



Lenten Devotional Booklet 2023

New Horizon Presbyterian Church

Ash Wednesday February 22 - A Covenant

I grew up in a tradition that defined Lent as a period of preparing ourselves to celebrate Easter. This was a season in which we intentionally turn to the Lord by turning away from things we normally focus our attention on. So we were urged to “give something up” or to miss a meal or 2 and use that time and energy in prayer. That sounds great on paper, but I confess it never did make a lot of sense to me as a kid. How did my giving up Tootsie Rolls prepare me to celebrate Easter?

That was over 50 years ago and my thinking about Lent has changed a bit. I know now that “giving something up” is not an end in itself, but an invitation to look at the big picture. In both the Old and New Testaments, COVENANT is the big picture. We are tempted to reduce the idea of covenant down to contract, that if we do X then God will do Y. Contracts are agreements between parties for some gain, usually money. Covenants, on the other hand define relationships, and those relationships define who we are. For instance, weddings are ceremonies of covenant, in which husband and wife bind themselves together with the promise to build a new life together, come what may. After vows and rings are exchanged, the husband and wife have a new identity, Mr. & Mrs.

In Biblical Covenants, God also binds God’s people to Himself through promises, and covenant promises are ratified in blood. In God’s covenant with Abraham, God promised Abraham both descendants and a home, and this promise was ratified by walking between the carcasses of sacrificial animals. Moses was given the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 and the people agreed to abide by them and offer sacrifices in Exodus 24. Jeremiah promises that God will make a new covenant with His people, one not base on their obedience, but on the knowledge which God will place in their hearts.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Luke describes the fulfillment of this promise at the Last Supper in chapter 22. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. This New Covenant sealed by the Cross and Resurrection is based on. Christ’s initiative and Christ’s grace.

The other thing that Biblical Covenants have in common is that they demand a response from God’s people. Abraham embraced a new identity as Father of a Great Nation (that’s what Abraham means.) Those gathered at Sinai left that place as God’s Chosen People towards a Promised Land. All of us who embrace Christ’s promises respond by letting go of past failures. We no longer hide behind feelings of unworthiness, Christ as set us free. We embrace our identity as God’s Forgiveness People by improving our own discipleship and work towards to future by being God’s blessing on our neighbors today. That is what Lent is for me: a time of reflection of what God has done for me and finding concrete ways to respond to God’s grace. Sure beats “giving something up”!!

--Rev. Paul Masters

Thursday, February 23 - Be Strong and of Good Courage!

The theme for our Lenten worship, “Be Strong and of Good Courage!” is found in God’s words to Joshua. After Moses died, God told Joshua that he would be a successful leader of God’s people. God told Joshua, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:1-6

For many years Lent has been thought of as a time to deny ourselves something in order to help us atone for the sin we commit. But in recent years, emphasis has come to be placed on putting action to our faith, on being the hands and feet of Jesus, on helping those who have needs of any kind. It is a good season to encourage others in their faith as we examine our own lives. It is a good time to not only think of where we may be lacking in our obedience to God, but of all the myriad ways God blesses us as we live each day to glorify Him.

Like Advent, Lent is a season of preparation, a time to get ready to accept the miracle wrought by Jesus’ death on the cross which eliminates forever the sins of each person who believes in Him. As David writes in Psalm 103, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!” David writes that God forgives all our sin and redeems our lives from destruction. David also says that the Lord abounds in mercy and doesn’t deal with us according to our sins, for as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God’s mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us.

So during this Lent we are free to praise and thank God for all His amazing care of us and to ask Him to guide us as we seek to serve Him by serving those He places in our path.

--Beverly Melchor-Young

Friday, February 24 - Courageous Verses

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Joshua 1:6-9 Be strong and brave--you will be a successful leader of my people. You need only be strong and courageous obeying every law Moses gave you, so you will be successful in everything you do. Constantly remind the people about these laws, and you must think about them every day and every night, for only then will you succeed. Yes, be bold and strong! Banish fear and doubt! Remember, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

2 Samuel 10:12 Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him.

1 Chronicles 28:20 David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

2 Chronicles 15:7 But you, take courage! Do not be weak--your work shall be rewarded.

Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 27:14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Psalms 31:24 Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Psalms 56:3-4 When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Daniel 10:19 And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."

Matthew 14:27 But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'
John 14:17 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

1 Corinthians 16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

2 Corinthians 5:8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Saturday, February 25 – The Observance of Lent

The observance of Lent has been kicked around over the centuries. It has been banned, ignored, considered papist, and declared nonbiblical. And yet, it still has a place in most church calendars. It also comes after one heck of a party.

There are 40 days in Lent. The number 40 pops up in the Bible 146 times. Have you heard the saying, “40 days and 40 nights it did rain, and it made old Noah’s Ark go flippity floppity flop.” For 40 years the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness. For 40 days Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. The number 40 is associated with a time of trial or testing in the Bible.

I must admit that Lent made little impression on me as I grew up. There was a neighbor kid who was Catholic, and one day he refused a piece of candy. When I asked him why, he told me he was giving it up for Lent. The focus of Lent bounced off me like tennis balls hitting a tank. 40 days of abstinence in such a usually dark and dreary time of the year?!

The practice of Lent gives us a Planck measure of what Jesus chose to endure for us. Our abstinence for a time gives us a boots on the ground experience of sacrifice and temptation.

To God be the glory, great things He hath done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in. (hymn by Nathan Fellingham)

--David Young

Sunday, February 26 - Giving to and Listening to God

Is God guiding me? On my way to church each Sunday I read a sign on McPherson that says “God’s willingness to speak to Me depends on My willingness to listen to Him”.

My head is always figuring something out. Should I? Shouldn’t I? What’s for lunch? What do I need to do for my dog, Lucky? How important is all that compared to what God has to say to me?

He is my encouragement, director, friend and savior. He has given me the gift of being a Stephen’s minister. As a result of that I have gotten to really know Joyce Mass. She is now 98 and unable to get out much. Me and my dog go and visit her each Thursday. We visit about what’s going on, and we watch DVD’s. Then she insists on feeding me and Lucky ice cream. I have received such love from her. I consider her to be a gift.

Any time I have tried to give something of myself to God, I have found that I receive more from Him than I give to Him.

--Sharon Bemis

Monday, February 27 - My Prayer

Dear God, at the start of each day I have to thank you for 10 blessings:

1. Thank you for life.
2. Thanks for my friends.
3. Thanks for my siblings.
4. Thanks for my 3 very different sons.
5. Thanks that I can drive where I want to go.
6. Thanks for such a warm and logical minister.
7. Thanks for such a talented choir.
8. Thanks for the freedoms we have in our great country.
9. Thanks for our 4 seasons.
10. Thanks for our daily bread.

Please guide and help the people of Russia, China, and other oppressed countries.

Please help the people of Ukraine and other countries seeking freedoms.

Thanks for the heat you provided Europe this winter where they had such a shortage of natural gas.

--Genie Hansen

Tuesday, February 28 – God Is With Us

One fall I had the opportunity to student teach in Scotland for 7 weeks. Following the experience, I traveled through several cities in Europe. One day when I was traveling in Rome, I was to meet my friends on the train after validating the tickets. Unfortunately, I couldn't find my friends on the train, so it left without me. At the time I was terrified, because I had been separated from my friends. To be left alone in a place where the people only speak Italian is definitely the worst feeling in the world.

