

# Preaching to the Choir

## *Words for the Faithful*



### *A Letter From The Pastor*

by Michelle Chappell

As a musician and former choir director the phrase “preaching to the choir” speaks volumes to my soul. So when the staff was discussing Lent ideas, I jumped on this theme. “Why don’t we have a series that speaks to the faithful? You know, those who always show up, sometimes we just need to hear words of reminder and encouragement.” And then someone else said, “Like preaching to the choir.” That sealed the deal.

A good choir director understands the value of a choir where folks show up week after week, giving their time and talent, out of love for music and the community of singers. Likewise, a good preacher understands her faithful community who shows up week after week, out of love of Christ Jesus and their church family.

For both, a constant reminder of the foundation that makes us “one” gives us assurance of God’s grace but also knits us closer together. The more we are reminded of the subtlety of singing together, the more we soar as one beautiful voice.

Within the pages of this devotion, YOU, THE FAITHFUL, the laity, have penned words that make a beautifully blended choral anthem. We hear how indeed the faithful choir of believers live in God’s grace, word and community. May we be reminded as we travel the 40 days of Lent that we are one, living and traveling with Jesus who teaches us the rhythm of faith through breathing, dynamics, rests, words, tempo, blend, and most importantly, keeping our eyes on the director (aka, Jesus).

Thank you to every voice who created this powerful witness of faith.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## Readings for the Faithful in Preparation for Lent

Ash Wednesday begins Lent, a journey the faithful intentionally walk with Christ. It always begins with a time of confession, symbolized with the cross of ashes. As we begin the practices of faith in communion with Christ may we focus on the One who directs us, who loves us, who teaches us, who encourages us, who heals us and who holds us tightly. Let us put on the sack cloth of repentance and clean our hearts for a journey ahead.

May you find the words of this Ash Wednesday hymn a good starting point on the journey.

### Hymn – Sunday's Palms Are Wednesday's Ashes

1 Sunday's palms are Wednesday's ashes  
As another Lent begins  
Thus we kneel before our Maker  
In contrition for our sins  
We have marred baptismal pledges  
In rebellion gone astray  
Now returning seek forgiveness  
Grant us pardon God this day

2 We have failed to love our neighbors  
Their offences to forgive  
Have not listened to their troubles  
Nor have cared just how they live  
We are jealous proud impatient  
Loving over much our things  
May the yielding of our failings  
Be our Lenten offerings

3 We are hasty to judge others  
Blind to proof of human need  
And our lack of understanding  
Demonstrates our inner greed  
We have wasted earth's resources  
Want and suffering we've ignored  
Come and cleanse us then restore us  
Make new hearts within us Lord



Wednesday, March 2: Ash Wednesday Reading to Prepare the Season of Lent  
Matt Sink

Joel 2:12-13

*12 Yet even now, says the Lord,  
return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the Lord, your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
and relents from punishing.*

Getting ready for anything these days can be a challenge; with a 4 ½ -year-old and 2 ½ -year-old just getting appropriate clothing on can be a challenge. No matter if we are going somewhere fun or somewhere necessary the getting ready part can be a challenge. As I read this passage in Joel, I am struck by the way that God is assuming the parent role toward the people. As a parent, I can relate to some of the feelings that God must have been feeling toward the people. Yet while there may be weeping involved when I am trying to get my kids ready to go, the weeping in the passage is contrasted with steadfast love. God shows His mercy and grace in a way that we can only strive for but the steadfast love is something I can relate to. I will always have steadfast love for my kids and in that respect can relate to the way God is feeling toward his people. As we get ready for Ash Wednesday and Lent it's important for us to take time and remember why we observe this season in anticipation for Easter Sunday. Lent is the time of preparation for Easter and without the time for getting ready we wouldn't be able to experience Easter in the same meaningful way. Some people fast during Lent and others give up different vices which can be useful reminders that help us to return to the Lord with all of our heart. So, as we prepare for Ash Wednesday and Lent let's hope that the getting ready involves less weeping and more grace, mercy, and steadfast love.

Prayer: Dear God, please be with us as we get ready for Lent and help us to remember your grace, mercy, and steadfast love.



Thursday, March 3: Ash Wednesday Reading to Prepare the Season of Lent  
Stephanie Lucas

Matthew 6:19-21

*19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust<sup>[a]</sup> consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust<sup>[b]</sup> consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

With two young children, getting to church every Sunday was a challenge. We were absent quite often. Knowing that there were ways to be part of the church family without being physically present each week, I looked for more intentional opportunities to give back to our church and to dive deeper into the ministry. I wanted to share the gifts our family is blessed with and as Matthew 6:19-21 says, not store them for ourselves. We have been able to join in fellowship at events, meeting outside to take part in a palm parade and learn about Palm Sunday, and taking part in the children's nativity. We brought non-perishable food items for the food pantry and donated our gently used Halloween costumes for families who left everything for a better life for their children. With church family events such as the 605 Tribe and Room at the Inn, our family is able to do more with the gifts we were given and grow our hearts surrounded by church family.

I pray that we are able to share our gifts and provide for others as we receive bountiful blessings.



## Friday, March 4: Ash Wednesday Reading to Prepare the Season of Lent

Lauryn Smith

Psalms 51:6-10

- <sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being;<sup>[a]</sup>  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*
- <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*
- <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.*
- <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right<sup>[b]</sup> spirit within me.*

Before you read the passage, you should know the following: Psalm 51 was written by King David after he had taken another man's wife and plotted for her husband to be killed on the front lines of a war. Thus, David had sinned against the Lord and several others in his life. The prophet Nathan came to David and confronted him. After being confronted, David feels extremely convicted and cries out to the Lord in repentance. He asks the Lord to cleanse him, wash him, and blot out his iniquity. He asks the Lord for a pure heart.

Verse 10 actually inspired the title of a very memorable hymn I sang growing up at The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Newberry, SC. My grandmother is the choir director at said church, so I gave her a call to discuss the passage. We talked about the song "Create in Me a Clean Heart", and its significance to our church services and in our lives. According to my grandmother, this song is sung similarly to the doxology and is often used as a "Prayer for Cleansing and Pardon". While reading this, I encourage you to open your phone and listen to "Create in Me a Clean Heart" sung by The Concordia choir. Meditate over the words. Lean into the words that stick out to you right now.

King David is realizing there is no way to cover up sin from the Lord, and is asking for forgiveness publicly. How do you typically respond to situations like this? Do you cover up your failure, or do you publicize your confession like King David did? Turning to the Lord with our sin, and asking for forgiveness daily is something very important to us as Christians. With that in mind, King David is emphasizing how forgiveness is purely based on God's grace for us. We don't deserve to be forgiven, yet each and every time we sin, we are forgiven. "Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; You taught me wisdom in that secret place". Today I am asking myself, is there more to my life that I can share with the Lord? When has forgiving someone else, or being forgiven personally, brought you joy?



## Week One – Words of Faith for the Community

### Preaching to the Choir: Community of the Faithful

#### Hymn – Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

1 What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms;  
what a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms.

#### Refrain:

    Leaning, leaning,  
safe and secure from all alarms;  
    leaning, leaning,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms.

2 O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms;  
O how bright the path grows from day to day,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms. [Refrain]

3 What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms?  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
    leaning on the everlasting arms. [Refrain]



## Saturday, March 5: Words the Faithful Need to Hear

Scott Boulware

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

*10 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,<sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,<sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food,<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.*

*13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

One of the many things I have learned in the last three years of Disciple Bible Study is that it helps to understand what was going on during that given time for the people written about. Reading from my Nelson Study Bible – Corinth was a key city in Greece and a hub of commerce between Asia and Italy. “Corinth’s commercial success was rivaled only by its decadence”. This last quote from my study bible really helps me understand why Paul spent so much time there and by his subsequent letters – trying to guide these members of this young church.

In Paul’s First letter to the Corinthians Chapter 10 –

Verse 13 states “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able but with the temptation will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it.

Maybe the societal times in Corinth are not that different than our world in 2022. It is comforting to read Paul’s words who God is watching over us and will in essence .... Give us the tools to deal with temptations.

Verses 1-4 offer a history lesson from the exodus of Egypt to crossing the Red Sea – to survival in the desert. It’s really amazing to think how this group of people survived all these obstacles for over forty years. Paul is stressing to the people of Corinth that they should **persevere** in God’s work and how the stories of the early Israelites show how God can **protect and guide** the faithful.

When the true believers realize that God had them under his watch the whole time – it becomes clear that – as my dear friend Tom Goins would say – “that ain’t no coincidence” – to have the Red Sea parted – the clouds that kept the scorching heat at bay and the various food and water that kept them alive for those 40 years.



Scott Boulware (cont.)

How often do we merely chalk up small and large events as “good luck” or “coincidence” – maybe if we start writing them down – over time we will realize the hand of God is in control. In my personal world – I think about

- how I avoided two near deadly car wrecks
- met my wife Liz - on a very random and last-minute bus trip to Atlanta
- watched two young babies baptized at DUMC grow into beautiful young women
- I could go on and on.....

As Tom would say..... “That ain’t no coincidence Scott Boulware”



## Sunday, March 6: Words the Faithful Long to Hear

Evelyn Beacham

Isaiah 55:1-3

*55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;*

*and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.*

*<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

*Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

*<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.*

*I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.*

At Myers Park High School, I take a class called TOK (Theory of Knowledge) which is a Philosophy class focused on the question, “how do we know what we know?” When reading these verses from the 55th chapter of Isaiah, I immediately connected with a lesson from my TOK class: people are intrinsically selfish. Even the concept of “selfishness” is selfish because it implies that there is a time in which we are not self-serving. Intrinsically, our actions most often have a selfish motive, even if the act itself appears selfless.

Verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah 55 state, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David” (Isaiah 55: 2-3). God wants us to ask ourselves these rhetorical questions. He wanted the people that He made and loves to understand Him and all of our earthly limitations. As imperfect as we are, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” everything about us is deliberate. In TOK I learned that selfishness is not in and of itself a “bad” quality. Selfishness is one of nature’s most instinctive, primal, natural qualities. Selfishness could be necessary for survival in extenuating circumstances. The rhetorical questions in these verses show that having selfish urges are natural and common. God made us this way. The questions in the verses are followed immediately with some answers (something I find is rare in scripture, so I greatly appreciated it). God shows us through Isaiah that striving to be selfless does not come naturally. It is a challenge to trust in God and let go of our instincts in order to strive for the



Evelyn Beacham (cont.)

selfless nature of Jesus. God made us to inquire, challenge, and evolve so that we may one day be more like His Son. The message that I took away from these verses of Isaiah was that the “Everlasting Covenant” that we have made with God will constantly challenge our natural urge to be selfish. Our promise is to put in the effort to grapple with free will. It is His desire that we overcome our earthly predisposition and choose to follow the ways of Jesus who showed us the ultimate example of selflessness. I am challenging myself and each of you to ask yourselves, “what would Jesus do?”



## Monday, March 7: Words the Faithful Long to Pray

Sallie Anna Broome

Psalms 91:1-2

- <sup>1</sup> *You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,*<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>2</sup> *will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."*

### Assurance of God's Protection

You may or may not believe it, but lately, binge watching "survival" t.v. shows has been my thing. At first, I wasn't sure why these shows hooked me since "surviving" on the yearly backpacking wilderness trip with my youth group friends is the extent of that type of adventure present in my life. Then I remembered that most of my favorite books growing up all had that "survival" theme. You know: *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *Hatchet*, *My Side of the Mountain*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and most recently, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

Whether on page or on the screen, my favorite part is when the characters start to build their shelter. I love the creativity that comes from necessity. I have learned that for survival, next to water, shelter is the top priority. It comes before food, rest, and fire. On our backpacking trips, we set up tents first because having a secure shelter means protection from the elements and from predators alike. I may even argue that having shelter seems to be as important mentally as it is physically. Knowing that everything won't get wet, that the bugs can't touch you, having a place to lay down, or even a spot to smile over a game of cards, gives your body and mind peace and rest. Shelter makes us less vulnerable, keeps us safe, warm, and alive, and very often, happy.

This snippet of Psalm 91, reminds us that for those who have chosen to "live in the shelter", or reside within the love of our Good God are promised the ultimate form of protection. It's important to remember that like on my shows, books, or on the trail: having shelter does not mean that the storms, bears, or mosquitos won't come. They will. It's a fact. I think it does mean that we are fortified against the situations and people that would attack us, and that we are equipped to take on what comes. Unlike a lean-to made of limbs, a tree house crafted from vines, or even a tent pitched in the wilderness, the love of God is one that we can truly trust to cover & surround & protect.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for choosing to be our shelter. Help us to choose to lean on & trust in you.



## Tuesday, March 8: Words the Faithful Long to Tell

Lauren Carlson

Psalm 91:14-16

*14 Those who love me, I will deliver;*

*I will protect those who know my name.*

*15 When they call to me, I will answer them;*

*I will be with them in trouble,*

*I will rescue them and honor them.*

*16 With long life I will satisfy them,*

*and show them my salvation.*

Psalm 91 is a comforting reminder of God as our refuge and our fortress. Throughout the verses, the writer details the confidence that a believer can have throughout challenges and adversity. In verses 14-16, the psalm closes out by laying out what trust in God looks like and by repeating God's pledge to care for us – to deliver us, to protect us, to show us our salvation. Amazingly, all the Lord asks of us in return is to hold fast to Him in love, to know His name, and to call to Him.

So often, I find myself falling into the trap of thinking that I'm not loving God enough, or faithfully serving enough, or believing enough. This psalm helps remind me that nothing could be further from the truth. Here, the Lord only asks for us to know, call to, and love Him. God promises to never leave us – not even in our hardest moments. It's astounding to think of that kind of love, that gives so much yet requires so little. Psalm 91 will always remind me of how great a gift God's love and care is.



## Wednesday, March 9: The Faithful Serve in *Unity*

Simon Spangard

Romans 15:4-7

*<sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>7</sup> Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

God wants us to work together in unison to help those in need. One way that I have done this is through service projects. One of my favorite service projects that I have done was when we went to a farm and gleaned the field for corn. As a group of 10 to 15 people we collected buckets upon buckets of corn that filled many truck beds. This corn was then cleaned and sent to the urban ministry to produce food for the needy. This experience was very fulfilling because I worked with many other people to help those in need which is what God calls us to do.



## Thursday, March 10: The Faithful Grow *Together*

John Ahrens

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

*<sup>3</sup> We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. <sup>4</sup> Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.*

“You’re a mess!”

Those were the words a close spiritual advisor once told me one day. “You’re messy!” My mentor has passed away now but I can still remember him comparing my life and my spiritual progress to dirt! He also used a few other choice phrases that I shall not mention here. Before I could defend myself, he said “it’s ok!! Roses grow in it.”

One of my biggest spiritual weaknesses is a lack of trust in God. I may talk a good game but when I am hit with a trial or a tremendous change in my life or some “persecution,” my anxious mind races around like a pinball machine. Every thought but trust seems to enter the garden that is my mind. When trials come, it literally is a mess.

But every once in a while, in the roller coaster of my thoughts in worries, there are little gaps and little breaks in the fear where I can hear God’s simple word – trust. And in those moments, I can be calm. I can let go and I can persevere. I can move forward through what is in front of me.

And the roses grow.

Prayer: Lord God, teach me to trust during the trial. Teach me to hold on when the challenges come. Help me to walk forward with you and with my brother and sister. And help my faith grow even in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. Amen.



## Friday, March 11: The Faithful Live as One Healthy Body

Catie Mullis

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

*<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

Paul is saying that as a spiritual member we are all one person. No matter who you are, your faith connects you.

This verse makes me feel as if I am part of a larger group of faith because I am connected to God through faith. This reminds me of a city. There are lots of people, with lots of different jobs. Like the mailman has to do deliver the mail and this is similar to how the Pastor has to deliver the message in the church. There are teachers in a city like there are teachers in a church. All the different people have all these different roles in a city and in a church. These different roles help us work together to create one big working group. For a real-life example, youth groups, we all have a spiritual connection to God. This brings us together to learn, work, and spread our faith.

God wants us to take away that it doesn't matter how different we are, we all have roles in faith. This brings us together to one whole. We all have a connection with God, that gives us a connection with others.



## Week Two - The Faithful Hear and Tell the Story of Jesus

Enunciate! Tell the Story

Hymn- We've a Story to Tell to the Nations

1. We've a story to tell to the nations,  
that shall turn their hearts to the right,  
a story of truth and mercy,  
a story of peace and light,  
a story of peace and light.

Refrain:

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright;  
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.

2. We've a song to be sung to the nations,  
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord,  
a song that shall conquer evil  
and shatter the spear and sword,  
and shatter the spear and sword.

(Refrain)

3. We've a message to give to the nations,  
that the Lord who reigneth above  
hath sent us His Son to save us,  
and show us that God is love,  
and show us that God is love.

(Refrain)

4. We've a Savior to show to the nations,  
who the path of sorrow hath trod,  
that all of the world's great peoples  
might come to the truth of God,  
might come to the truth of God.

(Refrain)



## Saturday, March 12: The Faithful Tell the Story

Alison Busch

Romans 10:8-11

*<sup>8</sup> But what does it say?*

*"The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart"*

*(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because <sup>a</sup> if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."*

When I read these words from the book of Romans, I hear two distinct calls. One is to BELIEVE in my heart. The other is to PROFESS with my mouth. I can handle the first one. Believe with my heart? Check. I've got that one. I may question and sometimes even doubt but at the core, there is belief in my heart. But it's the second part I am not so confident about. I've never been one to profess, witness or share my faith very openly with others. However, this segment of Scripture is asking us to ENUNCIATE and as faithful followers of God to tell the story. It's not asking us to join a committee or lead a small group or volunteer countless hours of time (although all of those things are worthy and necessary at times). But it's telling us to keep it simple. Feel and believe in our hearts that God is here for us and then share that with those around us.

I still will not be the first one to profess my faith using the best words or great clarity. But I can profess my love for God by inviting others to join in the special community we have at Dilworth. In this time of rebuilding and recommitment to our church community, I can use my voice to profess that God is good and things are happening and there is a place for everyone in this church I love. So, find your voice in whatever way makes sense for you and tell the story of the faithful to those around you.



## Sunday, March 13: The Faithful Tell the Story

Andrea Areskog

*Ephesians 3:10-12*

*<sup>10</sup> so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.<sup>[a]</sup>*

I will admit I read this verse and sat on it a few times, trying to put it in context in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, many of whom were already believers. Preaching it to the choir – perhaps I'm catching on to our theme. I think Paul is talking about how Jesus on Earth changed things for us giving us a glimpse into our heavenly Father. The pieces that jump out to me in these verses are that through the church the wisdom of God might be known, and that we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Sometimes I can get caught up in what the church can do for me. I want the sermon to speak to me every Sunday, and to never offend. I want to grow deeper in my faith through just the right activities, with the right group of people, offered at precisely the time that is convenient for me. I want to volunteer, so long as it's on my terms. I can get lost in my own expectations of the church, completely losing sight that God just might be trying to use us as the church so that others could better know Him. God works through individuals, but the voice of a collective church might get some attention – almost like a choir.

