

He is KING OF KINGS

Devotions

For the Season of Lent
2018

First United Methodist Church
Greensburg, Pennsylvania



By: Chloe Fantanuzzi

HE IS KING OF KINGS

Introduction

The LORD says, "The time is coming when I will choose as King a righteous descendant of David. That king will rule wisely and do what is right and just throughout the land. When he is King, the people of Judah will be safe, and the people of Israel will live in peace. He will be called 'The LORD Our Salvation.' (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

About three centuries ago, Spaniards besieged a small French town, St. Quentin. The city walls were in ruins; fever and famine plagued the people. One day the Spaniards shot over the walls a shower of arrows to which were attached little slips of parchment promising that if they surrendered, their lives and property would be spared. The mayor of the town was a devout Huguenot (French Protestants who followed John Calvin's reformed theology). For answer, he tied a piece of parchment to a javelin and hurled it back to the Spaniards. On the parchment was the message: "*Regem habemus*" -- "We have a king!"

Christians also can say, "We have a King." Jesus is our King. We belong to his Kingdom. He is not like other kings, however. He is not just another king. He is different. He is not only king but King of kings. He is not like the ancient Egyptian king, Rameses, whose arrogant motto was inscribed on temples still standing, "I am the greatest." Jesus is not the kind of king, a savage tyrant, like the king of China who used millions of slaves to build the Great Wall of China, a wall so huge that it can be seen from the moon. He was not a king like Louis XIV, who lived in excessive luxury in his Versailles palace of 1000 rooms.

Like the French Huguenots, Christians can say to the world, "*Regem habemus*," "We have a King." He is Christ the King. But, can you say Christ is your King? He may be the King of the church, but he is not your King until you crown him King of your life. A pastor was teaching his little girl to sing, "Praise him, praise him, all ye little children, God is love, God is love." Then "serve him," then "love him." When he stopped, his daughter said, "Daddy, you forgot to crown him." So they continued, "Crown him, crown him ..." Have you, by any chance, forgotten to crown him the King of your life?

This Lenten season is the time to do it! And in your hands, you will find a great resource written by folks who know Jesus as "King" and "Lord." Mull their words over in your mind and let them sink deep in your soul. After reading this devotional book, you may find you want to crown Jesus "King of kings" of your life. And if you crown Jesus King of your life, you will receive the promise made by God to Jeremiah: "the people ... will be safe, and the people ... will live in peace."

Be blessed!

Rev. Anette V. Gerber

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018

FROZEN PIZZA

Almost walked past a dear old friend
Inside the groc'ry store.
A tired face, a coat and cap
and years of wear he wore.

My dear old friend where have you
been
Since last our paths have crossed?
A story told of death come near,
A life so nearly lost.

Then on he went to tell me of
His days of last employ.
A smoky club within the 'hood
that housed him as a boy.

I cooked the finest dishes with the
best ingredients.
But all they did was whine, complain,
and cause my heart torment.

No longer could I nightly stand,
the battle cry that meets ya'.
All they cried, Lord, all they cried was:
We want frozen pizza!

I sympathize with your past plight,
The problem that you name.
My dear old friend, I gleamed and
grinned, the church is just the same.

God wants to give us healthy food
and things that make us grow.
But all we want are happy words,
familiar hymns we know.

We can't await the present wrapped
beneath the Christmas tree.
We want to tear the paper off
before the Babe we see.

God gives us time to contemplate
redemption by His Son.
Slowly to unwrap the myst'ry
of incarnation.

The trees of Christmas become trash;
twelve days have just begun.
Ne'er pray we for a hastened
second coming of the Son.

But now my friend I must move on
as quick approaches Lent.
Christmas hymns. Society wins.
And now we must repent.

Rev. Jill M. Croushore

Thursday, February 15, 2018

THE JOURNEY

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. (Luke 12:48 NRSV)

Eight years ago when we first met, our journeys with God were at different points. My future spouse had an established church family and was quite involved in youth and other missions. My focus on the other hand had been my career, education and social engagements, with an occasional visit to the church I grew up in. As our relationship grew so did my relationship with God. Over the next few years God provided our growing family with multiple moves, new jobs and a number of other life changes.

As we welcomed our first daughter we found ourselves in a new city with new challenges. We were blessed to once again find a wonderful church family. During this point of our lives we both worked high stress jobs while raising a young family. Our love for each other, love for God and desire to help out in the community led us to mission work within our church that allowed us to work with the youth and the community as a whole. Many of these missions we worked on as a "team".

Upon moving to our current home we were excited about the opportunity to once again become involved in a new church family. Once my husband started his job at the hospital we quickly realized that much of the mission work we used to share would likely fall on the shoulders of just me. While I quickly embraced this new family role it was not without some fear. Within the eight years of our relationship (a mere blip compared to that of the marriages of our parents and grandparents) our "roles" when it came to our service within the church had completely reversed. God has taught us to serve him through one another and while at times it may be difficult to take a step back, either in service to the community, career or whatever that may be, we are truly blessed to have the partnership that God has given us.

Dear God, thank you for your countless blessings and gifts. Help us remember that what we do with them is our gift back to you.

Mallory & Nevin Baker

Friday, February 16, 2018

KING OF KINGS

There is a real King, Jesus is King! If we claim to be His faithful servants, then we should obey his commands. Before Jesus ascended to be with the Father, He left specific instructions for those that follow Him. In **Matthew 29:19** we find He said, **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”** So unless He has given us other specific orders, our mind, heart and resources should be part of our response to a Church body. His orders forward part of our minds in all the services, functions, and meetings that we organize and participate in. This should include our service to our fellow man and community.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are considered the “big three” of Lenten practices. Together, they become the complete package - reminding us to focus on our relationship with God (Prayer), our need for transformation (Fasting), our connection to others, especially the poor and vulnerable (Almsgiving). These practices remind us to keep a balance in the way we treat Lent as a preparation time. We can tailor our approach to each toward whatever will challenge and help us the most. We each find different forms of prayer most compelling. We ought to consider choosing practices from all three rather than say, only focusing on what we will give up or abstain from during Lent. Several years ago the idea of giving up undesirable habits was the focus of our Sunday School lessons. This was to help us improve our treatment of others.

God guide me to answer Your commands with Your will in my life and give me the courage to take the steps as You guide me to take them. Praise be to You, our King of Kings. Amen

Frank and Mary Stillman

Saturday, February 17, 2018

FISHERMEN

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

Lately I have been thinking about Jesus' invitation to become fishers of men. The image that comes immediately to mind is of the disciples in a boat dropping a net over the side and it being filled to overflowing with fish. However, there were also times when they caught nothing at all. As this relates to fishing for people, there are times when there is bounty in response to our efforts. And there are times when there is no catch at all. Perhaps the times when we haven't asked the captain for direction about where to cast our lines.

While I can find no such example in the Bible, there's another scenario that seems to apply as well. Anyone who has ever been deep sea fishing or seen a TV program about it knows that sometimes you have to fight to catch a trophy fish. A fisherman may get a large fish on his line but must battle for hours to finally reel it in. The fish may seem to tire and begin to be reeled in only to find the strength to pull away again. When that fish is finally landed, it is valued all the more because the fisherman had to fight for it.