I phoned my father in the U.S. to tell him about the scary situation. In return he gave me a pep talk, telling me that I would find my friends. The encouragement helped, but I was still in tears halfway across the world. A few hours later I managed to get on the next train to Venice. Nearly 8 hours later I finally was in touch with my friends at the Venice train station. Luckily when they reached Venice, they called my parents and said I was on the next train.

Other than my parents, the only other way I got through this horrifying experience was my belief in God. While I was by myself for 8 hours, I did a lot of praying and thinking. I knew God would do His best at helping me locate my friends. Ever since this experience, I feel truly blessed and know that God is there to look out for us and to give us daily strength.

--Amanda Parrott Pals (*from Journey to Easter, vol. 4, 2000*)

Wednesday, March 1 - From Vinegar to Hope

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”
I Corinthians 13:11-12

Perhaps you have had the experience of hearing a song and being transported to a memory from your past. But what about an aroma that triggers memories of your past? Scientists have conducted studies of the connection between smells and memories. For me, vinegar is that trigger. Whenever I smell vinegar, I think back to my childhood and dyeing eggs for Easter with my mom and my siblings at the table in our kitchen. We would use the Easter egg kits from the store. The dye was mixed with vinegar and water in the orange coffee cups from Mom’s dinner set. Later Mom and Dad would hide the eggs in the yard for us to find on Easter morning.

Watching as the eggs changed into beautiful colors was always amazing. The kits came with wax colorless crayons which were used to mark designs on the undyed eggs. The dye would not color the shell where there was wax. Seeing what you had drawn with the crayon was difficult, so watching the design emerge in the dyeing process was always something of a surprise.

As a child, I thought mainly of Easter as Easter baskets containing some candy and colored eggs from the hunt in our yard and from the town hunt in the park. I knew the Easter story of Christ’s death and resurrection from Sunday School lessons, but I did not fully understand the meaning of these events in my life. During the years that have passed since then, I remember the first time I saw one of my public school students with ashes on her forehead and learned that Ash Wednesday symbolizes our human mortality and our need for God in our lives. I remember the dear family members and friends who have passed away. I gained a realization of needing God in my life to restore my hope, especially during times of despair. That hope and the new life symbolized by an egg remind me that God forgives our sins and that He allowed His Son to die for our sins. God’s grace is given freely and enables us to have the hope that sustains us through good times and bad. We can’t see our future, just as we couldn’t see the design on the egg until the dye shaped it. God shapes our future and gives us joy, color and HOPE!

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.” 1 Peter 5:10

--Janet Christensen

Thursday, March 2 - God Walks With Us

When I was young I knew God controlled nature and world events. After joining Grace Presbyterian Church, I learned of the personal relationship of love and redemption and protection. I have experienced His protection on several occasions which could have been life threatening.

Once I lost my balance when bending over looking at lawn equipment from a 3' high stoop with no protective railing. I became upright in seconds. Praise the Lord!

Another time before stepping on icy steps I asked for foot protection. I was thrown backward, landing on a concrete corner of the stoop with my head and neck hitting a metal pipe with much force. Nothing appeared broken, just shaken up, and I was so thankful for God's protection.

Then on June 1st, 2019, we were dressing to go to a birthday party, and both of my feet caught in a throw rug as I turned quickly. The momentum slammed my head into a 5' chest of drawers. My 1st thought was that it was my call to come home. My 2nd thought was, "Jesus, help me!" which I kept repeating many times. The x-ray showed 2 broken neck bones. Paul was able to pray a comforting prayer before a wild ride to an Omaha hospital. The doctor told the family I might not make it through the night. During my 3 month confinement Jesus was always there, giving me songs to repeat, portions of hymns, and thoughts of how lucky I was. Jesus would enter my thoughts, letting me know His presence.

That was 3½ years ago, and He is still with me. He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His creation.

--Thelma Fauble

Friday, March 3 - God Is Awesome

Traveling to Alaska was a dream that came true in 1998. We decided to take a “flight seeing” tour to the face of the Mount McKinley. We bundled up, rode the bus out to the airport, and boarded a fixed wing airplane. This tiny aircraft held 8 people, and as we taxied down a dirt and gravel runway, I began to feel as if I was in a metal bumblebee.

Soon we were off the ground, and I tried to relax as the pilot described the Polychrome Mountain range ahead. Climbing in altitude made the plane cold, my feet freeze, and my thoughts wander. Why was I trusting this total stranger, called a pilot, to take me up 20,320’ in a tin can? I tried to take my mind off this metal bumblebee by looking out the window where I saw glaciers that had formed thousands of years ago. Mammoth rocks forged mountain ranges that contrasted against the rich azure sky. The wind created ridges of ice and snow that could easily start an avalanche. The sky became white with blowing snow and clouds. Then our pilot radioed to another pilot, who discovered it would be clearer if we went to the other side of the mountain. So we ascended 5,000’ in corkscrew turns, higher and higher. Scared, I thought, “God, please get my feet on solid ground.”

Still trying to concentrate on the view, I saw immeasurable amounts of snow forming sharp ridges. But once again, the sky became white with blowing snow, which at times blended into the mountainside. I was not sure if we were in the air or headed toward the mountain. At that moment it struck me how awesome this mountain of rock, ice, snow and wind was, and yet our awesome God created it. Focusing on the mountain and its enormous size made me realize that all this vast space is but a speck in God’s creation. I was having trouble comprehending the colossal size of this one mountain, and yet my Lord is even more powerful and awesome. I felt more secure trusting in the strength and power of an awesome God. Yet somehow, awesome seemed inadequate to describe my God.

Looking in the concordance, I found that a synonym for awesome is fearful. Without a doubt, my experience had been fearful. One of the scriptures listed under awesome helped to explain my experience. It is Job 37:22-23. “Out of the North comes golden splendor, around God is awesome majesty. The Almighty—we cannot find Him; He is exalted in power”. Awesome majesty and power are what I experienced that day. It is reassuring to know I can trust for eternity in an awesome God and not simply a pilot flying a tin can.

--Teena Kern

Saturday, March 4 - Touched By an Angel

He has given His angel charge over you; to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. Psalm 91:11-12

A college age friend, Sara, performed during 1996 with “Up with People”, and in early December she and a friend decided to do some sightseeing during their short visit in Paris, France. The girls purchased their subway tickets, but Sara couldn’t get hers to operate the turnstile to the boarding platform, although she tried numerous times. While she obtained the help of the ticket agent, the train left without the girls. To check Sara’s ticket, the ticket agent inserted it several times into the slot in the turnstile, and each time it worked as it should. Later that day, December 3, 1996, the girls learned that that commuter train had been bombed, resulting in 2 deaths, 35 seriously wounded, 7 of them critically!

Each of us can recall happenings in our life that can’t be explained, but we sensed an invisible presence we know came from God’s intervention—yes, touched by a Angel, as were Sara and her friend.

We thank you, Lord, for your angels, ministering spirits. They are with us in peace and joy as well as to guide, protect, and comfort us. In their work to see that Your will through Jesus Christ is fulfilled in us, we are grateful for their ministry. Amen.

--Mari Belle James (This story was originally published in Grace’s 1st Lenten booklet.)

Sunday, March 5 - Where God Lives

When our #1 son started kindergarten we lived on a farm 7 miles east of Council Bluffs. On his first day of school the teacher had him explain where he lived. His directions were a bit vague, but the teacher later told us that he concluded his directions with “and then on top of that hill is our big house, and God lives across the road.”