If God wants to use the church for others to know Him, I feel both comforted and challenged by the end of the passage, that our access to God should be in boldness and confidence through our faith in Him. I am comforted to be reminded that we should be assured in our relationship with God. God can handle our troubles, our mistakes, and can use us for good despite our humanness. Now what about "boldness" as we use our voice? That feels tougher. Do we want to be bold? I wonder what we, the choir, are being called to take up in boldness because of our faith? Trusting that God will have our back. What could God use Dilworth Church for if we as a collective church were willing to be a little bit more bold?

Lord, thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to walk amongst us so we might begin to know your wisdom. Please continue to strengthen my faith, and give me confidence even when I have doubts. Help us to see the beauty of our church, to be surrounded by people with diverse opinions in varying circumstances, united because of our faith in you. Speak to us, the choir, and help us to use our collective voice boldly because of our faith in you. Amen.



## Monday, March 14: The Faithful Tell the Story

Betty Hunter

*Mark 9:38-41*

*<sup>38</sup> John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone<sup>a</sup> casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup> Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.*

Acceptance of those who are not like us can often be hard. Often our tendency is to shut them out or try to treat them as different or "less than" merely because they are outsiders. And what does that do but take our limited energy and time? So, it is in today's reading. The disciples are so taken aback by someone other than Jesus or themselves casting out demons that they spend their time stopping him when instead they themselves could be doing God's work of caring for this man. The concern is in stopping the outsider not in improving the situation. Whether this is caused by a pride that they are Jesus's special disciples or a fear or jealousy that someone will outdo them, Jesus reminds them that the goal is to follow him, showing the world love, to drive out evil and injustice wherever it is found. And thus, whoever is doing God's work is not a threat to Jesus or the Kingdom of God. We are better defined by our similarities than our differences. To accomplish this, we need to practice humility to see that God's work can be accomplished in many ways by many people. It is what is in the heart that is important. Our call is to be a positive loving presence to all we encounter. Or as a wise friend once counseled, always assume good intent on the part of others.

### Prayer

Oh Lord, help us to understand what you are saying to us so that we may put our faith into action and show the world your love. Help us to remember that your ministry is all encompassing of those who love their neighbor. Amen.



## Tuesday, March 15: The Faithful Tell the Story

Caroline Beacham

*Acts 1:8*

*<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Did you know that as a professed Christian the Holy Spirit is automatically inside you? It's in there right now. I never understood it exactly this way. I certainly don't feel it all of the time. Of course, I Googled a lot in preparation for this devotion. I even found an FAQ, "Where in your body is the Holy Spirit located," which sounded useful if you can't find it when you need it and I definitely needed it to write this devotion.

Why did the Lord determine we each should be given this gift of the Holy Spirit to reside within us? It seems there are some strings attached. Acts 1:8 tells us we need the Holy Spirit in order to garner the power necessary to spread the Gospel. In the Old Testament we can find stories about David or Moses who received the power of the Holy Spirit so that they could be brave and wise and accomplish things bigger than themselves, so they could carry out the work of the Lord. The Holy Spirit was doled out sparingly to special people whom God wanted to use in that moment. After Jesus died and was resurrected, he democratized the

Holy Spirit in a similar way that he made the Word and a personal relationship with God more attainable for all. He needed all of us all of the time empowered to serve as Disciples, not just a few special people some of the time. The Lord deems each of us special. We are all called to Evangelize. What that looks like to you is a personal decision and a personal journey, but it is indeed a string attached that you are asked to take hold of. He believes we are worthy and capable through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Moses and David were only expected to do as much as one person could do, to take a leap of faith, the rest of the plan would follow. The Lord would be at work in the process.

My Google searches also turned up "How to Receive the Holy Spirit in 4 Easy Steps" and the "Holy Spirit Resource Kit" (not made up). But we don't need all that to find the power the Lord has already given us. Just be still, close your eyes, open your heart and receive your gift that's been there all along...and of course, share it.



## Wednesday, March 16: The Faithful Tell the Story

April Whitlock

*Matthew 9:35-38*

*<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

Is there a word that you struggle to pronounce correctly? For me, it's "poem." My family finds such joy in getting me to say the word so they can chuckle. They've demonstrated the correct pronunciation a thousand times and I've even listened to Google. If I stop and think about it, I pronounce it correctly (pow-uhm). But, if I'm in a hurry or distracted I fall back to the bad habit of saying "poi-em," no matter how many times I've been told otherwise.

In today's scripture, Jesus is giving the Disciples (and us) the blueprint for telling his story. He went to all of the towns and villages "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." But even though Jesus was burning the midnight oil, working overtime, preaching up a storm, He still looked around and saw His people as helpless sheep in need of a shepherd.

Now, it's not that Jesus was struggling with his word pronunciation, it's that He was dealing with believers who were content to listen to the good news, but not share it. They were all looking for a Savior, not realizing that once they were saved, it was their job to spread the good news.

How many times am I like those early Christians? So, content to think it's enough to go to church, to listen to a daily scripture meditation, to give money and volunteer my time for others, but never realizing that what Jesus wants more from me is my testimony. Jesus wants me to turn around and share his message to another person who needs to hear it. He's telling us that there are a lot of people who want to hear the good news (the harvest), but there aren't enough of us willing to step out and share (be the workers).

Not all of us are called to speak from the pulpit, but we are all called to share our story in this hurting world. People are craving connection. The people of Dilworth can provide an earthly connection with friendship, a listening ear, a hand-written note, a thoughtful text or an in-person visit. But we can also provide a spiritual connection by sharing how we have experienced God's grace and good news. Sharing our own experiences as a Christian is a great way to be an example of Jesus. And it really doesn't matter if you pronounce any of the words wrong.



## Thursday, March 17: The Faithful Tell the Story

Amy Watson

*Matthew 5:14-16*

*<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Matthew chapter 5 starts with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In this passage, Jesus teaches a crowd. He opens with specific circumstances that render someone “blessed” – the passage we now call the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and anyone when “people revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matthew 5:12). This is shocking stuff! According to Jesus, the default setting on blessings isn’t to the healthiest, wealthiest or most powerful.

Following the Beatitudes, are a pair of illustrations: “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world” (verses 13-16). They are a bridge between the Beatitudes and teachings on the law. Unlike in the preceding verses where the categories of blessed people are specific and unexpected, in these passages, everyone in hearing is included, even us work-in-progress types. **You** are salt, **You** are light. Not just the meek or mourning. Whatever the state of your heart and spirit, **You** are salt; **You** are light. Is it a blessing to be salt and light, or a directive on how to be a means of blessing others?

Salt and light change the circumstances of all they contact. Just as a pinch of salt changes the flavor of a whole dish; so does a lamp change the visibility in a whole room. It is the presence of salt or light that makes a difference. Not just for the person who added the salt or brought the light – all benefit. I don’t lose out on being able to read my book, just because you can also see to tie your shoe. And if a friend joins us to paint a picture, or play an instrument, there is still plenty of light for all of us. Even divided across multiple people, there is as much light for me to read as there was when I was alone.

Music has some of the same dimension – we can all hear the music, even if only a few of us are playing it, or there is one radio. Connection with others reflects God’s love in human friendship. Shared experiences of fellowship remind of us the abundance of God’s love.



## Friday, March 18: The Faithful Tell the Story

Carrie Tish

*Matthew 28:16-20*

*16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*<sup>[a]</sup>

Matthew 28: 16-20 are the closing verses of the last book of Matthew's Gospel. It is three days after his death on the Cross, and Jesus appears to the disciples. While Jesus foretold that they would see him in this place, the disciples are still awestruck at the sight of the resurrected Christ. They are overjoyed: Is Christ alive?! I imagine they immediately fell to the ground at Jesus' feet to worship their beloved teacher. I imagine one of them looking up and questioning: "Can this really be happening?" Then Jesus speaks his final words to them:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

This instruction by Jesus to spread the gospel to all the peoples of the world will become known as "The Great Commission". The good news to spread is that Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead were saving acts of God to bring a reconciliation with all of humanity. Jesus' resurrection is a triumph over the power of sin and death itself that ushers in the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Indeed, the passion of Christ represents no less than a cosmic victory for all the ages of goodness over evil.

Today, two thousand years after the Crucifixion of Jesus, over 2.5 billion people around the globe are followers of the risen Christ. Christianity has spread from 11 disciples to become the world's largest religion. Both collectively, as the Christian Church, and as individuals, we continue to be called by Jesus to understand his teachings and to boldly follow him: grow closer to God, be empowered to resist evil and oppression, and practice charity by loving friends, enemies, and strangers alike as much as we love ourselves.

**Prayer:** Thank you God for sacrificing your precious son to save a broken world. Thank you for giving Jesus all the power of heaven and earth to redeem humanity. Please fill me with your all-powerful Holy Spirit, that I may find a voice to speak up and speak out the good news of Christ's redeeming love to others. **Christ is alive!** Hallelujah!



## Week Three - The Faithful Rest and Breathe

### Observe the Rests!

#### Hymn- Be Still My Soul

1 Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side.  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
leave to your God to order and provide;  
in every change God faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: your best, your heavenly friend  
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul: your God will undertake  
to guide the future, as in ages past.  
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;  
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know  
the Christ who ruled them while he dwelt below.

3 Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on  
when we shall be forever with the Lord,  
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,  
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.  
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,  
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.