When fishing for people, we may think we are succeeding only to realize that our "battle with that fish" has just begun. Someone seems to be doing well only to slip back into destructive behaviors. We can become discouraged, and need coaching from our captain or encouragement from our companions. If we persevere and succeed, how sweet the victory when at last the person is "landed." And we should prize that person knowing that they were well worth our efforts.

Lord, help us to be successful fishers of men. Fill our nets and direct us when our nets come up empty. Help us to know that the one on our line, the one that we must work to reel in is valuable and worth our efforts. Amen.

Janet Craig

Sunday, February 18, 2018

Though his state was that of God yet he did not deem equality with God something he should cling to. Rather, he emptied himself, and assuming the state of a slave, he was born in human likeness. (Philippians 2:9-11)

That's quite a King we have who chooses again and again to descend taking the lower place. He shows this disposition in his birth in the choices he makes in friends and how he spends his time and in choosing to die on a cross. It is this model of descent that Jesus asks us to follow. That sure sounds counter-cultural! In a world where everything seems to speak of desire to go up, to make it to the top, to break the record, where "more is better", Jesus says "less is best" and follow me on the downward way. He is not looking for worshippers, he's looking for followers of this joyful, freeing, peaceful way.

So how do we follow the way of Jesus? We can begin by recognizing where we are and seeing where we are headed. Jesus leads us down the path--- letting go, releasing what we cling to in order to receive the love/truth that can only be received when we have our hands open. We too choose this way again and again because it is the way to abundant and eternal life.

Lord, teach me your ways so that I might be a faithful follower of your downward way. Amen

Rev. Bobbie Hinline

Monday, February 19, 2018

IT REALLY IS SIMPLE

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me. (EXODUS 20:1-3)

PARENTAL GUIDANCE 101:

“I am your mom, who gave birth to you. You shall: brush your teeth, use soap when you’re in there, eat your vegetables, sit up straight, “please” and “thank you”, do your homework, put your plate in the dishwasher, do not lie, own it--if you said or did it--, and go to bed.”

It really does seem simple when listed on a piece of paper or even just recited out loud. Putting it into action, at times, can be challenging! Throw in a monkey wrench of either party having an “off” day and the act in question may be lost and possible even forgotten how it all started.

Through my journey of being a mom, sure, I have had my times when my patience was tried, and found myself taking some deep breaths. But, no matter the situation, how the action evolved, what was done or ignored, there has never been a moment for either one of my children that my love ceased and forgiveness was not found. Unconditional love, a beautiful gift, even on those challenging days.

PRAYER: *Precious dear Lord, thank you for your unconditional love, understanding and forgiveness. May you always hold us in your heart and continue to guide us through the obstacles we stumble upon, in Jesus name. Amen.*

Tracy Barr

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

PLANS

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

I am big on plans. I plan my day, my week, and sometimes my month or year. So Jeremiah 29:11 has always been a favorite of mine.

The problem comes when my plans are more about me than about God. Sometimes my plans are too ambitious, leading to discouragement when I don't achieve my goals. Sometimes my follow-through isn't as strong as my planning ability. And sometimes, life happens. A work crisis, a child who needs attention, a sick pet... and poof! There go my plans.

That's why I'm trying to learn to fold my own plans into those God has for me. And it's funny: God's plans often don't look anything like my own. For example, when I was aiming to hit a particular production goal and double my newsletter subscribers in my writing business, God recently tapped my shoulder to suggest that "giving back" should be my target. The writing community has done so much for me over the years, and I'm grateful; now, I have the chance to help others as I was helped.

Interestingly enough, giving back never seems to conflict with my loved ones' needs. It's not really an ambitious goal—there's no number attached to it—so I am not tempted to overshoot. Instead, I've found unexpected opportunities to give back dropping into my lap. In addition to helping others, these opportunities have been leading me into better relationships and a deeper sense of satisfaction.

On the way to the cross, Jesus prayed: "not my will, but thine be done." Being fully human, he must have had his own plans, and they didn't include the terrible pain and suffering he was about to face. But he had the wisdom to realize that God's plan was best. How fortunate for all of us!

Lord, help me tune into your plans for me, and give me the strength to move into the future you've designed.

Lee Tobin McClain

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

AGE OF INNOCENCE

Father, mother, brother and I always had breakfast and dinner together. We took turns when it came time to say the "blessing." Back in those days Dad was the "bread winner." Both mother and dad did a great job of raising their two sons. As for the house doors being locked, we never worried about that. I was in high school and college in the late fifties and early sixties. The Lord's Prayer and the "Pledge of Allegiance" were an every school day event. We had respect for our teachers and professors. Most students lived with their parents. Each Sunday we would see our friends and neighbors where we worshipped.

Friday night football was a "social event." Cigarettes and beer were sometimes present but "drugs" were unheard of. After home football and basketball games there were dances at the "Armory" on North Pennsylvania Avenue. For those who might remember there was "Harry's Danceland" in Latrobe on Saturday nights.

Every so often Frankie Avalon, Bobby Vinton, Connie Francis, Paul Anka, or Bobby Darin, all "teenage idols", would make an appearance. The first week in college all freshmen were asked to attend an assembly. The president of the college made the statement, "Look to your left, look to your right," some of you will not be here at the beginning of the second semester.

Back in the sixties and seventies my favorite movie actor was "Marion Morrison", better known as John Wayne. I always enjoyed watching him in:

The Quiet Man
She Wore a Yellow Ribbon
The Horse Soldiers
The Alamo

"The Alamo" was on one of the cable channels in early January. It makes you proud to say, "I live in these United States," as well as being a real "tear jerker."

God bless us all.

Ed and Sue Meadows

Thursday, February 22, 2018

Who is the King of Kings and do I have a personal relationship with him? His name is Jesus and, Yes, the answer is Yes!

I have asked myself, "What do I need and want from this wonderful relationship in Him being my friend?" Firstly, my human need is for Jesus to forgive me of my sins and love me as a father loves his child, to trust that He hears my prayers, to teach me and guide my steps in His ways, to protect me from evil, to give me peace of mind and to be my #1 friend that I can call on, talk to, and feel his presence as he walks with me each and every day. I need Him to help me view each and every person as His beloved child, helping to end my judgments. When I read His words in the scriptures and apply them to myself, I feel renewed and refreshed. I need and want Him to restore those ever-creeping and critical negative thoughts into positive ones, allowing joy and peace to flow in my heart. I believe that He knows my needs and fulfills them.

Now comes the question to my mind, "What do I, in return, give to Jesus in this personal relationship we share?" I will continue to give him my heart that He has filled with love to give to others, to believe and trust in His words and promises, to willingly give myself, with the abilities that He has given me, to use for the good in helping others and always give Him my THANKSGIVING for the many blessings that He has poured out on me!