Our farm was across the road from the old rural Hardin Presbyterian Church. Em and I were married in that little country church, then it was off to war for 4 years. But what I had learned and believed about the love, the mercy, and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ kept me going through the war years. When I returned Em and I started farming her family home farm, and as the years went by, I realized that God didn't live across the road in the church, but He lived in me.

In trusting God through good times and bad—in every day living and in farming, He became my rock, my strength, my hope, and I learned that through Him all things were possible. But I also learned that it was not always my will be done, but His, and that His timing was not always my timing, but I could trust in Him.

I know still that God is my refuge, my strength, and my hope. With His help, I try to live each day in His love, knowing He is at my side to guide, to correct, to forgive, to strengthen, and comfort me.

All praise to God!

--Gene Krohn (*excerpted from Journey to Easter, vol. 4, 2000*)

Monday, March 6 - Today and Every Day

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be full of joy and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24

The past couple of years have been very challenging, at times heartbreaking, but filled with many blessings. My job has been more difficult than ever. The day to day stress sometimes is indescribable. I also helped take care of my father who passed away last year from congestive heart failure. The years have been filled with a lot of stress, uncertainties and tears. I would often find myself, and still do, on the drive in to work reminding myself that today is the Lord's day, to rejoice that I have been given another day, and to make myself a blessing to someone today.

During the past few years, Mark and I also welcomed a granddaughter and more recently, our second granddaughter, to this world. The years have also been filled with many laughs, giggles, and immense love. Mark and I have had some amazing adventures along the way as well.

Every one of those days, the good days and the stressful ones, remind me that God has given me this day to do his work, to spread his love, and care for others. I am reminded each and every day that I am truly blessed by my Creator. Each day is a new day to rejoice and be glad, even if you have to look harder for the blessing.

Dear Lord, Thank you for blessing my life with others to care for, and others who care for me. This is the day you have made for me, and I will rejoice and be glad in it. The work you have called me to do, I will do so with my whole heart.

--Sharon Poindexter

Tuesday, March 7 - No One Knows Except the Father

Jesus called God “Abba”, or “Daddy”. They had a very loving and trust filled relationship. God trusted Jesus to obey Him, and Jesus trusted His Daddy to love and care for him, regardless of the trials he would face in his short life on this earth as fully human and also fully divine.

One day while driving a school bus for Lewis Central, we got to the school a few minutes too early to let the kids off the bus. As we waited, a 5th grade girl started crying. She had seen several billboards proclaiming God’s punishment and the quickly arriving end of the world. She told me, “God’s gonna do horrible things to us!” I reminded her that she had told me about going to church and believing in Jesus. I told her she was safe because of her faith. I also told her to ignore all predictions of the end of the world, because Jesus Himself said, “no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, except the Father”. Both Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 carry this account of Jesus’ words. Of course, the bus was strangely quiet as everyone listened raptly to our conversation. The girl was able to stop crying and seemed to feel reassured as to her future.

Whenever I am tempted to believe things I hear in this world, I always try to remember to check what the Bible says about them. Satan is a deceiver and would love for me to believe all kinds of untruths and worry about them. But thankfully, God’s perfect love casts out our fear. May your Lenten journey bring you much peace as you live your faith in your loving heavenly Daddy and his wonderful Son, your Savior.

--Beverly Melchor-Young

Wednesday, March 8 – Waiting Patiently

Good is the Lord to one who waits for him; to the soul that seeks him; it is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord. Lamentations 3:25-26

Did you know that the word patience comes from the Latin verb *patior*, which means “to suffer”? So what does it mean to wait patiently for God? It is not like waiting for the phone to ring, or the wind to stop blowing, or the heat of the summer to leave. Waiting patiently for God is an active waiting. God calls us to live in the present moment completely so that we can find the signs of the One, Jesus Christ, we are waiting for.

Waiting patiently is suffering through the moment, really living it and letting it grow into the next moment as we grow into God. God is coming right before our eyes. Are we living in the moment so we can see God coming, or are our eyes looking back to the past or beyond to the uncertain future? Easter is coming, the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Prayer: God of the moment, we thank you for your gift of the present. Help us not to miss the meaning of your resurrection, as we pray in our Savior’s name. Amen.

--Jack Pettit (*from Journey to Easter, vol. 4, 2000*)

Thursday, March 9 – This Little Light of Mine

Matthew 5:16 – In the same way, let your light shine so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

On February 5, 2022, to commemorate my youngest daughter, Mindy's, 50th birthday and my 75th birthday, Michele, my oldest daughter, and Mindy surprised me with a trip to Black Squirrel Tattoo. We all got identical tattoos of my daily mantra/mission Be The Light on our forearm. Yep, at 75 years old, I got my first tattoo.

What does it mean to Be the Light of Christ? For me, it means praying, being kind, compassionate, patient, loving, understanding, joyful, and also by having grace and by being a servant of God. I always told my grandchildren, Kylee and Aidan, to Be the Light every time I dropped them off at school. It is so simple. Just smile at someone. Be helpful. Say "Hi!" to someone you don't know; it just might make their day. Be kind. I try to Be the Light to people I come in contact with during my day. Maybe it is the crabby clerk at Walmart who suddenly smiles and tells me to have a nice day after I initially smile at her and tell her to have a blessed day. Maybe it is helping the lady in the electric cart at the grocery store that is having trouble reaching an item on the shelf.

I volunteer at Inter-Faith Response. On days I volunteer, I talk to at least seven clients who are in crisis and need rental or utility assistance. These clients have some of the most heartbreaking stories. When I hang up the phone after talking to a client, I want to know that I have touched their lives in some small way and brightened their day by listening, being kind and making them feel like they are important and that someone does care about them. Be the Light!

A card I received from a friend had this message, and I think it says it all: Live your Faith. Do what's right. Count your blessings. Be the light.

Prayer: Dear God, Please walk with me and guide me as I share and let your love shine through me today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

--Nancy Hetrick

Friday, March 10 – How Will You Spend Your Dash?

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend.

He referred to the dates on the tombstone from the beginning to the end.

He noted that 1st came the date of birth, and spoke of the 2nd date with tears.

Then he said that what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

That dash represented all the time the person spent alive on earth,
and only those who loved him know what that little line is worth.

It matters not how much we own; the cars, the houses, the cash.

What matters is how we live and love and with whom we spend our dash.

If we think about it long and hard, will there be things we'd like to change?

We never know how much time is left. We could be in the dash mid-range.

Can we slow down enough to consider what's true and what's real

and always try to understand the way other people feel,

Maybe be less quick to anger and show appreciation more,

and love the people in our lives like we're never loved before?

We should treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile,

for this special dash lasts just a little while.

When your eulogy is being read with your life's actions to rehash,

will you be pleased with the things they say about how you spent your dash?

--Unknown

Saturday, March 11 – Renewal

Well done servant of heaven, you have prevailed,
And evil was vanquished: cast down for a while.
Those who ride away shall no longer be assailed,
And their hearts are at peace, and they shall smile.

Justice has been done; their sins are now forgiven,
And though scars remain; healing shall be theirs,
Now extend your hand, and let blossoms be given,
And let water cleanse and obliterate the dark lairs.

Forget not the humans, and let their needs fulfill.
And heaven's power is yours to aid and defend.
Time will pass, and some will come to your hill,
And they will seek guidance, and you shall attend.