## Saturday, March 19: The Faithful Rest

Susan Wright

*Mark 6:30-34*

*<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*

We can all relate to the daunting task of helping the needy and feeding the hungry. Sometimes, we just get tired of volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, Room in the Inn, Roof Above, and many other ministries that Dilworth Church is a part of. Or, we are too busy with our lives that we simply can't take on anything else. This is probably how the apostles felt, who were exhausted for all they have done. Jesus understood this and sent them away to a deserted place to rest.

When we slow down and shut down the things that interrupt (cell phones, social media, etc.), only then can we truly be with God. As a personal testimony, I recently started observing the Sabbath as part of my DBS2 studies. It is amazing how much more productive I am at work, which allows me more time to create space to reflect on what is important. When you see the progress of the Habitat for Humanity House, the gladness of our Room in the Inn guests after a warm meal and place to stay, and new beginnings for our A Tu Lado families, you realize you couldn't have done all this without first taking care of yourselves so you can give to others.

God, thank you for having compassion on all of us and reminding us that we need to rest, renew and refresh in order to be your faithful servants.



## Sunday, March 20: The Faithful Rest

Lynn Fayssoux

Matthew 11:28-30

*<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

To-do lists, fears, expectations, and plans for the future. Maybe this is just something I experience, but often times, life's burdens build up to the extent that it can feel like a literal weight, suffocating my joy and hope. If I am being honest, because I enjoy feeling as if I have control over things, I grasp onto each to-do item, expectation, and plan and hold them tightly in my fists, not willing to give them up. Part of the fear involved is that, if I give these things up to God, if I fully surrender the control, His plan will be different than my own; His plan may be different than what I desire and picture for my life, for the lives of those around me. These hopes and desires for mine and others lives may not come to fruition. God doesn't promise my life will be what I picture it as. He does promise that If I surrender my hopes, plans, worries, and failures to Him, that he will take care of me, that He has the best plan. He promises rest— something I don't allow myself to have when I grasp everything tightly. Instead of rest, I find myself chained by worry, fear, and anxiety when I tighten the grip and attempt to hold onto control. My prayer is that we will all, myself included, have the courage and faith to open our palms to the sky and ungrasp our tight fists. That we will entrust a good God, who has good plans and provides us with rest and care, with the desires and worries of our heart. That in doing so, we will live more joyful and hope-filled lives.



## Monday, March 21: The Faithful Rest

Ted Harris

*Hebrews 4:9-11*

*<sup>9</sup> So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.*

In this scripture, God tells us how we can experience the “rest” he offers. He says that our Sabbath rest is ongoing. This rest is always available to everyone and is offered by God to those who have completed the works he has given them. We should make every effort to finish all that he has asked of us. How do we achieve this rest? What kind of work is he referring to?

There are many ways as Christians we can do or “spiritual work” for God to find the rest he offers. Maybe you have a friend or family member who is going through some bad times. Or, the homeless person asking for money or food. You have compassion for them so you act, to show your love and support. God has given you the knowledge and ability to use those tools; the tools of compassion and love to handle the job.

Another example of spiritual work is our commitment to God. I really like the way Billy Graham explained this, and I quote; “Christian commitment is like a marathon race. There are fresh, eager faces as the gun sounds to begin the race, but along the grueling 26-mile route, one person after another drops out before the finish”.

I went through a period of my life where I lost my commitment to God. I just didn't put forth the energy and love it requires to be faithful. As I and my family grew older and after I went through a divorce, I realized where I went wrong. It certainly didn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out! So, I renewed my commitment to God and through his grace and love, I met my wife Pamela as a direct result of a church-based support group. That was over 20 years ago.

Our lack of belief and commitment is the disobedience that can destroy our ability to fulfill the destiny God has in store for us. God only rested from his creative work when it was complete, as Genesis 2:2 tells us. So, in order for us as Christians to rest, to obtain the eternal life he has promised, it is not something we earn, but something we receive by his goodness. We must complete the work given to us. We must always trust, obey and believe in him and his words. Don't drop out before the finish.



## Tuesday, March 22: The Faithful Wait in Stillness

Marie Feroli

*Psalm 46:10*

*10 "Be still, and know that I am God!*

*I am exalted among the nations,*

*I am exalted in the earth."*

"Be still, and know that I am God." This is a phrase in the Bible that has brought me and many others comfort during times of stress, life changes, and traumatic events. Having a higher power to lean on in life is one of the many perks of Christianity. I am grateful to worship a strong, father God that has a greater plan for me than anything I can think up for myself.

When I was assigned this passage, the first thing that came to mind was the vast beauty of the mountains. The awesome creator, God, that I have been taught about since day one in my life. Nature has always been a great refuge for me. Camping, hiking, rock climbing, even a quiet walk outside my house, have always helped to center me and bring me back to God.

These quiet times in nature are great representations of God's Love, but today has reminded me that I don't have to walk outside my front door to find God's healing. Today I am stuck in a minivan, going 20 miles per hour down the highway because a snow storm has hit Texas. As my husband, Dave, and I inch down the road, all we can do is pray and lean on each other. Every time we pass a wreck or get stopped in a traffic jam, we just hold hands and say, "I love you." God has blessed me with one of the most loving husbands. As you are reading through today's passage, I hope you will find refuge and strength, not in nature or music, but in your loved ones. I hope you will be still and look at your husband, your wife, your son, your daughter, or your friend and be comforted by their love that has been gifted from God.

I am grateful for you, church family.

With love, Marie Feroli



## Wednesday, March 23: The Faithful Breathe

Jane Knight

*Ezekiel 37:3-5*

*<sup>3</sup> He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath<sup>[a]</sup> to enter you, and you shall live.*

In this scripture, God leads Ezekiel into a valley filled with bones dried by the sun and weather. God asks Ezekiel, "Do you think I can bring these bones back to life?" Ezekiel, unsure of how to answer, says, "Only you know the answer to that." Then God instructs Ezekiel to tell the bones that He will breathe on them to bring them back to life.

When Ezekiel looks over the large pile of bones, he is unsure of the way in which to answer God's question to him. I am sure he was overwhelmed. I am reminded of a song I sang as a child, "Dem Bones". The idea for the spiritual came from this passage. "Dem, bones, dem bones, dem dried bones, now hear the words of the Lord", we sang. When I was in elementary school, there were no teacher aides, no PE teacher, no gym, and few classes with less than thirty students. So, on rainy days, we sang the song and performed the actions to get out the wiggles. After we sang the "dem bones" phrase, we leaned over and started by pointing to our feet as we sang, "And the foot bone was connected to the ankle bone, and the ankle bone was connected to the leg bone." In doing so, we showed how God had resurrected the "old bones".

Then God asked Ezekiel to tell the bones that His breath would bring them back to life. I remember another song I sang in church, "Breathe on me breath of God. Fill me with life anew that I may love what Thou doth love and do what Thou would do." As this hymn suggests, we still need God's breath today to guide us as we journey through life.

Through this scripture, we can see that these three verses have inspired others to express their feelings about the message that they bring. We can see that, even before Christ's resurrection, he resurrected the bones in the presence of Ezekiel. Thanks be to God for the breath he breathes on us today.



## Thursday, March 24: The Faithful Receive Quiet Refreshment

Anna Sink

Psalms 23:1-3

*<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.<sup>[b]</sup>  
He leads me in right paths<sup>[c]</sup>  
for his name's sake.*

### Let Me Catch My Breath

I have a hard time with rest. On the Enneagram, I am a Type 3, which means I am driven, pragmatic, and want to be of value. It also means that I can get so busy, so caught up in achieving that I lose myself along the way, or I alienate those closest to me because my search for value takes me away from what is essential and what God truly wants.

I am constantly tempted by busyness - appearing like I am doing something worthy. But Psalm 23 reminds us that rest is holy. In looking at several translations of the well-known scripture, words like 'restore', 'revive', and 'new strength' jump out at me. I especially like The Message's translation which states:

*'God, my shepherd!  
I don't need a thing.  
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,  
you find me quiet pools to drink from.  
True to your word,  
you let me catch my breath  
and send me in the right direction.'*

*You let me catch my breath.* What comforting and welcoming words! There are days when it feels like I don't sit down or have a moment to catch my breath. At the end of those busy days, it's hard to know if I've really accomplished anything, or done anything of value. This Psalm reminds me that stopping to sit quietly and reflect is vital to my journey.

During this Lent season, I have carved out time to sit and be still. To quiet my soul is to listen for God and devote myself to *His* works, not just my own. The quiet spaces will revive me, give me new strength, and prepare me to go in the right direction.

Prayer: Our Father, your offer of rest is a comfort and blessing to us. May we embrace the stillness and quiet to better hear you. Amen.



## Friday, March 25: The Faithful Rest

Ryan Mills

*Exodus 33:13*

*13 Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people."*

As we progress through our lives of faith on this earth, we must realize that it's a continuous path of growth that only digs deeper and never finishes. I was born and raised in a family that took me to church every Sunday and encouraged me to be as involved as possible. At 34 years old I'm still reaching for a deeper understanding by coming to church, participating in Bible studies, etc. and I still feel like I've barely scratched the surface. It can be frustrating if you focus solely on trying to achieve complete understanding versus valuing your progression of knowledge and faith. You must come to terms with the fact that you will always be able to further deepen your faith relationship.

If I asked you to teach a Bible study and one of your students was Moses, would you feel like you were preaching to the choir? You might think Moses has clearly reached the pinnacle of understanding and needs no further growth but you'd be wrong. In Exodus 33:13 we see even Moses grow tired of his own attempts at fully understanding God and his plan. He rests in a way by reaching out to God for help. He pleads for direct assistance from God to help him understand the plan he has and to achieve a deeper relationship with Him. This should show you that no matter how knowledgeable you may be in your life of faith; it's still ok to ask for help and rest on the shoulder of God on your journey forward.