PRAYER; Jesus, as in the lesson where you healed the 10 lepers and only one returned to give thanks, help me to always remember to be like that one! You truly are my everlasting Friend and Savior. Amen

Carole Beam

Friday, February 23, 2018

FAITH AND BELIEF

As I sit here, wondering what I should say, my thoughts continue to go to my youth, when being in church was the only place I wanted to be. Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings, if the doors were open, I was there. Nothing could keep me away. As the years changed me, my attendance changed also. A job, a husband and a family took up my time now and the church was put on the back burner. But one thing remained constant, my belief and faith. My belief that God is always with me and faith that he would guide me through all things. I have been blessed throughout the years, a devoted, loving husband of 38 years, who passed away 11 years ago, two beautiful, healthy children and now two wonderful grandchildren. As a child, I was taught that God is always with me. God has guided me through many rough times. He has and continues to hear my prayers. Recently, my only daughter had a severe stroke. I continue to pray every day that God walk with us through this very difficult journey. Things are still not good with her, but my God is still with me and my family. We are blessed to still be together. I believe that we all must experience the hard times to understand and have faith that the Lord will take care of us. I reflect on all the teachings of my youth and remember that "The Lord is my Shepherd..." today, tomorrow and forever.

May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all the blessings you have bestowed on me throughout my life. Thank you for your Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for my sins. I ask your forgiveness for those sins, Lord. May you continue to bless and guide myself and family. Amen.*

Sandi Foreman

Saturday, February 24, 2018

WE ARE REMINDED

As the winter season begins to wane we begin to look forward to spring. We also begin the Lenten journey; we are reminded of knowing that the season lying ahead is in a trial of denial, the agony of Jesus and the cross.

As we see the spring being the time of renewal of life in God's creation, its new life coming alive again in the trees and plants along with the birds and rabbits being born. We are reminded of what Jesus did for us as our sacrifice for our sins. We are to be born again through him.

Spring may have also been the time of Jesus birth. Like the first seed sprout as it peaks through the earth to seek the light. We are reminded of the babe in the manger who became the light of this dark world.

O how the red and green Christmas M&M's, are also a reminder of Lent. The green, being for the "new life" and the red for the "blood" that was shed for us.

As the writer of 2 Peter 1:12 (NIV) states, *...I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them...*

God we also may need a reminder at times of things, even though we know them. In Jesus name we pray... Amen

Bruce A. Blackson

Sunday, February 25, 2018

MADE US TO BE A KINGDOM

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
(Revelation 1:4-6 ESV)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, a man had to be descended from Levi to be a priest to God. When Jesus came, He established a new kingdom. To be one of God’s priests, no longer was a male Levitical bloodline required. Instead, God poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2), so that all believers were qualified. The purpose of every man and woman whether young or old—who is living in the Kingdom of Christ—is to serve as a priest to the living God. Why? So that God may be glorified forever and ever. Amen!

That certainly is an overwhelming responsibility! Who could ever think that we are capable or qualified? Apparently God does. You and I are given the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit so that we may be a “kingdom of priests to our God.”

Prayer: Holy God, You call us to serve You. We answer with joy and fear! We are honored to be chosen but afraid we cannot do You justice. Pour out Your Holy Spirit anew that we may faithfully serve You and others. In Jesus’ Name and for the sake of His Kingdom, Amen.

Rev. August B. Twigg

Monday, February 26, 2018

Oh! Only if I Could Talk

I carried Jesus to Joseph's bedside.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

I carried Jesus to the river Jordan to be baptized by his cousin John the Baptizer. I heard a voice saying ... This is my son, in whom I am well pleased.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

As Jesus had the children on his knee ... O how I felt the joy of those children.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

I carried Jesus when he went to Gethsemane to pray ... O what a heavy heart he had.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

I carried Jesus to his being beaten ... Oh how I felt his blood dripping on me.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

I wept at Jesus' feet as I heard them driving the nails through his hands ... I felt every strike of the hammer as I looked up.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

I walked from the tomb with Jesus ... what joy I felt.

HALLELUJAH HE IS RISEN!!

Oh! Only if I could talk.

When Jesus carried me with him as he ascended into Heaven ... O what joy I had.

Oh! Only if I could talk.

LORD, you are with me through the joys of my life and you also carry me through the sorrows and difficult times of struggle. For I may be carrying so heavy of a time that I too will say ... Only if I could talk ... not knowing that you are already there carrying me. In Jesus name I pray ... Amen.

Bruce A. Blackson

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

(en obsurite in lucem)

Read Psalm 121

Recently, there was hustle and bustle of activity. It was due to an anticipated winter storm. Grocery shopping was paramount. At the store we saw our share of Methodists. Our anxiety: would we be prepared for a deluge of ice and snow in unknown depth and length, fueled by the hype of forecasters? Truth was, our dog, Gino, was out of food!

Winter seems to be the dark days in Western Pennsylvania. Frigid temps, freezing rain and inches to feet of snow. When you add the common cold or dangerous flu, this hinders our going out and coming in.

Spring, however, is bright with sun, blossoms, flowers, all new life! Cocoons become butterflies and birds sing songs. Plus, who is going to spot the first robin? Our weather and winter season sets the stage for the Lenten journey.

Lent is the time for self-examination through prayer to prepare us for the darkest time in Christian history: Jesus's crucifixion. However, we can be saved from death through his resurrection. Like Spring, this is a bright time, indeed! By God's merciful love, we have been given hope for eternal life. All we need to do is love God and live a holy life by serving him.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, during this Lenten season, help us to be faithful and aware of the great sacrifice: your son, Jesus. Amen.

Karen and Fred Pershing

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

STEPPING INTO OPPORTUNITY

Since July of 2017 when I had to face putting my day to rest, I have gotten lax on exercising. I've located my pedometer. It has motivated me to get a few more steps while caring for my leg-amputated son.

I wonder if our Christian life isn't a bit like that—there are opportunities to love and serve and interact with people every day. Am I always aware of those moments? Am I paying attention to be an encourager?

God is at work in all persons I relate to from family and grocery-store clerks. Who knows how God might work in those moments when we are alert to the opportunities He sends our way.

PRAYER: Lord, there are so many opportunities to love, listen and serve around us each day. Please help us to become people who notice the needs of others.

Jean Faust

Thursday, March 1, 2018

**Whatever the activity in which you engage, do it with all your ability, because there is no work, no planning, no learning, and no wisdom in the next world where you're going.
(Ecclesiastes 9:10)**

In my life I have learned the hard way that we need to put forth all effort if we want to do something great. Of course in everything we do if we honestly tell ourselves the truth, putting forth all of your effort is usually the hardest way but also the most rewarding way to do things. I am an athlete. I swim competitively and I also do track and field competitively. People always think that the main goal in these sports is to get first place because that is the place that gets you the most points, right? Well in truth that is the second thing that people in these sports need to be focusing on. The main goal is to beat yourself. Well how do you beat yourself? That makes no sense. I understand that this doesn't make sense yet, but it will. These sports are based strictly on the times you get in the race.

The main goal is to always get a better time than your last and that is always hard; technique can only get you so far. So you need to build strength in your arms, legs, and core. Strength doesn't come to you overnight – it takes hours upon days, weeks, months, and years. In the weight room you can do things by yourself like squats, push-ups, and crunches, to name a few. Then there are also the things that you can't do by yourself and you need a person to stand by you in case something were to happen.

On average I spend two hours in the pool and one in the weight room six days a week. At this point I bet you are thinking to yourself – OK so you are completely crazy and need to chill. Can you tell me what any of this has to do with Ecclesiastes 9:10? Well what I take from this verse is that God wants us to be able to prove that we are not wasting one of his gifts that has been given to us. Life on this earth, if we waste it by sitting around doing nothing productive, what does that say about us and how much we appreciate what we have been given?