Humans are heaven's creation, yet trials they face,
And evil shall tempt them, though not in this place.

Evil and temptations will not exist where good is found, and remember that God has provided good for all of us. (from a poem in the historical novel "The Dark Cabin Murders" by Frank L. Gertcher)

--Mary Alice Fehr

Sunday, March 12 - A New Way to See Things

Some time ago I heard in a Sunday sermon to “go climb a tree”, inferring that we, like Zacchaeus, needed to exert ourselves to “better see Jesus”. I reflected on how often a surprising twist to a few words, or a new look at an old cliché can provide a meaningful mini-sermon whose message stays with us through the years and often flashes back as an answer to prayer to provide instant comfort or good advice when needed most.

Such as when uncertain about undertaking a new venture, I suddenly recalled a speaker I had heard some 20 years earlier whose message was “rolling stones gather no moss, but who wants to sit around covered with green fuzz?” The point was to go out and meet new challenges and new ways of serving God.

I recently caught myself reciting to a group of bored teenagers an old maxim of my father’s, “all you need is a little more hoe handle.” Hoe handle was, for my father, a symbol of honest hard work related to the days of cutting weeds with a hand held tool—the hoe. His theory that “work to do will eliminate boredom” is enduring.

Another time I recall a situation when I felt I couldn’t work with some unchangeable conditions and some unchangeable people, when a wiser one quietly said, “learn to love the dandelions”. Strangely enough, with that quiet reminder to accept all people as children of God and not to sit in judgment, I found the dandelions beautiful.

To me one of the most beloved mini-messages of all is the great Easter message, “He is risen!” What love, hope, peace, and joy that message can give each of us!

--Em Krohn (*excerpted from Journey to Easter, vol. 4, 2000*)

Monday, March 13 - Grace

I was 15 years old going on 16. I would be 16 in a month. I had gotten into trouble. I was pregnant. I lived through telling my parents and they were supportive. But then my mother said “you have to tell your grandmother”. Well, grandmother was a preacher in the Assembly of God. My mother had always kept us in line by saying, “what would your grandmother think?”

I was already self-condemned. I waited until I had the courage and then I went to the nearest pay phone and dialed long distance to my grandmother. I started out with small talk, but grandma said, “What’s the matter?” I blurted out, “I’m pregnant and have to get married. Grandma, I’m sorry.” There was no hesitation in her reply. She asked “what’s the young man’s name?” I told her, “it’s Gary,” and she replied, “Well, honey, you know I will love Gary just like I love you.”

That is grandmother grace. It’s nothing compared to the grace of Jesus. He died on a cross to say, “I love you and will be with you.” He forgives all my slip ups, big and small. He has forgiven all past sins and all future sins I will commit. Now that’s grace. All He asks is that I confess He is Lord of my life.

--Sharon Bemis

Tuesday, March 14 - We Have the Victory!

Lent is the season of sacrifice. As we give up something for Lent, God made the ultimate choice when He gave His only Son. Jesus was punished and humiliated, but even on the cross He asked His Father to “forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Luke 23:34

On Easter when Jesus arose from the dead, many doubters became believers. Their faith in Jesus gave them victory over sin and death.

John Yates (1837-1900) was a shoe salesman, and then the manager of the local hardware store. His parents had emigrated from England. Shortly after he left the hardware store to become the editor of a local newspaper, he wrote the hymn, “Faith Is The Victory”. This key phrase is taken from 1 John 5:4, which says, “And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith.” In 1891 John sent “Faith Is The Victory” to Ira Sankey (1840-1908), who composed the music for it. This is the only hymn John wrote that is still sung in our Protestant churches today. Ira Sankey composed the music for hundreds of great hymns by other writers. Here is the chorus:

Faith is the victory, faith is the victory, oh, glorious victory that overcomes the world!

--Alyce Hough

Wednesday, March 15 - Where Is Our Home?

And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:7

Many years ago, my mother and I visited her 100-year-old aunt in the Alzheimer's unit of a nursing home. Over the previous 10 years of living in an apartment, an assisted living entity, the nursing home, and finally this restricted unit, my aunt had given her daughter fits of guilt and agony because she wanted to "go home". After listening to my aunt's fragments of sentences, conversations, and questions, Mother and I realized that all her references were nearly 70 years old, back to when my mother was a child. As we prepared to leave her, she once more asked if she could go home. We discussed the fact that the home she was referring to had not existed for a lifetime. Mother and I then drove 20 miles to Jamesport, Missouri, a community full of nostalgia, antique stores, Amish buggies and furniture, and tourists. We watched the people going in and out of the antique shops and listened to them exclaiming about items they remembered from their childhood, when it occurred to us that they, too, were attempting to go home. The entire commercial aspect of that community with buses of tourists coming and going was built on the desire to "go home", back to a time of innocence or youth or . . . what? What is it in us that compels us to find "home"? I think that what compels us to look for home is the longing for our source—our mortal attempts take us back to childhood, but our soul is hungering for something more.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

You might end your devotion with a prayer meaningful to you about your quest for home, then read or sing the last verse of How Great Thou Art:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home,
what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim,
"My God, how great thou art!"

--Jan Pellant

Thursday, March 16 - Trapped No Longer

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close in on you suddenly like a trap." Luke 21:34

While thinking about my devotion topic, I found that the word “drunkenness” is used 81 times in at least 40 verses of the bible. For about 15 years of my life, I was caught up in this “trap” called alcoholism. Trap is a very good term to apply to my drinking. The drinking started innocently at social gatherings and grew until it controlled my life. This process took about 15 years during which time I abandoned my church family, attempted suicide, made several visits to the psych ward, divorced my spouse, and listened to my children tell me I was an alcoholic. None of which gave me the idea that I needed to stop drinking. One excuse of many was that I was working every day.

I had been a member of Bethany and Grace since I was a young child. A wake up call came when I received a letter from Grace saying I was being taken off the church roll. My decision to stop drinking came after a sober argument with a not so sober family member. This was Thanksgiving 1986 and I found my way to Alcoholics Anonymous February 2, 1987. In a few days I will be celebrating 36 years of living “One Day at a Time.”

I am so thankful that God has blessed me with sobriety. The Bible gives us the 10 commandments to follow. The AA program gives us 12 steps of which 6 mention God. Step 11 gives us the direction “sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for his will and the power to carry that out.”

Heavenly Father, Thank you for blessing me with sobriety. Help me to be an example to others who are traveling down the road to recovery. Lord help me to do thy will not mine. Amen.

--Karen Russell

Friday, March 17 - On Saint Patrick's Day

An Irish Blessing:

May the road rise to meet you.

**May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.**

Whenever I hear or see this blessing in my mind I always have to add:

**And may you be in heaven half an hour
Before the devil knows you're dead!**

Now, I'm not sure where these last lines originated, but I heard them throughout my childhood, and they were always a source of amusement. My grandmother came from Ireland, and I can only assume that she said these words around my father as he was growing up, and then he repeated them to me.

Is it the Irish in me that finds humor in something as unfunny as death? Or is it the image of "beating the devil" that makes it so memorable? Or maybe it's just the idea of heaven as a safe place, safe from the devil, that is so appealing. And just as anyone who grew up Catholic can tell you, the devil was a very real threat, and anything that would make that less scary was welcome relief. But whatever the reason, it is as amusing and comforting today as it was in my childhood. And it is my St. Patrick's Day wish for you.

