. My five-year-old son, Matthew, was among them. Ants swarming an ant hill.

It seemed like only a minute or two before they had stripped the field clean, like giant grasshoppers, and were trotting back to their families, with broad smiles and eager to pop open the eggs to see the candy and trinkets inside. But where was Matty? All the children were off the field, and I couldn't see him. I was beginning to panic, as when I briefly lost sight of him at the beach. A woman approached with my son in one hand, and hers in another. Uh oh. What had he done?

“Are you his mom?” she asked. I nodded, wondering what law of propriety my Kindergarten had broken.

“My little boy fell in the crowd at the beginning. By the time he got to where the eggs were, they were all gone. He was crying, and your son comforted him and gave him half of his own,” she said. “I just wanted to tell you and say thank you.”

I felt the air sucked from my lungs.

As it turned out, one of the plastic eggs remaining in Matthew's basket had a gold coin that entitled him to a special prize. My sister would call it a “God wink.” On the drive home, I told him that by sharing, he had loved his neighbor, just like Jesus teaches us. “Do you think Jesus is happy with me?” he asked from his car seat, with that wonderful openness of young children. “Oh yes. I'm sure of it,” I responded with tears welling in my eyes.

In the 22 intervening years, I've been proud of my son on many occasions. And he has taught me as many lessons as I have taught him. But none as great as the Palm Sunday Easter egg hunt of 1999.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.

Galatians 5:22-23

April 4, Easter Sunday

Love Your Neighbor—An Easter Heart

Today's Scripture: John 20:1-18

Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." 3 Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. 4 They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. 5 Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he didn't go in. 6 Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It wasn't with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. 8 Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 They didn't yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

11 Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. 12 She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. 13 The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." 14 As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus.

15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, "Don't hold on to me, for I haven't yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I'm going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.