It doesn't have to be sports – it can be music, dance, art, law, teaching, food, science, and so much more.

God please help us to try our hardest and give our whole being in all that we do and not to fall into the trap of being lazy.

Callysta Fontanazza

Friday, March 2, 2018

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S (Psalm 24:1)

Read Psalm 24

I feel fortunate that I have been able to fulfill my retirement dreams of travel. It has been on these adventures that I have become even more aware of God's handiwork. From the green meadows with grazing sheep of Britain, the highlands and lochs of Scotland, the Alps of Austria to the terraced vineyards of France and Portugal and the Dalmatian coast of Croatia beauty abounds. All these the work of our Lord. It is awesome! The best is yet to come, however, when we one day can see the beauty of Heaven.

Praise be to God.

Prayer from hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth"

*For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful
praise. Amen*

Pam Hamill

Saturday, March 3, 2018

And he said, thy brother came with subtlety, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, is not he rightly named Jacob? For he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him: and they wept. (Genesis 27:35-36)

My childhood was amazing, I was blessed with the greatest parents and grandparents ever. My late teenage years into my early twenties included some of my hardest times and greatest blessings. The obvious blessings from that time are my two oldest children, but some of my experiences during that time period were extremely well disguised blessings that at the time I would have never considered blessings at all.

My high school boyfriend eventually to become fiancé and I were together for four turbulent years. It was never a healthy relationship that constantly bordered on mental and physical abuse, he was also dating other women and had a poorly masked drug and alcohol problem. I don't know why I fought to stay with him as long as I did, but at the time I had many justifications. They just don't make sense any more.

Also during the same time period my father was suffering an extremely slow torturous death from MS. I was young and selfish. He was in pain and scared. My mom was working full time midnight shift and spending all her free time doing her best to take care of my dad and me. He had changed from someone I can't ever even remember raising his voice to being explosively angry and saying hurtful things constantly. I had gone from a sweet little girl to a mean thoughtless teenager who couldn't see past herself. My mother got the worst of us both.

I gave birth to my oldest daughter when I was 19 in September 2002. At that time my father was declining pretty fast. Also things had gotten progressively worse in my relationship with my fiancé. Now that I had my baby and was pregnant with our second I could no longer justify the things that I used to. I ended our relationship when I was 9 months pregnant on Mother's day.

In June 2004 I had my second daughter. My mother couldn't visit me at the hospital for very long because my dad was much worse and she couldn't leave him alone for extended periods of time. My ex showed up for a short period of time then left to be with his girlfriend. It was hard. I had one amazing friend who came and spent a night in the hospital with me, but at the time I was so wrapped up in my own pain I didn't even appreciate the gesture like I should have.

Saturday, March 3, 2018 - Cont'd

My father continued his decline until we were forced to put him into a home. I don't think my mother ever slept during that time period. She would go straight from work to the home every day. I visited too, but not as much as I should have. He passed away in January 2005.

It was a really hard time, I was lost. Within a year everything had changed in ways that I never would have conceived. During this time period I was a mess, but my children saved me as my mother and my friend supported me. All the plans I had ever had were gone. I wasn't supposed to be a single parent. Not to mention the supreme guilt I felt for how I had treated my father, not being there for him the way I should have. He had always taken care of me, he never let me down. I repaid him by giving him the worst of me when he needed me the most. I also let my mother down by not giving her the help and support she needed. Like Esau I'd felt like I lost so much. I was filled with anger and self-loathing.

During this time it was hard for me to see my blessings, but they were numerous. My children, mother and my friend were the biggest and the best among them.

God provided for me. He gave me so much love that I didn't stay broken. He gave me my children who saved my life. I had to live well so that my choices wouldn't ruin their chances. He gave me my mother who never stopped loving me no matter how difficult I could be. He gave me a best friend to support me until I could stand on my own. My life took a new direction.

If I hadn't had that horrible break up I would never have had a husband who I love and trust. It's not always perfect, but we bring out the best in each other. If it were not for my previous relationship I know that I could not appreciate him as much as I do. I also would not have had my third daughter and my son and I would not want

Saturday, March 3, 2018 - Cont'd

to imagine a world without them. Thank God that my life went according to his plans for me and not mine. If life would have taken the path I had planned I would not be who I am now or have the life that I have now. The hardships were well worth it because I love my life.

Another blessing I've taken from then is my guilt of how I treated my dad. It was truly a blessing and a curse. It's still painful for me to think about my relationship with him during the last years of his life especially because we were so close for so very long. However it's taught me an incredible lesson. I value my family so much I don't ever want to take them for granted. I want them to always know that I love them. I want to live my life for God and for them. It's not just the big efforts when you love someone it's also the little daily acts, together they add up to so much.

In the end Esau embraced Jacob. Like Esau I made it past losing what I had expected to be my life and have been truly blessed in ways that at the time I couldn't have imagined possible. It may not be what I originally planned for, but it is so much better than I could have ever dreamed.

Lord thank you for all our unanswered prayers. Amen.

Glenda Rupert-Mester

Sunday, March 4, 2018

Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all. (Mark 9:35)

We know nothing of the child Jesus chose to be an object lesson that day. He was small enough to be engulfed in adult arms that's for certain. He could have been blessed with doting parents. Possibly he was an orphan living on the streets barely scraping by on meager handouts. Perhaps all his life no one paid him the slightest attention until the moment when Jesus yanked him out of the crowd bear-hugged him and said "whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

The disciples had been arguing about greatness, specially who was the greatest among them.

We still hear the same argument today; voices all around us clamoring for attention...shrilly, stridently and shamelessly claiming to have achieved greatness. But to hear Jesus tell it greatness isn't achieved. It isn't earned. It's conferred. Greatness is servanthood pure and simple, Jesus said. And he was dead serious when he said it.

Help us O God to learn and live true greatness. Amen

Chuck Nash

Monday, March 5, 2018

SIMON OF CYRENE

As it is told in the Gospels, Simon of Cyrene was chosen by a guard to carry the cross of Christ the last mile to Golgotha. Jesus had already been whipped, beaten, and a crown of thorns puncturing into his head, prior to carrying his own cross. His physical strength was exhausted.

Simon only lightened his physical burden for just a short time...the last mile. Christ carried it ALL for us! Simon probably had Jesus' blood on his hands and clothes. It does not matter if Simon was chosen to do so or not. It was Simon or maybe yourself to be there in the last miles.

OUR Simon may come from family, friends, support, or other help through our struggles. We all have to help each other at times to lighten the load of one's cross. Our cross may be seen by others as a light yoke. But, to the one carrying, it is real, and may be a heavy burden for them. Just as the guard thought it was for Jesus.

*Grant me the strength and grace that I may also carry another's burden. For it is said, that **"whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."** (Matthew 25:45 niv), In Jesus' name I pray...AMEN*

Bruce A. Blackson

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

Many events happen in our life that can stir up many emotions. Sometimes what we feel is anger – other times we feel sadness. A lot of people turn to God as well as away from him in dark times. The people who turn away from God usually do it because they don't understand why an event happened in their life. Though no one truly knows why certain events happen to us and other people, to me, Proverbs 3:5 means that we know so little and when we try to put our own reasons towards what we don't know, it can blind us from seeing God. The Lord knows and has a reason for everything, and although he may not tell us his plan, we should know that God will keep us safe within his hands. All we can do is trust in him so we can help him, help ourselves, and others.