--Cathy Born (*from Journey to Easter, vol. 4, 2000*)

Saturday, March 18 - How God Speaks

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Psalm 146: 1-2

How do you hear God? God speaks to us in so many ways. He may speak through scripture, in prayer, through others, in solitude, through our circumstances, in nature, in music. Anyone who knows me, knows that a huge way God speaks to me is through music. I've spent nearly all my life making music for the glory of God.

My mother used to tell me how, when I was two, I begged and begged for her to talk to the other people at church to convince them to let me go to Sunday School even though I wasn't old enough. You see, a child needed to be three to go to Sunday School in our small-town church. But I could hear the kids singing Jesus songs and, by golly, I wanted to sing Jesus songs, too! And I didn't want to wait!

Who knows which song or songs may have spoken to me? Was it The B-I-B-L-E? Maybe I Will Make You Fishers of Men? Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man? Jesus Loves Me? This Little Light of Mine? Jesus Loves the Little Children? All I know is, my mother and I prevailed, and I was allowed to attend Sunday School early so I could start singing Jesus songs. And I've sung them ever since.

When I was old enough to take piano lessons, besides practicing my assignments, I would play out of the hymnal. We had some old ones around the house, and I also took one home from church. To this day, running my hands over the pages of an old hymnal brings comfort and peace. Oh, I like other music too, but nothing else touches me deep in my soul like church music.

God speaks to me through music. God speaks to all of us every day and in so many different ways, if we listen. God spoke to me when I was two. And I listened.

Dear God, thank you for speaking to us every day. Help us to listen with open hearts and open minds. Amen.

--Mary Jo Bailey

Sunday, March 19 - Stars

Julie, my neighbor, and I were sharing thoughts about living in the country and being able to see the night sky. When Julie started talking about Taurus and Gemini and other constellations of the Northern Hemisphere, I had to admit I can only find the Big Dipper and Little Dipper.

Stargazing is a magnificent way to appreciate God's universe. It brings me great peace and joy. I am reminded of what Philippians 2 says when it talks about Christ's humility and greatness. Starting in verse 14, Philippians tells to "Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may be innocent and pure, as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people." This is from the Good News Bible. It goes on to say "You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, as you offer the message of life."

The idea of being like a star inspires me. Then I need to remember it also says "as I offer the message of life". This means I can either tell Jesus' story, or if I'm anxious to tell or preach, it can be done in other ways. A long time ago I made a discovery that I don't have to be a preacher or a missionary in Africa to serve God. There are lots of ways to serve right here in the USA. It can be working on mission projects. It can be feeding the hungry, or helping clothe the naked like Matthew 25:42- 45 directs. It can be as simple as smiling at a stranger or calling a lonely person. God will nudge us in ways we can serve, and we will be **stars lighting up the sky.**

--Teena Kern

Monday, March 20 - Give Thanks

Always give thanks for everything to our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 5:20

This was one of the first verses that popped into my head as the doctor was telling us that David had stage 3 colorectal cancer. My thought then was that I doubted I could ever be thankful for cancer. The first thing we did was make all the necessary appointments with all the necessary doctors. Then as soon as we got home, we asked all our friends and relatives to put David on the prayer list at each of their churches. Prayer warriors in at least a dozen churches were praying for him.

God provided so many miracles! All the various doctors communicated wonderfully well with each other and with us. We even found some humor along the way. The surgeon was an immigrant with a very long, unpronounceable name. When I asked him how to pronounce it, he said, "I don't." He also told us it would take a year to treat the cancer.

When David couldn't work and disability payments hadn't yet begun, y'all provided Thanksgiving dinner. It was like opening presents at Christmas as we unpacked the groceries you gave us! Such a fun, bright spot in our lives! Then so many of you sent cards to encourage David. Thank you so very much!

Another blessing was that we live only 5 blocks from Jennie Edmundson where David had radiation during that cold, snowy December and January. Then in March on one of the gray drizzly mornings as I drove to Methodist Hospital to be with David as he recovered from the first surgery, I was praying and mentioned to God how encouraging it would be just to get even a brief glimpse of the sun. As soon as I reached David's room and opened the blinds for him, the sun peeked out for a few minutes! What a glorious, uplifting sight! Then the strong chemo David had to take made him extremely and painfully sensitive to cold. He couldn't even enter the refrigerated aisles of the grocery store. But what a blessing that he took that chemo in the summer! At least he could enjoy sitting outside, soaking up the warmth.

God's timing was impeccable throughout the whole year of dealing with cancer. He provided exactly what we needed when we needed it. After a year of reveling in so many miracles, we could praise and thank God for everything, even cancer.

--Beverly Melchor-Young

Tuesday, March 21 - Kum Ba Yah

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life,

neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

“Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah, oh, Lord, kum ba yah.” These words are from the chorus of an African folk song and mean: “Come by here, my Lord, come by here.” The song is traditional to youth and to the campfire. Perhaps that is the reason it has always been one of my favorites—I relate it to those experiences of fellowship and warmth. It is also very adaptable to my needs.

Many years ago in the early morning hours, rocking a crying baby, it was a prayer: “Someone’s crying, Lord, kum ba yah.”

It’s an easy, fun song to teach a child: “Someone’s laughing, Lord, kum ba yah.”

In the loneliness of a long night of despair, it is a plea: “Someone’s failing, Lord, kum ba yah.”

In the quietness of a long night, it is another prayer: “Someone’s dying, Lord, kum ba yah.”

But I must remind myself that I am the one whose moods change and needs fluctuate, whose paths waver, whose direction changes, but God is constant, His love and care are forever.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to feel you at all times—knowing you are by me, with me, and in me. Amen.

--Jan Pellant

Wednesday, March 22 - There Is a Green Hill Far Away

There is a green hill far away,
without a city wall,

where the dear Lord was crucified,
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear;
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiv'n,
he died to make us good,
that we might go at last to heav'n,
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin;
he only could unlock the gate
of heav'n, and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved,
and we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

--Cecil Francis Alexander

Thursday, March 23 - Children of God

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. Romans 8:28

C.S. Lewis once gave a lecture in which he compared the pains of our lives to the blows of the chisel that a sculptor uses to create a masterpiece. Lewis said that God uses pain and suffering to make us the creations He desires. As much as I usually like what C.S. Lewis says, I don't like the picture of an arbitrary God inflicting pain on any one of us to make us better persons.

For those of us who have raised children or had grandchildren, we know the difficulty of dealing with a child's need for growing independence. Many times there are things that he wants to do that are above his ability level, and if he would let us help him or do it, the results would be neater, quicker, better, or of a higher quality. We hear, "Let me do it!" I begin to think that we are probably much like the child. Too many times we want to handle the pain, hurt, or disappointment in our lives by ourselves. Too many times we say, "Let me do it," instead of turning the chisel over to the Master Sculptor to use for our growth and His glory.

Romans 8:17 And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for all God gives to his Son Jesus is now ours too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

--Jan Pellant

Friday, March 24 – Everything Is the Lord's

Earth and all stars, loud rushing planets, sing to the Lord a new song!

O victory, loud shouting army, sing to the Lord a new song!

He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song!

Hail, wind, and rain, loud blowing snowstorms, sing to the Lord a new song!

Flowers and trees, loud rustling dry leaves, sing to the Lord a new song!

He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song!