### Prayer

Lord God, I ask for your assistance in my path of faith so that I can continue to grow deeper in my relationship with you each and every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## Week Four – The Faithful Live in the Power of Quiet Love

Dynamics! Pianissimo: soft, Forte: strong

### Hymn – What Wonderful Love is This?

- 1 What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.
- 2 What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of life  
to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,  
to lay aside his crown for my soul.
- 3 To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing,  
to God and to the Lamb, I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM,  
while millions join the theme I will sing, I will sing;  
while millions join the theme I will sing.
- 4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on;  
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,  
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and through eternity I'll sing on.



## Saturday, March 26: The Faithful Love Patiently

Jenna Booth

*Luke 15:18-20*

*<sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."'" <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. 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.*

At first, I could relate to the older brother and the confusion he had, as he had been the loyal son throughout the years while his younger brother was away. I had some questions swirling around in my head. What if the youngest son is only back to fuel his own needs and does not intend to stay? Would the father welcome him back so quickly if the son leaves for a second time?

When the son returned home the father wasted no time welcoming him back with literal open arms. The father simply chose to forgive his son when he admitted his sins. That is what our Heavenly Father would want us to do. Choose forgiveness. Although I'm fairly certain that God is not a fan of repeat offenders of sin, he still welcomes us back when we ask for forgiveness. If one Prodigal Son can self-reflect and return to his father to ask for forgiveness, then let us take a page from his book.



## Sunday, March 27: The Faithful Love in All Ways

Lois Kilkka

*Ephesians 4:29-32*

*<sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,<sup>[a]</sup> as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup> and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.<sup>[b]</sup>*

Every choir member learns about dynamics, the Italian terms or symbols that direct how quietly or loudly a piece should be performed. Composers use dynamics to set or change the mood of a number. In Italian, the language of music, piano (p) means soft, forte (f) means loud or strong; the more p's or f's in the symbol (ppp to fff), the softer or louder the passage. Musicians use these cues to bring excitement, drama, feeling and movement to a piece that would otherwise be unremarkable.

But if piano means soft, why does 'piano' also mean that large wooden instrument with 88 keys that your accompanist plays? Back when keyboard instruments were invented, the most significant were the organ and the harpsichord. Each had a limitation: the volume of the instrument could not be controlled by touch. Pound on a key or tap it gently, the note could not get any louder. Organ volume could be enhanced by a foot pedal, but the harpsichord only had enough power to be played in a small ensemble. So composers worked within the limitations of their instruments and wrote solo or chamber music for harpsichord.

But around 1700, a technological revolution took place. An Italian instrument maker named Bartolomeo Cristofori figured out how create a full range of volume from a keyboard by using a mechanism involving hammered rather than plucked strings. Suddenly the instrument could play loud, soft and everything in between simply by striking the keys with varying degrees of power. He named this creation a 'clavicembalo col piano e forte,' literally a harpsichord that can play soft and loud noises. This was shortened to 'pianoforte' and eventually, the now common name, piano. Within a few short years, the field of music had changed dramatically. Composers like Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven began creating a powerful repertoire for piano with a spectrum of moods and shades of expression. The versatile instrument could be played for solos, accompaniment, alongside a full orchestra, for Clair de Lune or Great Balls of Fire.



Lois Kilkka (cont.)

The power came in the ability to control the instrument by touch. Sometimes a work calls for a peaceful, meditative, introspective mood. Sometimes a work calls for force, power, rage or triumph. Sometimes a work is an entire journey, using both piano and forte to stir the soul.

A valuable choir member trusts and follows the composer's and conductor's dynamic cues to create a powerful experience. Our God has an infinite range of dynamics in guiding us, his people. Let us be more responsive instruments by remembering the power of dynamics. May the forte be with us!



## Monday, March 28: The Faithful Love Patiently

Dave Mildenberg

### *2 Thessalonians 3:1-5*

*3 Finally, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you,<sup>2</sup> and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. <sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup> And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command. <sup>5</sup> May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

Paul closes this beautiful passage with a prayer that the Lord direct the Thessalonians to be patient. I especially need that guidance because I often lack patience, as those closest to me would confirm. I want to move from A to B as quickly as possible. I talk and interrupt rather than listen. Rather than giving thanks for today, I worry about tomorrow's challenges.

Urgency is important, to be sure. The late civil rights leader John Lewis' famous comment to "get in good trouble" has become an important warning against complacency. In today's first verse, Paul asks for prayer that God's word "may run swiftly and be glorified."

But throughout his writings, including this one, Paul continually emphasizes obedience to God: "that you will do things we command you." And Paul viewed patience as an essential, non-optional Christian virtue that is "both a command and a gift of God," Christian scholar Albert Mohler has written.

I'm thankful for all the people in my family, work and community circles who have been lovingly patient with me. Dilworth Church is filled with patient, faithful saints. May we all strive to be more patient with all of those with whom we interact.



## Tuesday, March 29: The Faithful Love Like Jesus

Melissa King

*John 13:34*

*<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

In this passage, Jesus finished washing the disciples' feet while they were gathered together for the last supper. He tries to prepare the disciples for life without him - both in the coming days following his crucifixion and once he ascends into heaven. Think of when you share instructions before you leave... to a babysitter, dropping off your child at school, before walking out the door. Jesus was doing the same thing when he said in John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Breaking this down phrase by phrase:

- This commandment is new because until Christ's death on the cross, believers didn't have an example of sacrificial love, laying down one's life so others could live (John 15:13).
- "Even as I have loved you" - Jesus tells the disciples to love sacrificially. His love was evidenced by his actions: washing feet, spending time with outcasts, and dying to self.
- He repeats the commandment again to make sure we understand and didn't miss it the first time "love one another".

Why? The next verse answers that clearly "By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." This commandment is so important to him that in two verses, Jesus commands us *three* times to love one another. Using His love for us as an example, our love for others should be sacrificial, radical, different from what the world expects so everyone knows we belong to Christ.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your example of sacrificial love and your easy-to-remember instructions. Help me today to see specific ways that I can love my spouse, child, neighbor, coworker or stranger in a way that would make them pause and say "she loves me like Jesus does".



## Wednesday, March 30: The Faithful Prayerfully Love

Tom Hamiton

*1 Thessalonians 3:12-13*

*<sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. <sup>13</sup> And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

As a youth, more specifically a seventh grader, I had just moved to Charlotte and was attending my grandparent's church. I soon found church to be an easy way to make friends, so youth group and Sunday school soon became weekly staples. Unfortunately, with that came the chore of a traditional service each Sunday morning. I often endured this Sunday ritual for the free pizza later in the day at youth group. However, my young mind still sought a way to escape my command performance on Sunday morning until I discovered the joy of Youth Choir. Not only was youth choir a way to see my friends, but I would have the honor of performing at the much shorter early service.

Wouldn't you know that I actually liked it? The phrase "preach to the choir" gets used so often, but it was in this case that the choir preached to me. Whether it was finally paying attention to the lyrics of the hymns, challenging myself to improve my skills, or just developing the church community that I had never had, I could feel God's abundance become a part of my life through the experience. While I found myself often feeling guilty for being pulled into church for the wrong reasons, I knew God never held it against me because I wound up where I was supposed to be. While I find it easier now to sign up for a volunteer project or a youth group activity, I am grateful to the people at my grandparent's church who, in this case literally, provided me with the choir that I needed to develop my first connection to God.



## Thursday, March 31: The Quiet Current of the Faithful

Inez Phifer

### *Philippians 4:8-9*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, <sup>[a]</sup> whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about <sup>[b]</sup> these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Paul was in prison when he wrote a letter to the church at Philippi. Many Christians were suffering and being persecuted. He was trying to encourage the believers not to become discouraged. He told Philippian Christians to rejoice, to feel and show great joy. Rejoice in the Lord and be in prayer with thanksgiving even in suffering. Paul was a living example of rejoicing and fellowship with Christ daily!

Paul reminded the church in Philippi of the importance of proper Christian thinking. He listed seven essential characteristics of Christian thought – whatever is true, honest, righteous, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy. Paul gives us all instructions on how to live out our lives with love, hope, faith, and gratefulness in the full blessings and love of God.

Many of us have experienced trials, hardship, and pain. Christians around the world today are being persecuted but exemplify a deep commitment of courage to share biblical truths. Fixing our minds on Christ is a conscious choice which we must make when problems and difficulties arise. Negative thoughts are hard to silence, but when they start to flood into our minds, we are to substitute those positive practices into our thinking. Be vigilant of the input you allow to enter your mind. At some time, every believer struggles to turn off those negative thoughts but as we develop a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our thoughts turn from negative to positive. Righteous living depends on right thinking.

Life circumstances can weigh heavily upon our heart. What's in our heart will come out of our thinking, speaking and activity. When the heart and mind are guarded from anxious thought, the peace of God reigns.

The promise in verse 9 includes peace, but the focus of the promise is God Himself. Amid any circumstances, we can rely upon God knowing He will take care of us. Christians – we don't have to worry! If we let the mind of Christ dwell in us and not allow the negative thoughts of our hearts to control us, God will take us on a journey to reclaim peace, goodness, love, and purpose.



Inez Phifer (cont.)

God encourages us to question, ponder, and grow in grace and knowledge through Bible study, prayer, worship, and service to others. Dilworth church provides us with the place to begin our positive journey of faith. Do we see and recognize in ourselves the need to grow on our journey and apply the attributes Paul spoke of in these verses?