Dear God, please help us to trust you with everything in our heart, and please Lord, help us not to lean so heavily on our own thoughts. Amen.

Chloe Fontanazza

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

**I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.
(Philippians 4:12-13)**

In our lives each day we try to find what is positive and good and what gives meaning to our life. I usually look to the basics of family, friends and the nature around us. Life seems to be filled with so many struggles that sometimes it can feel overwhelming especially when multiple things happen at the same time. What do we do and how do we go about handling what we are given? First I try to remember that God is with us in all ways. Central to our lives are family and friends and that is important to always keep in mind. A little over a year ago we were blessed with the birth of a granddaughter. God does give blessings. Let's try to enjoy what good is given to us.

Thank you God for what you give to us. Help us to enjoy it. Help us also to deal with the adversities that life gives to us. Amen.

Kerry Thompson

Thursday, March 8, 2018

What if you woke up today with only the things that you thanked God for yesterday. That's a profound statement. It was the last thing I expected to see in one of my home shopping catalogs. It was a wall hanging and it was the answer to my prayer asking for help coming up with a devotional idea for this booklet.

I have to say I do pray nearly daily and my prayers always begin with a thank you for giving me another day. I pray for my family and friends and people I know who are having health issues or family issues or just need support. I thank God daily for my good health that allows me to work to support myself and my family. My prayers became more regular when my husband Ray and I were dealing with his dementia. Then I prayed for courage and stamina to do what I needed to do. It was abundantly clear that I had much to be thankful for.

I remember going to a seminar many years ago about the "attitude of gratitude" and so many of the things we discussed resonated with me. But, I have to say when I look out into the world, I don't see much gratitude. I see more evidence of entitlement. People expecting, even demanding things. Government programs seem to be designed to keep generations of Americans dependent and others who seem to be deserving, who are trying to help themselves, don't qualify.

Where is the gratitude? We all need to spend time in prayer thanking God for everything we have. How many times have you said "I think I have problems until I see someone else struggling with theirs." It seems to me that thanking God is the least we can do for the abundance that we have.

We are so grateful for what we have Lord. Forgive us when we forget to thank you for all that has been provided to us. Keep us mindful of those who are suffering and in need. Help us to make a difference where and when we can. Help us to keep an attitude of gratitude.

Sherry Miller

Friday, March 9, 2018

**Do to others as you would have them do to you.
(Luke 6:31)**

I have experienced many things like this for example I have helped my friends by telling them what page handwriting was on or helping them with math. But yet my siblings and I are not always nice to each other. I am going to tell you why it is better to treat people nicely and not like dirt. If you don't treat people nicely and treat them like dirt they will treat you like dirt right back at you. My grandma always says it takes two to fight. She also says two wrongs don't make a right.

So when my brother, my sisters, and I are mean to each other it makes all of us feel sad and I don't want to make anybody sad the way I sometimes feel. So when we are nice to people it might help them more than we think. That is why you should treat people how you want to be treated.

Dear God please help all of us here and at home treat people with respect. Lord please let us all remember to treat people kindly and with respect. Thank you Lord Amen.

Cheyenne Miller

Saturday, March 10, 2018

PROCRASTINATION AND INDELIBLE INK

Put off, around-to-it (remember that hot pad?) no inspiration yet...all excuses that I wrongly call reasons for not having composed this devotional in a *“more timely manner.”* That term was in my head from my teen years throughout all of my formal education. It was, however, that very characteristic that decided my topic. I googled “procrastination” and found a site that quoted Proverbs 20:4: *“Those too lazy to plow in the right season will have no food at the harvest.”* I think I got that...if I don’t do what I’m supposed to do when I promised to do it, I’ve failed myself or someone else. Not inspirational! Yes, but not new knowledge.

Then, I found a website titled “45 Bible Verses for Procrastination”. Woo hoo: That’s for me! The author had many headings; I read on and suddenly..BOOM! Hebrews 12:1-3: *“Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance that race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

This sermon was preached by our interim pastor Reverend Dick Marple who walked about and talked about his great cloud of witnesses who were role models in the formation of his faith. It was like a conversation with friends. Seeing these verses again nudged me on to think about my great cloud of witnesses which in turn resulted in this, my emotional devotional.

The first person on my cloud as an adult, is my late best friend, Maryann Peterson. My beloved husband lay dying of lung cancer. Sweet, kind, loving Maryann gently asked me if I thought Jake was at peace and who I was going to have officiate at his funeral. I had never given it a thought. My blank stare, she knew I had been unchurched for the past 25 years, was returned by her compassion and understanding. She immediately called her pastor, Rev. Dr. Jack Aupperle. Within the hour, he appeared at my door, and then came every day, joining the 2 cats, 1 dog, 4 adult sons, 2 grandsons, one an infant, and me on our king size bed. His eulogy was as though he

Saturday March 10, 2018—Cont'd

knew us all, all of our lives; I decided after the acute numbness wore off, "This is my church." Jack holds a place on that cloud.

I attended this church with Maryann since 1991 when Jake died...as a consumer. I attended every Sunday to update and maintain my faith. Enter Rev. Bob Wilson. I listened to his sermons attentively and almost always thought, "How did you know that about me?" Then Maryann became ill, very, very ill. Bob visited when we girlfriends were with her in ICU. He knew Maryann well; he knew she was heaven bound. When it was clear that our dear Maryann would soon join her husband, Jay, and parents in heaven, Bob stayed with us, for us, and watched in the night until her final earthly moment. Bob Wilson has a name tag on that cloud.

I eventually remarried, continued my Sunday mornings in church and, on occasion would be a greeter when Charlie Johnson would get to "my" pew. Being a social being I was almost always happy, especially in church. Jill Croushore smilingly approached me one Sunday and invited me to join her hospitality committee. I accepted (shhhh) as long as I didn't have to do too much. She enlisted many but her knowledge along with Shirley Neill's knowledge and experience made for work to be done, help to give, statistics to keep. Even in those days her sights focused on welcoming the new and nourishing the old. More schooling and a full-time job encouraged her to pass on the hospitality torch, still always having ideas.

Jill and Shirley who both helped me to form a more mature and meaningful faith and Martha Nash, the Great Encourager, with wisdom in life and death and all living in between...these women occupy space on that cloud. There are several more, particularly my girlfriends, whose lives and families exemplify living the fruits of the spirit, will be for another, another time.

Oh, and what does indelible ink have to do with procrastination? Well, this is a Lenten devotional. What if Christ had put off sacrificing, suffering, dying on the cross to save us from our sins? What if there was not enough inspiration for the horror in store? All moot pints; he **DID** suffer and die for us. He **DID** what He was sent to do when He was supposed to do it. We **ARE** saved and it's written in indelible ink for now and forevermore and that's a fact!