Trumpet and pipes, loud clashing cymbals, sing to the Lord a new song!

Harp, lute, and lyre, loud humming cellos, sing to the Lord a new song!

He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song!

Knowledge and truth, loud sounding wisdom, sing to the Lord a new song!

Daughter and son, loud praying members, sing to the Lord a new song!

He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song.

--Herbert Brokering

Saturday, March 25 - Can We Get Along?

I was raised in the city, he in the country. His mother called me a city girl. He ate farm food. Hearty meat and potatoes guy. I ate sandwiches, mac and cheese, and whatever was being served later in the evening. He was scheduled, mostly by his parents--everybody agreed on meal times, bed times, chore times. I was not so scheduled. I was more driven by need. I was raised in a family of 7 children and 2 parents. My mother was not your typical mother. She was always ailing from something, real or imagined. She needed help and I was the oldest daughter. I helped her raise the siblings, especially my youngest sister. Sue was 12 years younger than I. She raised a prize calf for 4-H.

My family moved more times than I can count. At 8 we move into a larger house in Webb City, MO – at 12 to Tulsa, OK. From there we moved around the city as necessary to keep up with or ahead of the rent. I was 13 when we moved to Dewey, OK, then at 15 to Lyons, KS. No wonder we couldn't agree on what's for dinner.

We raised 4 children. David when I was 18, Lyndon when I was 20, Barbara when I was 22 and Paul when I was 23. Our children were raised by children. Thank God for my Grandmother's prayers. We struggled to raise them and deal with problems when they were teens--marijuana, bulimia, and alcoholism. We sent one off to the Army to straighten him out and the youngest to an alcohol treatment program. All of this lead to much counseling for all and more prayers from my Grandmother. Grandmother was a Church of God minister and wore her prayer bones out praying for her family.

Gary and I struggled and separated for a year. At the end of that year we reconciled and renewed our wedding vows. He was a master carpenter, and I took administrative secretary jobs. We moved several times, from Kansas to Nebraska and retired in Iowa.

The thing that held us together was prayer. Grandma's prayers and later our own prayers. God has been right by my side. At first He was Grandma's God, but later I accepted that He was my God and Savior. As I look back over the years He has been right by my side. He has put his Spirit in me to help steer me when I was not to self-sure to listen.

Thank you, Jesus, for being my help in times of confusion and need.

--Sharon Bemis

Sunday, March 26 - God Is Always Present

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. Psalm 19:1-6

When I was in 7th grade, my family flew to California for a week of vacation and a trip to Disneyland. We took advantage of the 2 days off in October that were available since all Missouri teachers were at state teachers' meetings. We would only miss a couple of days of school on either side of the meetings. We drove to Kansas City to catch our TWA airplane flight (note, I did not say jet) to San Francisco where we would be met by relatives who later would drive us down to this new place called Disneyland. On the way to Kansas City it rained and drizzled and snowed icy flakes that melted as soon as they hit the car. The flight itself was going to be so exciting! At that time or on that day, I decided that I was going to be an airline hostess. They were so sharp in their navy and white suits with those cool navy and white spectator heels! As we got ready to take off the weather was dreadful—cold, depressing, gray, not an auspicious beginning to this long planned vacation to sunny California. We taxied down the runway and lifted off into the grayness. In a few minutes I could see nothing, just more gray, and then, all of a sudden, we broke through into the brightest sun and bluest sky and below us was this incredible white blanket of clouds. The awe I experienced has stayed with me all these years. I'm sure that rationally I knew that the sun was just hidden behind the clouds, but I had never experienced so dramatic a revelation of this. I still can see that startling, surprising image framed in the gray TWA window.

I recall this image often when things seem gray in life. Whether I can see it or not, God's love and support are there just as the sun was there, is there, behind the clouds. All I must do is break through and know the revelation that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39.

--Jan Pellant

Monday, March 27 - Servanthood

In the last few years I have had to have many surgeries. The first 2 were hip replacement. I had just moved to Council Bluffs, and Gary wasn't sure he could be there for me enough as I was recovering. My daughter-in law, Cyndi, said, "You can stay with us"--her, my son, 3 little ones and a large dog. I borrowed a lift chair and moved into their home. She took care of me like I was one of the little ones. The dog was protective of my hip, the whole family took care of me.

One day I was going to get myself to the kitchen for breakfast, but my son caught me getting up and scolded me. He said, “Mom, our children don’t need to serve themselves until they are 2 years old. Mom, with this surgery you are not 2 yet.”

One year later that replacement failed and had to be redone. They opened their doors for me once again. This kind of care happened again and again as I needed a rotator cuff repaired, a detached retina, a shoulder replacement, 2 knee replacements and another shoulder replacement.

The kind of care I received is Christ like. The only problem for me is that my daughter-in-law does not believe in a God that would have His own Son die on a cross. You can put this on your prayer list and pray that I find the words to help her understand the blessing she is to me and the reason Jesus had to die.

Without His sacrifice we could not be forgiven our sin. He is the only way to bridge the gap between heaven and hell.

--Sharon Bemis

Tuesday, March 28 - There's a Mansion in Glory

The party was a huge success, although Cathy didn't feel the best. She had started chemo. But the next ten months were nothing short of a miracle. With the help of her daughters and her brother and sister, she made it back to Council Bluffs to be with us three times for a week each time. She had made a list each time of the things she wanted to do, and we succeeded in getting them all done. She even went to Estes Park for her actual birthday with her husband, Mark, and two daughters, Katie and Annie.

Cathy's philosophy throughout her entire cancer battle was "One Day More", a song from a favorite musical, "Les Miserables." That gave her great incentive to live nearly a year after her original diagnosis. Cathy passed away on December 12, 2020. She was a strong, loving and caring person, a teacher by profession influencing so many. She was a wonderful daughter, sister, wife, mother and a special friend to many. And we miss her. But our faith tells us there is an afterlife whatever that is. And we sense her presence often. She taught us how to die with dignity and with positivity.

One final story: Amy asked Cathy if she were to come back in the afterlife, what would she be? Amy was hoping for a cardinal or a deer, plentiful in Iowa. But Cathy chose a dolphin. Amy said. "No, Cathy, there are no dolphins in Iowa." To which Cathy replied, "You'll just have to come to Florida then." And ever since, anytime we see a dolphin in Florida, we know it's Cathy coming to say hello!

--Anne and Bud Crawl

"Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly. And you know where I am going and how to get there." John 14:1-4

Wednesday, March 29 - May Jesus Christ be praised!

When morning gilds the sky, our hearts awaking cry:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

In all our work and prayer we ask his loving care:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

To God, the Word on high, the hosts of angels cry:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let mortals too upraise their voices in hymns of praise:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let earth's wide circle round in joyful notes resound:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let air and sea and sky from depth to height reply:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this, when day is past, of all our thoughts the last:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

The night becomes as day when from the heart we say:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Then let us join to sing to Christ, our loving King:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this the eternal song through all the ages long:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

--Edward Caswall, translator

Thursday, March 30 – Prayer Time

In Matthew 26:40-41 we read how Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane stepped away from the disciples to pray for a while. When He came back and found them sleeping, He said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! That calls me from a world of care,
and bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found relief,
and oft escaped the tempter's snare by thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! The joys I feel, the bliss I share
of those whose anxious spirits burn with strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place where God my Savior shows his face,
and gladly take my station there, and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! Thy wings shall my petition bear
to him whose truth and faithfulness engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since he bids me seek his face, believe his word, and trust his grace,
I'll cast on him my every care, and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet Hour of Prayer was written by W.W. Walford. There is another hymn about prayer
by James Montgomery called **Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire**.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed;
the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try,
prayer the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air,
his watchword at the gates of death: he enters heaven with prayer.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice, returning from his ways;
while angels in their songs rejoice, and cry, 'Behold, he prays!'