Heavenly Father, keep us from anxious thoughts. Help us to keep the eyes of our hearts fixed on you. Guide us to make a conscious choice to feed our minds on those fruits of the spirit and the sacrifice you made for us.



## Friday, April 1: The Faithful Love Like Jesus

Norma Thomas

*1 Corinthians 13:1, 4-8*

*13 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.<sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.*

In elementary school I felt so special to be chosen by the music teacher to sing with her. As a young girl, my grandfather brought me to the other end of the house away from the rest of the family. There he would play classical music on the phonograph and we would listen together. I was transfixed and inspired by the beautiful harmonies. I later became a music teacher, choir director, and longtime choir member, singing alto in many choirs wherever we lived. When my mother was in a nursing home, I was led to bring the uplifting love of God to those living there through music. Through music I have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit leading me to respond to God. Now because of age my eyes, ears, and voice are diminished; I sit in the pew and appreciate listening to God speak through the music of the choir.

Just as music inspires and uplifts, so the Holy Spirit moves in our lives guiding and leading us to act in love for God: the melodies of each of our lives in perfect harmony with the song of God.

Prayer: O Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit and teach us to love unconditionally; to set our sights with awareness and love and to see and seek others in need. You love God is a never-ending chorus of love that never gives up and endures through every circumstance. May we be that prime example.



## Week Five – The Faithful Steadily Persevere Tempo!

### Hymn – Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

1. Come, thou Fount of every blessing,  
tune my heart to sing thy grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
mount of thy redeeming love.
2. Here I raise mine Ebenezer;  
hither by thy help I'm come;  
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,  
safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
wandering from the fold of God;  
he, to rescue me from danger,  
interposed his precious blood.
3. O to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;  
here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
seal it for thy courts above.



## Saturday, April 2: The Faithful Pursue the Goal

Sally Mesibov

*Philippians 3:12-14*

*<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal,<sup>[a]</sup> but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved,<sup>[b]</sup> I do not consider that I have made it my own,<sup>[c]</sup> but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly<sup>[d]</sup> call of God in Christ Jesus.*

If I were to summarize this scripture in one word, the word would be perseverance. Often when I have read this scripture, I thought it was Paul's effort, alone, that was necessary for him to push on or persevere. Moreover, when I read this scripture looking for personal biblical instruction or personal support during a challenging time, I believed that I, like Paul, needed to put in more effort or push harder. In other words, I needed to persevere through the difficult time – me, alone. I read right over the bit in the scripture that states “Christ Jesus made me his own.” It wasn't until recently that I realized my individual effort wasn't going to get me anywhere except stuck. Paul understood that he was able to press on because he belonged to Jesus, and only through that connection was he able to keep going forward. Like Paul, it is the connection we have in Jesus that is going to give us the strength to press on together.

The past couple of years have been very challenging in so many ways. One of those challenges involves our time together in our church family. Although our church has been open for worship for months, Covid has changed the worship dynamic. This changed dynamic may lead some to long for the days of worship before Covid, when we could see each other face to face, rather than mask to mask. Just as Paul perseveres in Christ, he also forgets what lies behind, and strains forward to what lies ahead. We too, as members of DUMC, must keep looking forward, in unity, with the teachings of Christ as our instruction manual. We are united in Christ, and we are united as members of DUMC. Together, let us keep an eye out for the prize that Paul speaks of, and continue to share the love of Christ that is in each of us with each other.



## Sunday, April 3: The Faithful Receive Strength for the Journey

Lindsay Ambler

*Isaiah 40:28-31*

*28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.*

*29 He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.*

*30 Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;*

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

I do not think I can even begin to count the number of times the word “journey” has been used to describe events or situations in my life these past few years.

Unfortunately for me, the word hasn’t been used in the context of an actual trip or adventure, but rather as the classic figure of speech. I’m sure you can easily guess the “journey” that pops front of mind during these times: navigating Covid as a mom, wife, daughter, sister, and friend has been quite the, well, journey.

The fear that engulfed our family began when we learned that this virus attacks the respiratory system. Our son was born prematurely, and not breathing. He spent 47 days in the NICU. His first 5 days of life were spent on a ventilator and he received breathing assistance the entire duration of his hospital stay. We had no idea what would happen to our son if Covid found him. There is no doubt in my mind that our faith in God has carried us through.

*“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.” Yes! “...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

Yes! God has given us strength and He has certainly given our son strength, both in his physical health and also in his soul.

We know that life will present us with many more journeys, we just hope that soon some of those journeys will be tangible adventures. No matter what journey comes next, we know that our faith will give us all the strength we will need.

Lord, thank you for giving us strength, especially during times of uncertainty. Thank you for giving us strength when we feel weak and when we feel as though we may not be able to move forward. Give us the strength to help others along their journeys and help us to lead by example, showing that the faithful can endure. Amen.



## Monday, April 4: The Faithful Persevere

June Helsabeck

*Psalm 126:4-6*

*<sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.*

*<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.*

*<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.*

In 586 BC the Persian King Cyrus set the Israelites free from their exile in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem and they were so glad! (Ps 126:3) They had looked forward to restoring/reconstructing their home country and making joyful new lives for themselves. God's people had, through 50-70 tearful years of exile, kept faith in their God to return them to their Promised Land. The psalmist likened this experience to a captive who during exile sadly keeps on trying to "sow seed" in a foreign country and who now can gather his harvest into bundles (sheaves) and "go home."

During the current COVID-19 flu pandemic, so many have been desperately trying to "keep going," faithfully believing God will bring us "back home" eventually. Being 85 years of age, I am reminded of the old gospel hymn, "Bringing in the Sheaves." Probably many of you reading this devotional don't go back that far so I'll quote a verse of the song:

"Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,  
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;  
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,  
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves."

by Knowles Shaw

Musical tempo refers to the speed and mood at which a piece of music should be played, fast, moderate, bright, slow, sad. May our "tempo" for help living our daily lives during the current upheaval be unending praise, trust, and faith in our God.



## Tuesday, April 5: The Faithful Continually Praise God

Katie McCraw

*Psalm 63:4-8*

- <sup>4</sup> *So I will bless you as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.*
- <sup>5</sup> *My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips*
- <sup>6</sup> *when I think of you on my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*
- <sup>7</sup> *for you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.*
- <sup>8</sup> *My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me.*

I love the hymn Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. I find comfort in the simple tune and steady beat of the music. Do you know it?

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, **Call for songs of loudest praise.**  
Teach me some melodious sonnet, Sung by flaming tongues above;  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon It, Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer: Hither by Thy help I've come;  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure, Safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger, **Wandering** from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger, Interposed His precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that goodness, like a fetter, Bind my **wandering** heart to Thee.  
Prone to **wander** Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love,  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for the courts above.

Written way back in the 1700s by an English preacher, it is truly a fountain of praise and thanksgiving to God for all the blessings He has given us. In fact, the first verse is a request for God to teach us how to praise Him “**with songs of loudest praise**”. The old writing style of this hymn may not flow very smoothly to our modern-day ears, but that part is very clear!

The subsequent verses continue to praise God for His grace and express some frustration over needing to be saved from our own **wandering** hearts. Often during handbell practice, we find ourselves wandering. Some ringers are playing faster and some are playing slower and the song falls apart. We have to stop and get back on track. We must work together to keep the same tempo.

Just like the old hymn writer and the handbell choir, a heartfelt and steady praise to God will get us through the tough times – or at least get us the end of the song together!



## Wednesday, April 6: The Faithful are Strong in Their Trust of God

Thompson Busch

*Joshua 1:9*

*<sup>9</sup> I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

Joshua 1:9 says "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Faithful people strongly trust God, since he has proven himself time and time again. He is with us all the time, and we have to trust in the path that he is leading us on. This means facing tough and difficult times, but also happy and cheerful times. As we continue through these difficult times which are filled with solitude and division, we need to keep our faith strong, and know that no matter what, the good is coming.



## Thursday, April 7: The Faithful Practice Daily

Emily Rogers

*Romans 12:9-13*

*<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

When I sit in the choir loft, preparing to sing a hymn or sacred text, my eyes instantly focus on the director's hands setting the tempo. It's one of the first rules you learn in choir practice; I'll bet even the sweet children in our jubilation choir know it: "eyes on the director". It not only keeps you on tempo with the director, but in unison with the rest of the choir as well.

Upon first reading this Romans passage, the lines sound a lot like a list of commands, or yet another thing to add to my "to-do" list. But after reading this passage to the rhythm of a "tempo", I began to realize the intention behind it. These imperative statements are meant to serve as the tempo for our daily lives, the core practices that keep us in rhythm with God's plan for us as a Christian family. So, what are some examples to maintain this tempo throughout our everyday routines? "Let love be genuine (v. 9)" – an honest expression of gratitude or words of encouragement for those working so hard in our community. "Outdo one another in showing honor (v. 10)" – or as my Message Bible states it, "Practice playing second fiddle"! "Be ardent in spirit (v. 11)" – find a new group or mission in the church to get excited about! "Persevere in prayer (v. 12)" – an obvious statement, but one that bears repeating nonetheless; research a new form of prayer (I love "breath prayers") to keep you going when you feel stuck. "Extend hospitality to strangers (v. 13)" – volunteer with Room In The Inn, introduce yourself to a new church visitor, ask your cashier how their day is (and actually mean it).

If this feels like a lot of expectations to live up to – it kind of is! God knows our lives and recognizes that we cannot perfectly match his tempo. But when you lose your rhythm, you can always set your eyes on the Director of our lives. He will bring you back into glorious unison.