Laurel Sedlacko

Sunday, March 11, 2018

HE IS KING OF KINGS

"My food said Jesus is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." (John 4:34)

The very first thing that entered my mind upon hearing of this year's theme was music to an old chorus that I had learned a very long time ago the title of which matches the theme exactly! Surfing the Web to refresh my memory of the verses. I discovered that it is an African-American Spiritual. (Find it in The Presbyterian Hymnal, 1990, page 153.) And here is the text in its entirety:

HE IS KING OF KINGS

1 Timothy 6:15-16

Revelation 19:16

REFRAIN: ...He is King of kings He is Lord of lords
Jesus Christ the first and last, no one works like
Him.

He built His throne up in the air no one works like Him,
And called His saints from everywhere no one works like Him.

REFRAIN:...O He is...

He pitched His tents on Canaan ground no one works like Him,
And broke oppressive kingdoms down, no one works like Him.

REFRAIN:...O He is...

I know that my Redeemer lives, no one works like Him,
And by His love sweet blessing gives, no one works like Him.

REFRAIN:...O He is...

We journey through this Lenten season as a time of personal reflection and introspection. So nothing is more simple, yet profound, as a Spiritual to express the depths of such contemplation. This Spiritual lifts up Jesus Christ as the "first and the last," the Alpha and the Omega. And the refrain proclaims that work of Christ as supreme. "no one works like Him!" Indeed it is true! In John 4:34 Jesus makes clear the priority of doing God's will and finishing God's work. [See above] That work of course, was the Cross upon which Jesus later would hang and cry out, "it is finished! "No one works like Him."

Sunday, March 11, 2018-Cont'd

Other truths in the Spiritual remind us that Jesus calls us, ["His saints," literally those "set apart and called out" for God's purposes from every place to join Him in his task to remove oppression everywhere and tell of the sweet blessings given by His love. But, again and again, it is His work, His accomplishment on the Cross, that returns as primary. In this season, let us keep our thought and focus upon the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of us and of the whole world, on the Cross. "No one works like Him!"

Rev. Aimee W. Twigg, Retired

Monday, March 12, 2018

Psalm 95:1-7 & John 10:1-18

In the opening verses of Psalm 95 we are encouraged to bow down and worship the King of Kings our creator, our redeemer, our shepherd...and to praise him in music and song.

In the gospel of John, Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd, who would lay down his life for his flock, whose sheep know his voice and entrust themselves to his care.

In a beautiful hymn praising our shepherd king, Henry William Baker writes these words:

The King of love my shepherd is
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine forever.

Through God's Word we understand his loving relationship with us. We bow down before Him in prayer. With music and song, we thank our Savior for His sacrificial love and for His tender care throughout all the seasons of our lives.

In the words of this beautiful hymn:

*And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house forever."*
Amen.

Ellen Briggs

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore, I will call on him as long as I live. (PSALM 16:1-2)

Do you have a problem? Does it sit in the back of your brain and pick at your nerves? It is so easy to say, "Give that problem over to God and forget it." But we humans are always taking back the things we turn over to Him. It's as though we don't feel really alive unless we are dealing with a problem.

The next time something nags at you, create a personal action prayer. Here's how. Write the problem on a piece of paper. Identify it simply and concisely. State it in a positive manner. Use Your choice name for God. Include yourself. Develop a prayer of ten words or less.

Examples: Lord, help me to love Aunt Susie.
Patience and I can be one, dear Jesus.
May my work be for the glory of God.

Now commit your little prayer to memory. Put it to a tune if you would like. Say or sing your personal action prayer continually throughout the day. Use that little prayer for as long as you feel the problem exists. Then tear up the piece of paper on which it was written. God and you have solved another problem.

PRAYER: *Dear God, hear my little prayer and take action through me.*

Judy Molter

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me...I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him. (John 14:1, 6-7)

When I first began my serious search to know God, I had several concerns and reservations about the divinity of Jesus. Was he really the Son of God? Was Jesus really different from others such as Abraham, Moses, and especially Elijah? Why did the God of Abraham see the necessity to send of Himself, in Jesus, to His chosen people?

The Gospel of John helped me to understand the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. Jesus was necessary to reveal God Himself. To show that God was more than His Commandments and Laws. To show God's compassion and love for the less fortunate among us. To teach us and to reveal God in the Way, the Truth and the Life. That the Way to know God is to know Jesus.

This understanding and knowledge helps to lead one to Faith, to belief without seeing. This Faith was shown by the beloved disciple that narrates the Gospel of John.

...then the other disciple (John), who reached the (empty) tomb first, also went in, and he saw and he believed. (John 20.8)

So as we enter the Lenten Season, let us remember the importance of "believing without seeing". This is the foundation of Faith in God and Jesus.

Scott McWalter

Thursday, March 15, 2018

ACTS OF KINDNESS

I have in my possession a button from a Russian soldier's uniform. It was presented to me as an overdue "Thank You" gift by an old Russian soldier. It was a beautiful day in May and I was sitting alone on a park bench watching swimmers in the canals of St. Petersburg, Russia. An old man surprised me by sitting beside me and engaging me in a brief conversation. He first said something like, "You are an American, aren't you?" I didn't feel alarmed or afraid and answered, "Yes, I am." I just want "to thank you as I'm here today because the Americans saved my life!" Then he explained how the Nazis had cut off the supply routes as a strategy to starve them to death. It was winter and the Americans came in from the north, crossed a frozen lake and brought the food that saved his life and many other lives. He said this is the first opportunity he'd ever had to say "Thank You" to an American for his life. And he smiled at me and I smiled back as he placed the button in the palm of my hand.

I was part of two Church Mission trips to Russia probably 20 years ago. My hope is that the button will remind me of the blessings I receive daily from my Lord and fail to acknowledge.

Shirley Neill

Friday, March 16, 2018

***“Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me...”
(Luke 22:39-46)***

Once again we awaken in the morning tired and depressed with a feeling of foreboding. It happens so often these nights of restless sleep. We worry about the events of the world, the test results, the wounding hurts, the health of a loved one. How can we make it right? What can we do?

Consider Christ that night when He was at prayer in Gethsemane. His nights were filled with despair, fear and dread of the pending crucifixion. Of course, He was scared! Emotionally distraught. So stressful that He sweated blood!! He had come to the place of absolute and complete release of His loved ones and personal desires into the hands of God. “Remove the cup from me.”

By releasing our worries and our loved ones into His hands we show not that we care less about them but that we care more. We are so limited in what we can do!

God is the doer—not we
Prayer did not deliver our Lord from suffering— it
delivered Him through it.

Sleep well, knowing that God is taking care of it all.

“Cast all our anxiety on Him.” (1 Peter 5:7)

Rest. Assured.

Martha Nash

Saturday, March 17, 2018

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

I wouldn't say that I've had the hardest life, but it hasn't been a walk in the park either. In the past couple of years especially, I have had many trials and unexpected times of pain probably the hardest moments of my entire life. I think the biggest, most important step in tackling these hardships is keeping a bright outlook as we go through our days. It's not always as easy as it is said, but keeping a head up and a smile on your face is always the first step to becoming closer to God and to have a happy life.

God was always with me since I can remember. I can honestly say that I always felt his presence as a child and through high school. Life at home was always an adventure with a father with health issues so there were always prayers being sent up for good health. It wasn't until two years ago that my faith faltered. My father, a faithful believer of Jesus and the Bible, passed away after bringing me home from classes. I didn't think it was fair and I wondered the question many others asked in a time of pain: "Why?"