The saints in prayer appear as one, in word and deed and mind;
while with the Father and the Son sweet fellowship they find.

Nor prayer is made on earth alone: the Holy Spirit pleads,
and Jesus on the eternal throne for sinners intercedes.

O Thou by whom we come to God, the Life, the Truth, the Way,
the path of prayer thyself hast trod: Lord, teach us how to pray!

Friday, March 31 - A Special Church

The first settlers arrived in 1848. By 1855 the first members of the Puritan-Congregational Church were holding meetings. By 1856 Bradford had 500 residents and was the first town in this part of Iowa. In 1857 a music teacher, William Pitts, was traveling to Fredericksburg, Iowa, to see the girl he would later marry. When the stagecoach stopped to change horses in Bradford, William took a stroll among the trees to stretch his legs. The gently sloping hills formed a slight valley, and the Cedar River flowed peacefully by. He thought it would be the perfect setting for a church, so William wrote the poem "Church in the Wildwood", later adding the music.

Five years later William relocated to Iowa to be near his elderly in-laws and to teach music at Bradford Academy. Imagine his surprise when he saw a church building sitting in the very spot he had previously envisioned it. Christians in the community, growing tired of meeting in abandoned stores, had built the church. Times were hard, so the church had to be painted using the cheapest color--brown.

When William saw the little brown church he rushed home and found the song he had composed years earlier. He sang the hymn at the building's dedication in 1864. Soon afterward he sold the manuscript to a publisher in Chicago for \$25. William used the money to enroll in Rush Medical College, and he spent the rest of his life as the town physician in Fredericksburg, Iowa, about 14 miles from Bradford.

There's a church in the valley by the wildwood, No lovelier spot in the dale;
No place is so dear to my childhood, As the little brown church in the vale.

Oh, come to the church in the wildwood, To the trees where the wild flowers bloom;
Where the parting hymn will be chanted, We will weep by the side of the tomb.

How sweet on a clear Sunday morning, To list to the clear ringing bell;
Its tones so sweetly are calling, Oh, come to the church in the vale.

From the church in the valley by the wildwood, When day fades away into night,
I would fain from this spot of my childhood Wing my way to the mansions of light.

Chorus: Come to the church in the wildwood, Oh, come to the church in the dale,
No spot is so dear to my childhood, As the little brown church in the vale.

--David Young

Saturday, April 1 - Foolishness?

Recently Pastor Paul preached about 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, in which the apostle Paul writes that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it's the power of God. And that God makes those of us who are weak and foolish strong and wise. So we can't boast about ourselves—we can, however, boast about God and what He does in our lives.

Sometimes I have wondered if we people in general can be dumber than rocks. After all, when the Pharisees told Jesus to make the Palm Sunday crowds stop shouting and praising Him (Luke 19:39-40), Jesus said that if the people were silent, even the rocks would cry out! That's why, when I hear people praise "the universe" for something good that has happened to them, or the coach of a winning hockey team on tv say the "hockey gods" must like them, I fear for humanity.

Don't we understand that our heavenly Father is the only true God, and that He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **alone** worthy of our thanks and praise (Deuteronomy 6:4)? Even the rocks and all of nature know better than we do sometimes.

So let's remember to give thanks where it is due.

--Beverly Melchor-Young

Sunday, April 2 - I Asked God

I asked God to take away my Pride, and God said "NO." He said it was not for Him to take away but for me to give up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole, and God said "NO." He said her spirit is whole; her body is only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience, and God said "NO." He said that patience is a by-product of tribulations, it isn't granted; it is earned.

I asked for God to give me happiness, and God said “NO.” He said he gives blessing, happiness is up to me.

I asked God to spare me pain, and God said “NO.” He said, “suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me..”

I asked God to make my spirit grow, and God said “NO.” He said I must grow on my own, but He will prune me to make me fruitful.

I asked God if he loved me, and God said “YES.” I asked God to help me love others as much as he loves me, and God said, “ah, finally you have the idea.”

--Sharon Bemis

Monday, April 3 - The Trumpet Shall Sound!

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 & 58 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The Scripture words and the music of Handel in **The Messiah** have always inspired and thrilled me. Thanks to his presentation of Biblical truths, I can hear that trumpet sounding,

and rejoice to think of taking part in the resurrection. Our church is richly blessed with multiple choirs and musicians. I find myself eager to hear the selections each Sunday as I enter the church to worship. So much beautiful music has been written for Easter. Do you have a favorite? Here's one of mine, words by Leo Hassler & music by J.S. Bach:

O sacred head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred head, what glory, what bliss til now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine, the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe me to Thy grace.

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

My ongoing prayer is that even if I lose my mental abilities as I age, God will help me always remember and be cognizant of my love for Him and His for me.

--Beverly Melchor-Young

Tuesday, April 4 - Am I Good Enough?

Yes I am! Not because I have done anything to earn approval from God. No, because Jesus paid the price for my sins. I have committed many sins, but they are all forgiven. I am sure I have not asked His forgiveness for each one, but I have accepted that Jesus was enough on the cross that I could be forgiven for all of them.

I hear people say at funerals that they were a good person, so they will go to heaven. Not necessarily. Have these good people accepted Jesus as Savior? Jesus is the gateway to heaven.

When we lived in Omaha, Gary and I belonged to Faith Presbyterian Church. We had a pastor named Richard Skelly. He used to tell us that when he reaches heaven he wants to hear “well done, good and faithful servant.”

That is also my goal. Some days I feel that I fall short of the “good and faithful”, but I pick myself up, ask forgiveness and serve again. Then I remember that it is not “what I have done” but what Jesus did.

Thank you Jesus.

--Sharon Bemis

Wednesday, April 5 - To Know Me and Love Me Anyway

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. Psalm 139:1-4

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets

also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’” John 1:43-51

Erwin and I have often talked about those special friends that we call “cactus friends”, because they don’t require much care. Those are the friends that we made when we were in college or newly married. None of us had much in the way of resources, and we shared the same struggles with classes and money and finding our way in the adult world. Life has taken us down different paths and away from each other. Children made our lives different and yet similar. Health circumstances of our parents and now ourselves changed us all. But when we get together, either in person or on the phone, the years fall away, and we can pick up where we left off so many years ago. There is a real comfort and familiarity and warmth in the relationships with those “cactus friends”.

It seems that Jesus is one of those “cactus friends”. Some times in the busyness of our lives, we don’t feed and nurture the relationship the way we should. But we can always know that if we turn to Him, He will be there for us. He remembers us when we were not the people we are, either for the better or the worse, and He also knows what we can become through His gift of salvation.

Lord, thank you for the greatest gift and the greatest love ever given to us. In the busyness of our lives help us to remember that you walk beside us and know us as we are and as we have been—and love us anyway. Amen.

--Jan Pellant

Thursday, April 6 - Ten Thousand Angels

Easter brings to mind this song, composed by Ray Overholt, of what Jesus could have done and didn’t:

They bound the hands of Jesus in the garden where He prayed;
They led Him through the streets in shame.
They spat upon the Savior so pure and free from sin;

They said, “Crucify Him; He’s to blame.