## Friday, April 8: The Faithful Set Loving Examples

Terry Scott

*Mark 9:42*

*<sup>42</sup> “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me,<sup>[a]</sup> it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.*

What would our choir sound like if everyone decided to sing at their own tempo? That probably is something you wouldn't want to hear. When voices blend in harmony, our spirits are lifted and we become a part of the worship. That is how regular attendance to services gives us that sense of reassurance and belonging we all need. As the hymn says, “tune our hearts to sing Thy praise.”

Our scripture today (Mark 9:42) reminds us of how important it is to not do anything that would keep another from the love of God. This would include putting aside those prejudices we have against those who are different. Our lives are an example to others of God's love.

Help us, Lord, to show that love to all people through our persistence in living our lives in harmony with our brothers and sisters in Christ.



## Week Six – The Faithful Live the Passion of Christ

Crescendo!

### Hymn- O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

1. O sacred Head, now wounded,  
with grief and shame weighed down,  
now scornfully surrounded  
with thorns, thine only crown:  
how pale thou art with anguish,  
with sore abuse and scorn!  
How does that visage languish  
which once was bright as morn!

2. 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 to me thy grace.

3. 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.



## Saturday, April 9: The Faithful Begin the Walk to the Cross

Ben Watson

*John 12:7-8*

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it<sup>a</sup> so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

A crescendo in music is a huge buildup to a note, or series of notes that acts as a climax in the piece. It can also be used to emphasize the softer, more subtle notes. Jesus was a lot like this, lending himself to huge spectacle to get his message out, such as in the story of him healing the leper Lazarus from the dead. However, he was not one to brute force his way into things. He would use these huge events to kind of underscore the smaller details of his life, that were, in the end, just as impactful for the people that witnessed them. In this passage, he emphasizes this by saying that although things may be used for slightly better purposes, it is very good and right to use those things to help those around you that you love and may not always have close to you to love. He uses the huge crescendo of Lazarus's rebirth to impress on those around him that small acts of love can be just as powerful for those close to you as a large show of power can be to those in a crowd. Go out into this world and take this message with you, that acts of love for those around you can be as powerful as that of Martha bathing Jesus' feet in the costly oil.



## Sunday, April 10: The Faithful Praise the King

Lucian Aravapalli

*Luke 19:35-38*

*<sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying,*

*“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

My daughter loves to sing and dance. She comes home from school, throws off her coat & shoes, and runs to me to turn on her favorite music so she can sing along at the top of her lungs. That scene of pure, unadulterated joy is the image that plays in my head as I read the scripture of Luke. Jesus is making his way into Jerusalem atop a colt and the faithful throw their cloaks on the road and lift their voices to praise the king. This is not a quiet affair. This is a time of celebration, heads turned up to heaven, pure joy on their faces as they loudly praise the Lord for all to see and hear. We the faithful can shout it from the rooftops; Jesus is here, he is all around and we don't need to be in the confines of our homes or in the pews of our church to show our love and praise the King of all kings. In these uncertain times with COVID, where we have been forced apart in so many ways, reading this scripture brings me comfort. I can watch my children sing & dance and know Jesus is with us and we can celebrate his love in so many ways. A kind word to a stranger. A smile to a neighbor. Making valentines to pass out to a friend in need. A reminder that Jesus is here no matter where we are and it's okay to share his love in any setting. Jesus provides the resources we need to go out and minister to other, just like when he told his disciples to get the colt that he rode in on. Each of us has a unique talent to do so. Sometimes we just need a little push to remind ourselves to stop and listen. Be grateful for God's love, lift up our voices and sing his praise.



## Monday, April 11: The Faithful Become Humble Servants

Emily Tolsma

*Philippians 2:5-8*

<sup>5</sup> *Let the same mind be in you that was<sup>a</sup> in Christ Jesus,*

<sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,*

<sup>7</sup> *but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,*

<sup>8</sup> *he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.*

I have read several leadership books, leadership philosophies, have studied “laws” of leadership, etc. over the past several years in my professional role as a people leader. The style of leadership that most speaks to me is that of Servant Leader. As I read this scripture, I was reminded that Jesus is the ultimate model of a Servant Leader. Other historical figures who are models of servant leaders are Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Abraham Lincoln. I am not trying to compare myself to these leaders in any way, but rather determine how I can strive to lead like them. These leaders all lift up and fight for the marginalized members of society even though this is not the popular thing to do. Being a servant leader can cost the ultimate sacrifice of life, as it did for Jesus.

The principles of servant leadership are as follows:

- Develop Diversity of thought
- Create a culture of trust
- Have an unselfish mindset
- Foster leadership in others

These are big ideas that I can only hope to create within my professional work team and all the community and church groups that I am involved in. The first, and sometimes hardest, step in moving towards servant leadership is listening. Listening with an open heart and being obedient to what you hear is hard. We



Emily Tolsma (cont.)

all come into situations with biases and preconceived ideas of how to fix problems, but truly listening and empathizing with those we serve can flip those ideas upside down and challenge us. Being vulnerable to what you hear is hard, but it is a good first step. During this season of Lent, I challenge myself and you to spend time in purposeful listening and mindful action.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to listen to those around me who are struggling, that I may hear their true needs and can work to serve and lift them up.



## Tuesday, April 12: The Faithful Share the Lord's Table

Hannah Walker

*Luke 22:14-15, 20b*

*<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;*

*<sup>20</sup> 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."<sup>[a]</sup>*

This verse tells of Jesus joining his disciples at the table sharing that he wants to be with them and the purpose of his death. When I read this scripture my first thoughts are of the warmth and love that envelop me at the dinner table when we celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. The air is full of joy and celebration and the simple excitement of being together. The time we spend together at these special meals can be compared to the crescendo of the Hallelujah chorus during the Easter Sunday service. It always starts out quiet, foreshadowing what's to come, and in Jesus's case its foreshadowing his crucifixion. Its darker and its somber and we wait in anticipation before it grows and then it reaches its peak echoing around the whole room, as God's plan for Jesus becomes clear through Judas's betrayal and Jesus being crucified on the cross. Just the night before his table is filled with joy as he is filled with a weight in his chest building up until he is crucified on the cross and God's plan for him is fulfilled allowing, we who sin to live on. Jesus knew it was coming and he didn't change God's plan for him, he didn't beg for it to change he just waited with the knowledge of everything to come. For this I feel unbelievably grateful as I'm sure many of you reading this now are as well. So, let's continue on in gratitude for his crescendo, let's never let it fade away, and keep it alive today, always, and forever. God brought Jesus to us for many reasons, some we won't ever know, but this crescendo of togetherness, family, friends and the light he brought into the world through his actions and God's plan will live through him, his message, and his followers forever.

I pray, family and friends, that this crescendo and more will live on forever through and in Jesus's image and I hope no one ever takes it for granted and that there is always gratitude as it is one of the strongest images of togetherness and acceptance ever seen, this I pray to you Lord, Amen.



## Wednesday, April 13: The Faithful Witness Betrayal and Evil

Graham Busch

*Luke 22:52-53*

*<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"*

The scripture Luke 22:52-53 is about Jesus being betrayed and arrested by the priests and elders. Jesus is upset about the way they arrest him rather than actually being arrested. This shows that he has faith in God's plan but is upset with the elders and priests for arresting him in a cowardly way. He had been alongside these people in the temple every day. They were afraid to arrest him because they were afraid that the charges, they had against Jesus were false. This scripture teaches us that we have to be open to the plan God has for us no matter how we feel about it. The way something happens may not be ideal at the moment, but it is the way God intended it to happen. It may be hard to take your hands off the wheel and let God work through you, but as Christians, we are all called to do so and believe that the plan God has created for each one of us is the right plan.



## Thursday, April 14: The Faithful Are Silent While the Crowds Sway Pilate

Jon Windham

*Luke 22:52-53*

*<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"*

Going along with the crowd is often just easier and less risky to our personal situation than rocking the boat. Despite some apparent vacillating, Pilate ultimately yielded to the demands of the crowd. All of us are susceptible to social influence. Even with the best of intentions we can be carried along by forces seemingly stronger than us and end up rejecting our moral conscience.

Social psychologists might say this is rooted in a deep human desire to maintain social harmony or because of the positive value we place on social relationships. Regardless of the reason, even those of us who mean well can succumb to peer pressure often to the detriment of others.

Although we may not put an end to herd mentality, we can seek God's help in our daily decision making. Help us take appropriate risks. Help us set godly goals, not worldly goals. Help us to not passively reject Christ by allowing outside pressure to lead us to compromise.

God, give me grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.

Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to  
peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,

Trusting that You will make all  
things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy  
in this life,  
And supremely happy with You  
forever in the next.

Amen



## Friday, April 15: The Faithful Watch Jesus Die

Ann Macon-Ellis

*Luke 23:44-47*

*<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land<sup>[a]</sup> until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> while the sun's light failed;<sup>[b]</sup> and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup> When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."<sup>[c]</sup>*

I was surprised in reading the Gospels, that only in Luke do Jesus' last words commend His spirit to His Father. Matthew and Mark have Him crying out to God, "why hast Thou forsaken Me"; while in John He says simply, "It is finished." I had always thought Jesus both asked why He had been forsaken and surrendered His spirit to God. What must the followers of Jesus have thought watching him 'give up the ghost'?

The scene was set and building in intensity, darkness and destruction, when Jesus in absolute trust gave Himself to God His Father. How crushing it must have been to those who loved Jesus, to watch Him die. Many of us have had the heartbreaking privilege of watching a loved one leave this life and yet we have the assurance through the Resurrection of life everlasting. My own faith was never more real to me than when my father died. I trusted and was consoled.

For Jesus' followers, this understanding was yet to come.