But because of the influence of my father's words and his strong faith, I turned to the Bible for comfort. There are many passages that I read and reread to find peace. And even though it still is tough, I know I can get through each day because of my faith. I realized that I shouldn't fear. There's nothing I should worry about because God is in charge and he will take care of me. Days come where I feel down, sluggish or stressed but I know the next day is coming and there's a reason to move towards it. In these

Saturday, March 17, 2018—Cont'd

past two years since then I have accomplished so much. I have been able to make it to my senior year in college, get a job I have never imagined having and have worked towards my future with high hopes, with many adventures along the way.

Not every life is the same and I am a strong believer that discussion of personal experiences can help someone else's faith. It took many months to get back on my feet and a few more to actually get walking again. The Bible had been a crutch that continues to amaze me with its power. God the mighty the kind and the empowering has given me that faith and strength I need to continue on my life journey, and he gave his Son to walk along beside me the entire way.

Looking back now, I know I wouldn't have come out of the biggest change of my life the same if it wasn't for the power of Christ. My advice for those who are going through a bump, hill or mountain in the road is to listen to the words of wisdom. Do not fear. God is with you. Do not fret. Rely on the awesome power and love of God. He will strengthen you and get you through anything and everything you encounter, even if it seems there's no way out. It will work out and you will continue on your path because Jesus is walking with us, no matter the terrain. All you have to do is to grab his hand.

Laramie Cowan

Sunday, March 18, 2018

IN THIS VERY ROOM

I was glad when they said unto me “let us go into the house of the Lord. (Psalm 122:1)

Come apart with me and go where the King of kings has been made known unto countless numbers of men, women, children...it is a place you know well...the sanctuary and nave of First United Methodist Church. But you must be prepared to see as well as look, to feel as well as talk, to open your hearts and imagination...ready?

Albert Schweitzer, renowned missionary and organist, shared: When I see churches in which modern architects had tried to embody the ideal of a “preacher’s church” I feel a sinking of the heart. A church is more than where one listens to sermons, it is a place for devotions. There is need of distance which lends to the mood of the worshipper so that the outward gaze can change to the inner one. The chancel therefore [should] flood a kind of transfiguring glory...to take us from the finite to the infinite wrapped in peace and quiet. *(Edited)*

As you look toward the chancel in our church, note the high arches above you, and down each side of the nave, framing the windows. All pointing to God. And there high above us again and again is the symbol of the cross and shield. Placed there by our forefathers in the faith that would put Christ above all. In fact the Methodist Church at that time was engaged in a Crusade for Christ...hence that shield and cross. At the top of the chancel is the beautiful rose window (remember the allusion to Christ as the rose of Jesse’s stem) with Christ in the center with the Bible in one hand and the other raised in peace. Christ the King who brings light and hope for all. He is surrounded by the symbols of the 4 gospels through which we come to know him. Note the symbols for Alpha and Omega...I am the first and the last.

Sunday, March 18, 2018—Cont'd

The red glass in all the window represents the blood of Christ; the blue represents hope which he brings. The Reredos and Altar beneath the window are intricately carved by hand, it does not take too much imagination to see the Italian workman sneaking in a modified crucifix at the very center of the Reredos. The Main Altar Cross has replicated some of the trefoils of the carvers; also the four Altar Candles representing the 4 gospels. Sometime go up to the Altar and see if you can make out the word carved around the Victor's wreath—symbol of Christ's victory over death...King of kings. If you turn and look east you will see the great Nativity window...and don't forget the small windows of faith, hope, and love which are beneath it. Study this window, know the greatness of our Lord and Master. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!

Father fill us with the devotion and love for you that those who worked providing this sanctuary must have had. Grant us your peace.

Rev. Robert C. Wilson

Monday, March 19, 2018

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." he took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:32-36 NIV)

Taking the trip to Gethsemane with Mark (14:32-36) helps me to remember that Jesus was a person and to contemplate the enormity of the sacrifice he was about to make. Sometimes, I forget that Jesus was living in the world as normal, everyday people live in it. This passage reminds me that Jesus realized what he was facing and was afraid, that he reached out in prayer for help, and that he wanted an all-powerful God to make the sacrifice go away. Instead, Jesus is given the strength to face his own, terrible death. His prayer, like all human prayers, receives an answer but not necessarily the answer wanted.

Reading this passage, I feel a connection to Jesus, the human, and that brings home to me the sacrifice God was willing to make for all of us.

Dear God, when we hear the story of the death of Jesus, let us be reminded of the very real sacrifice made to demonstrate your love and commitment to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pat Ebert

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

I WILL TRUST IN THE LORD

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you declares the LORD, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the LORD, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

I am not a patient man and I can get frustrated and depressed when I feel that I am not making progress. After my divorce, I felt lonely at times and wanted to have someone share my life. I prayed to God to send someone into the church for me. Months went by and nothing happened. I became more despondent and wondered when my prayers would ever be answered. Then on March 19, 2016, a stranger walked into the Saturday night service. She had just relocated to the Greensburg area. Upon gazing at her, I was overwhelmed by a feeling that someone was telling me, "There she is". I found the courage to speak with her after the service and we discovered that we had many things in common. She is now my wife and we both thank God every day that she came into the service that evening.

John Weaver

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

We frequently hear exhortations to “pray for peace” and read about “peace talks” between various groups of negotiators. While I believe that constant and consistent efforts to promote peace between warring factions and countries is extremely important, on a personal level I find myself praying for peace with a different meaning for myself and for others.

The meaning of the peace that I seek is not so much an absence of conflict problems, or difficult situations, but is more an inner sense of doing the best that I can to follow God’s plan. The promise of “Peace I leave with you” did not ensure smooth sailing through the days of our lives or a freedom from situations that test our stamina and faith. To me, the promise means that we can rely on achieving an inner peace when we have sought guidance to do what is right and good and have used our talents and energy to achieve the best results possible in everyday life, with kindness, humility, and joy.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

This is the peace that I seek for all of us.

Barbara Hinkle

Thursday, March 22, 2018

ANGELS

For He shall give His angels charge over you. To keep you in all your ways. (Psalm 91:11)

God not only gives each and every one of us a Guardian Angel but the ultimate gift his wonderful Son to die for our sins.

Each year at this time of Lent my thoughts try to focus on the best ways to daily prepare toward Easter Sunday to feel gratitude for what God has done for us.

For some reason I can't help and reflect on so many times I have felt the presence of "my" angel...just a little nudge here and there to do the right thing or avoid a problem and an almost accident...and how many times have you witnessed an angel among us? It could be a good friend or a kind gesture when you are out in public...or did you get that strong urge to call a certain person or relative and they respond, "oh, how did you know I really needed to talk to someone today"...that's when I think...thank you angel.

So my focus each day will be to try to help when I can and thank God through these acts for giving us our Lord and Savior...King of Kings.

Mary Lou Fitzgerald

Friday, March 23, 2018

**It is the Lord who directs a man's steps,
He holds him firm and watches over his path.
Though he may fall he will not go headlong
For the Lord grasps him by his hand.
(Psalm 37:23-24)**

2011—The year began with exciting promise. My younger son was graduating from college in March and my first grandchild was due in June.