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free.

He could have called ten thousand angels,
But He died alone for you and me.

When they nailed Him to the cross, His mother stood nearby,
He said, “Woman, behold thy son!”
He cried, “I thirst for water,” but they gave Him none to drink.
Then the sinful work of man was done.

To the howling mob He yielded; He did not for mercy cry.
The cross of shame He took alone.
And when He cried, “It’s finished,” He gave Himself to die;
Salvation’s wondrous plan was done.”

The song describes the crucifixion and the suffering Jesus endured. The willingness of Jesus to endure and suffer alone, never giving a thought to calling 10,000 angels.

We need to remember “He could have called ten thousand angels.”

Overholt became a traveling singer and preacher and wrote more than 200 other songs, none quite so powerful as “Ten Thousand Angels”.

This Easter may we think about the Power of God and what He did for us as He sacrificed Jesus.

--Teena Kern

Friday, April 7 - It's Friday

It's Friday. Jesus is praying, Peter is sleeping. Judas is betraying. But Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. Pilate's struggling. The council is conspiring. The crowd is vilifying. They don't even know That Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The disciples are running Like sheep without a shepherd. Mary's crying. Peter is

denying. But they don't know That Sunday's a comin'.

It's Friday. The Romans beat my Jesus. They robe him in scarlet. They crown him with thorns. But they don't know That Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. See Jesus walking to Calvary. His blood dripping. His body stumbling. And his spirit's burdened. But you see, it's only Friday. Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The world's winning. People are sinning and evil's grinning.

It's Friday. The soldiers nail my Savior's hands to the cross. They nail my Savior's feet to the cross. And then they raise him up. Next to criminals.

It's Friday. But let me tell you something. Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The disciples are questioning: What has happened to their King? And the Pharisees are celebrating, That their scheming Has been achieved. But they don't know. It's only Friday ...Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. He's hanging on the cross Feeling forsaken by his Father. Left alone and dying. Can nobody save him? Ooooh. It's Friday But Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The earth trembles. The sky grows dark. My King yields his spirit.

It's Friday. Hope is lost. Death has won. Sin has conquered and Satan's just a laughin'.

It's Friday. Jesus is buried. A soldier stands guard And a rock is rolled into place. But it's Friday. It is only Friday. Sunday is a comin'!

--Joyce Sawyer

Saturday, April 8 - Seven Words from the Cross

“Father, Forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34 How could they know? Only those “born from above” can see the big picture of God's hands graciously forgiving the unforgiveable. Only those “born from above” can see the Fatherly compassion, as the High Priest becomes the Sacrifice. A dying person either denies his guilt or gives in to

the verdict. Perfect Innocence did neither. He pleads with His Father to forgive those whose sins blind them from seeing “things from above” as the loving Father sees them.

“Today you will be with me in Paradise.” Luke 23:43 A dying man asks a dying man for life. The thief’s last prayer was probably his first. He knocked once, sought once, asked once, dared everything and was granted Eternity. A man without anything asks a naked man for a Kingdom. A thief acts like a thief and steals Paradise in the last few frames of his life. Confusing? That’s Amazing Grace for you, isn’t it?

“Mother, look at John. He is now your Son. (John, the same goes for you).” John 19:26 The long journey that Jesus and Mary took, beginning with the angelic shock of her pregnancy, the heavenly symphony announcing His birth, the growing realization of His anointed messianic task, the unimaginable journey from Bethlehem to Cana and on to Calvary. Not always understandable. Not always pleasant. But always Gracious. Mary too was “born from above” to witness first-hand God’s plan of Redemption. Now that they have come full circle, Jesus looked at Mary and said, “I must leave so that the Spirit might come and expand my Father’s work.” John, walk beside her in My Spirit and neither one of you two will ever walk alone again.

“At midday, the sky turned as dark as night. And Jesus cried out, ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’” Matthew 27:46 At His Birth, the curtains of creation flung open with a trumpeted sounds of, “Alleluia!” A feeding trough was showered in the light of a guiding star. But at His dying, there is only the choking silence of darkness. It was as if those very angels closed the curtains so that not one ray of light would shine on the crime of diocide. The price for Abel’s blood was high. Israel’s harlotry and all of our sinful self-centeredness would be paid for in darkness with a most unbelievable estrangement. He called You Father! He taught us to address you, “Daddy, in Heaven!” Now the words of Paul are on display with all their consequence: “He, who knew no sin, became sin for us.” The price tag was beyond reason. Still, the Father in compassion could nod in understanding when other children cry out in anger, “God, where were You when my child died!” Quietly, the Father whispers, “At the cross.”

“I am thirsty.” John 19:28 Considering the evens of the last 12 hours, no one would be surprised that Jesus was thirsty. They might have been puzzled that He said so out loud. The Pharisees could smirk: “He who called Himself, ‘The Living Water’ and said that ‘Those who drank of Him would never be thirsty’,” would now publicly admit to a parched throat. So, in mocking derision they hoisted up a spung soaked with stale vinegar to Him. It could have been a pain killer, had He sucked on it. But Jesus would face the pain of His crucifixion head

on. Having felt David's words in Psalm 21 with all of their depths, Scripture was fulfilled, His messianic call completed and the Atonement finished, Jesus acknowledged His humanity one last time: "I'm thirsty."

"It is finished." John 19:30 BUT IT WASN'T "FINISHED!" It was just starting! We need to re-hear His Last Words as they were spoken in our Lord's Aramaic tongue: "It has been accomplished!" His last words before dying were not an exasperated, exhausted admission of failure. He said, "I accomplished what I set out to do!" The hopes of slaves wondering around in the wilderness! The assurances of the elders around camp fires! The words of sages and prophets! The writings of many generations. All these Words are a completion of His Father's word spoken at Creation: "It was Good." Re-creation was accomplished. The world could once again be born from above. Good Friday had only to rest through the Sabbath as the Spirit would then fill the Son with new Life. The Son's work was accomplished. The Spirit's was about to begin.

"Father, into your hands I had over my Spirit." Luke 27:50 The Prodigal Son had turned his face toward home. But unlike the parable He told his disciples, this Son was not returning home broken, defeated and in shame of a wasted life. No, He would be returning home to the waiting Father with a triumphant shout, "We Did It! Salvation is secured. But even more important: I left behind my Spirit. Your Spirit! My Spirit! The Spirit will instruct them how to be understanding and compassionate to one another. The Spirit will teach them to love their world as much as we do. The Spirit will bring me back to them every day, so that they will be able to do more than I ever could have done staying with them. Father, in this Spirit I have finished my work. In this Spirit our work is just beginning."

To His Glory – Larry Miller

Easter Sunday, April 9!!

Hallelujah! Christ is risen from the dead! Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-11 all describe the scene in the garden where Jesus' tomb had been opened and Jesus was no longer lying there dead. What a miracle!!

Many Easter worship services begin with this hymn by Charles Wesley:

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say: Alleluia!

Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply: Alleluia!

Some begin with this hymn by Robert Lowry:

Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes.

He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign.

He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Others begin with this one by Alfred H. Ackley:

He lives, He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives, He lives! Salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.

And Gloria and William Gaither's hymn says it all:

Because He lives I can face tomorrow; because He lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives.

May your Easter be blessed and joyous! --Beverly Melchor-Young