## Saturday, April 16: The Faithful Lay Jesus in the Tomb

Will Scott

*John 19:38-42*

*<sup>38</sup> After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. <sup>40</sup> They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

I don't remember hearing these verses before, but I think it relates to another verse about a lady pouring perfume on Jesus' head. A bottle of perfume that would have been worth a year's salary. That seemed wasteful but Jesus said he understood that it was feelings she poured out not just the perfume. Nicodemus and Joseph were doing something like that. They were honoring him by going to all that effort to bury him properly. They even brought a hundred pounds of Spices and aloe to do it. That must have been hard to do and it must have had a very strong and powerful scent. They surely would smell it from a long way away so they might have had to hide his body in a secret place.

The theme of this week is "crescendo". When I think about the word crescendo, I think of music and the piano. It means to build up the sound gradually. I play piano but I don't really ever crescendo because I don't like the loud notes at the top of the crescendo. I prefer soft and medium volume. Whenever someone plays loud music, I cover my ears because it really bothers me. I practice new songs with the quiet pedal until I know them and then I play them at normal volume.

I think crescendo not only applies to music, but it mostly means building up. Christmas season, for example, has a lot of "crescendo" because we're building up our spirits and preparing to celebrate the anniversary of Jesus's birth. Easter doesn't really have as much crescendo, but it should because it celebrates the day Jesus rose from the dead. Easter is just as important because Jesus made a significant sacrifice of his life a few days before. That's worth getting loud about. It's the most important thing. Some people don't like the loudness or the peak of Christmas and Easter because it also leads to the cascade or the end of the crescendo. That's when everything goes back to a normal volume. I think we should let the crescendo continue and stay "loud" through the year like the smell of the aloe and spices they dressed Jesus with. That way others will be reminded of how special Jesus is throughout the year.



## Eyes on the Director! That's Resurrection!

### Hymn- This Is the Day

This is the day, this is the day.  
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made.  
We will rejoice, we will rejoice,  
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.  
This is the day that the Lord has made.  
We will rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day  
That the Lord has made.



## Sunday, April 17: The Faithful Witness the Resurrection

Blaine Nashold

*Luke 24:5-9*

*<sup>5</sup> The women<sup>[a]</sup> were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men<sup>[b]</sup> said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>6</sup> Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.*

On the third day after Jesus Christ’s death, angels at the tomb announced His Resurrection to a group of women. Upon hearing the women’s report, some of the disciples doubted the possibility of the Savior’s Resurrection. Two disciples traveled to Emmaus and, without recognizing the resurrected Lord, spoke with Him along the way. Jesus later appeared to His Apostles and others, showed them His resurrected body, and commissioned them to preach repentance and be witnesses of Him.

Imagine being at the tomb when Jesus was placed there and seeing the stone rolled in front of the doorway. Conceptualize the thoughts and feelings you might have experienced on that holy but heartbreaking plot. Now, envision returning three days later only to find an empty tomb with angels surrounding the entrance claiming, “He is not here; He has risen!”

I’m confident we’ve all encountered times in our biblical studies where, like the disciples in the chapter, we have struggled to believe a core gospel tenet. Luke indicates that it was difficult even for the eleven Apostles to believe the women who testified that Jesus had risen from the grave.

Although other individuals had been temporarily revived from death but would eventually die again as mortals, Jesus Christ was the first person to be resurrected. As American religious leader Gordon B. Hinckley explained, “Never had this occurred before. There had been only death without hope. Now there was life eternal. Only God could have done this. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the great crowning event of His life and mission. It was the capstone of the Atonement. The sacrifice of His life for all mankind was not complete without His coming forth from the grave, with the certainty of the Resurrection for all who have walked the earth.”

Further, by this miracle the Apostles turned from fearful doubt to radical faith. Jesus’ friends boldly shared the Gospel, and later, even the anti-Christian teacher



Blaine Nashold (cont.)

Saul was recruited to their ranks. Only the real resurrection of Jesus could explain such a drastic change. As scripture makes clear, Jesus' triumph over death challenges believers to live with joy and hope in the unmistakable reality of the risen Christ.

Even as the faithful body of Christ here at Dilworth, we are all called to go deeper into our church's ministry – and that starts by going deeper into scripture. As Luke 24 demonstrates, Jesus used the scriptures to teach the two disciples rather than simply revealing who He was on their walk to Emmaus. I challenge each of you, including myself, to study the scriptures carefully, deliberately, intentionally, and to ponder and pray over them. We should boldly share our radical faith and boldly share scriptures that, as Luke depicts, made the disciples "hearts burn within" them as the central purpose of all scripture is to fill our souls with faith in God the Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

For we've got a story to tell. A wonderful story to tell. So, we must go out. Go out to a world in which meaning is lost or twisted. Go out to a world in which people don't know who they are. Go out into a world where the idea of the story is completely gone. We have a story to tell. And the story is fantastic! Easter morning was the dawn, was the birthday, of God's new world. As a congregation, let's ask ourselves each morning, "Am I going to live out the resurrection life?" Further, "To what degree do I live out the resurrection life? In a world of suspicion and mistrust and fear and doubt, how much of my life is marked by joy and hope and peace and genuine love?" Jesus' resurrection is just as critical to God's redemption plan as the crucifixion. Christ's victory over sin and death is the foundation for our hope and should shape every aspect of our daily lives for Jesus promises abundant life in Him. Happy Easter for Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!



## Sunday, April 17: It's Resurrection! I Have Seen the Lord!

Rev. Michelle Chappell

John 20:11-14, 18

*<sup>11</sup> Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus. . . .*

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

It's resurrection!! I have seen the Lord!

All through this season of Lent the faithful have followed Jesus, the director of our faith. Loving, calming, healing reassurance carried us through those first weeks, learning to fix our eyes upon the Teacher. We learned Jesus' way of truth and life through watching and listening in the Word. We cried tears of brokenness, forgiveness and redemption like the prodigal child who saw the father running down the road to embrace him. We waved the branches of palms, watching a parade of children singing and dancing for the Lord who rode a donkey. Then our eyes became blurry with pain as we agonizingly watched Jesus stumble up the road to the hill known as Golgotha, crucified upon a cruel cross. The scene too much, perhaps we shut our eyes to the pain, numbing our senses to survive through the dark night.

And this is where Mary is, perhaps with blurry, numb eyes as she goes to visit the grave of her dead Lord, not understanding why the tomb is empty. She saw that they put him there after he died. She saw the stone rolled in place most likely. And now her eyes must deceive her as she sees two angels where the body of Jesus had been. She is looking for answers and directions. And in her weeping over this, she turns and sees Jesus standing there. But in her numb state, in her blurry vision, she doesn't know who it is she is trying to focus upon.



Rev. Michelle Chappell (cont.)

Finally, the Lord Jesus gets her attention. It's as though he takes the fiber glass baton of choral directing and swings it in the air for her attention. She sees fully who he is and it is the RISEN LORD, the one she has followed and learned from, her guide, her teacher and now her Savior. The veil of brief numb blindness is lifted and she fully SEES the Lord. Hallelujah! He Lives! And what is the first thing she does? She responds to the direction given by the Lord. She runs to the faithful, to the followers, and exclaims as the first Christian witness, "I have SEEN the Lord!"

During Lent we have talked much about the faithful choir with all that entails, but there is one phrase left for this day. I used to say it all the time as a director -- - "Watch me!" In other words, "watch the director!" You see, it's hard to follow and be a choir if one doesn't watch the director. It would be mass chaos and we would miss so much beautiful music if not watching. The faltering would be plenty and music lousy if our eyes were not fixed on the leader. We follow the directions and commands of the director to make beautiful music.

My friends, we follow the direction of our RISEN LORD in celebrating a resurrection faith of hope and grace. Easter resurrection takes our numb, hazy, blurry eyes and wakes us up as we fix them on Jesus. When we lose our way, we turn to look at our director, Jesus Christ, who IS THE way. When our wells get dry and our shoulders slump from the weariness of it all, we lift our gaze to the One who carries our burdens and shows us the way because death no longer has the final say and victory has won over sin. Hallelujah! Jesus is risen and I see my Lord. So, watch. Eyes on the Lord.

# Visiting? Get to Know Dilworth UMC

Welcome to Dilworth United Methodist Church, a friendly, open and welcoming Christian community. You are always welcome, just as you are because at Dilworth there is a seat at Christ's table for ALL people. Located in the heart of Dilworth, we are committed to developing faithful and engaging connections with our church family and community at large.

We are intentional in our pursuit of compassion, understanding, humility, justice, and mercy. Through all this, we strive to be a sign of Christ's love for the world. Join us.



## Our Mission

Dilworth United Methodist Church strives to be a sign of Christ's love for the world, starting right here in our local community and then reaching beyond. We celebrate our legacy built over the last 125 years of being a progressive and welcoming community in the heart of Dilworth, living out the truth that God's grace-filled gift of love is abundant for all folks. We hold to the truths of central Christian teachings and truly work to build strong foundations of faith.

We strive to live into what it means to be a church with "open hearts, open minds and open doors" and "doing all the good you can in all the ways you can". We believe this so much that you will see those very words etched in stone above the main entrance of the Jones building. We hope that you will worship with us and connect with folks on a journey. Know that you are welcome to be a part of a family who strives to be a sign of Christ's love for the world.

*"Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can."*

JOHN WESLEY

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## *A Typical Sunday at Dilworth UMC*

### Sundays

10:00 am –Worship via Facebook Live and in the Sanctuary

11:00 am - Open Door Sunday School

4:30 pm - Jubilation Choir

4:30 pm - Tribe 605 (3rd - 5th Grade)

4:30 pm - Confirmation

5:30 pm - Youth

6:00 pm- Handbell Choir Practice