Things changed however. My life changed course without notice. In February during a routine mammogram a lump was discovered. A biopsy determined surgery was necessary. It was shocking news to me. I decided to wait until the family was together at graduation to break the news.

The weekend of graduation arrived. My family, including my mother met in Columbus. Tragic news, however, changed our happiness to great sorrow. On Saturday, my brother died suddenly at age 57. I was in a panic. I was grieving for my brother, but now I had the dreadful task of telling my mother that my brother Gary died; and that I needed surgery for breast cancer.

Through prayer I asked for guidance in choosing the right words to tell my mother of Gary's passing. It was certainly the most difficult thing I had ever done. I knew how devastating the loss would be for my mother. My news about surgery would have to wait.

With God's help I was able to explain my brother's passing. God is always there for the faithful. My trust in God made me stronger; he is always with me. It was with God's steadfast love that I later went through surgeries and chemotherapy that same year.

Dear Lord help us remember that your love is always with us. Keep our hearts filled with gratitude for all your concern and guidance.

Sandy Gardner

Saturday, March 24, 2018

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4)

We had been to church, my mother and I. We had gone out to eat and accomplished some errands. Two days later, my mother sustained a massive stroke and nine days later, she passed through death to eternal life.

My reflections over the past eighteen months are many. The depth of my loss is great, but the depth of my thankfulness to God is also great.

The support of my church, my family and friends, daily devotionals, and the reassurance that because of Jesus we are never alone, has helped to sustain me in my grief.

I was blessed with parents whose lives were based on faith, Biblical values, and love of country. My parents did "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) In the words of the Bible, I know one day we will be together again.

"Faith is seeing God in the dark and the light." Author and artist, Joni Eareckson Tada wrote that "Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at His word, and taking the next step."

As we approach a new Lenten season, may we recall what Norman Vincent Peale once said: "Remember, you do not go into the New Year on your own, but with the loving God who has walked with you ever since you were a child."

PRAYER: *Thank you, Jesus, for being my lighthouse yesterday, today and forever.*

Rebecca F. Slyman

Sunday, March 25, 2018

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:13-20)

The term “Christian” means “Christ-follower.” Christians agree that Jesus is the only way to eternal life with God. Other religions believe there are other ways. Only Christianity teaches that our hope lies, not in ascending to god-like status, but in God descending to become man. Paul sets forth in Colossians a definitive discourse, an air-tight defense, that Jesus is the only way, and because he is the only way, Jesus has the rights and privileges of the title and position: King of Kings.

Hear again Paul’s description of Jesus:

- Image of the invisible God firstborn of all creation.
- Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, all things have been created thru (Jesus) and for (Jesus).
- (Jesus) is before all things, and in (Jesus) all things hold together.
- (Jesus) is the head of the body, the Church.
- (Jesus) is the beginning; the firstborn from the dead so that (Jesus) might have first place in everything.

Sunday, March 25, 2018 - Cont'd

- In (Jesus) all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell. And thru (Jesus) God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things: whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace thru the blood of (Jesus') cross.

Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus is the King of Kings, and invites each of us to be part of his Kingdom. Everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord is part of the Kingdom of God, and it's a Kingdom that God places within your heart. It's a Kingdom of love and light! People can tell we belong to the King Jesus, and that we are part of God's Kingdom, by how we live our lives.

Isaiah 9:6 says, ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*** Jesus - is the mighty God. Jesus – is God, the Son. Our God, Jesus, IS the King of Kings.

Rev. Patricia M. Nelson
District Superintendent

Monday, March 26, 2018

THE HOUR I KNEW I BELIEVED

Sometimes it is hard for me to process that I have now lived longer without my Dad than when he graced my life. In so many ways he has remained with me and given me strength in times when I struggled to find answers. I forever wonder, what would he have done?

He died of a heart attack, suddenly, in 1982. I was 30 years old. No matter what your age, you are never prepared for the loss of a parent. The grief you feel is wrapped together with the understanding that your life will forever be different. You lose a part of yourself. I was no different.

It would help you to know what kind of man Ray Kennedy was.

He was the oldest of three boys. From the very beginning he was put to the test. His own father struggled with tuberculosis for years and then died far too young at the age of 43. My Dad had to quickly grow up and become a source of emotional and financial support for his mother and brothers. They struggled to make ends meet and then when the Depression hit, things got even worse. But he adored his mother and would never let her down. Elizabeth Kennedy, my grandmother, also died young, at the age of 53 and my Dad's world was rocked at the foundation. But he endured the monstrous grief and continued to be the source of strength for his younger brothers. Then it was off to fight in the Pacific and I am sure he would have wondered if he would even make it home again.

Well, naturally, he did. When he did, he started a family and by 1952 when I was born he had three sons and we would forever be, in his words, his greatest source of pride. But as I grew up I realized that the only thing that meant more to him was his faith. His faith was not a demonstrative one. It was a quiet, rock solid one. Until the day he died he prayed quietly in his room, every night, before he went to bed. He

Monday, March 26, 2018 - Cont'd

would no more think of missing church on Sunday than he would have considered harming his sons or missing a day of work. Just being with him made you want to be a better person. We all wanted to please him because we knew that if he stood for something, it had to be the right thing. Like so many folks who endured the Depression, he made every cent count. But even though we lived very modestly, we always felt safe, and loved, and proud of our Christian faith.

So, when he died in March of 1982 I felt true grief for the first time in my life. I had so many things I wanted to tell him. I wanted to tell him that I truly loved him and I admired everything about him. I wanted to be a better man because of him. I prayed for one last chance to talk to him, to feel him near me and tell me it would all be ok. But he was gone, and I would never have that chance...or so I thought.

A few weeks later it was Easter and naturally, we went to church. Sunday Mass always made me think of him and, on that Easter, I was overcome with grief and I started to cry and once again prayed that I would see him again. And then, as sure as anything I have ever felt in my life, I felt him. I felt him not only spiritually but physically. I knew he was reaching out to me, to tell me...it would all be ok. I had that chance to say my good-byes and tell him he was the greatest man I ever knew.

He imbued me with the same kind of faith that he enjoyed but, admittedly it occasionally waivers. But for that Easter Sunday and every day since, I KNEW I BELIEVED.

**And behold a voice out of the heavens said, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.
(Matthew 3:17)**

Dennis Kennedy

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

THAT'S MY KING! DO YOU KNOW HIM?

My King was born King. The Bible says He's a Seven Way King. He's the King of the Jews—that's an ethnic King. He's the King of Israel—that's a National King. He's the King of righteousness. He's the King of the ages. He's the King of Heaven. He's the King of glory. He's the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords. Now that's my King.

Well, I wonder if you know Him. Do you know Him? Don't try to mislead me. Do you know my King? David said the Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. My King is the only one of whom there are no means of measure that can define His limitless love. No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of the shore of His supplies. No barriers can hinder Him from pouring out His blessing.

He's enduringly strong. He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He's impartially merciful. That's my King. He's God's Son. He's the sinner's Savior. He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands alone in Himself. He's honest. He's unique. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He's supreme. He's pre-eminent. He's the grandest idea in literature. He's the highest personality in philosophy. He's the supreme problem in higher criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of historic theology. He's the carnal necessity of spiritual religion. That's my King.

He's the miracle of the age. He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him. He's the only one able to supply all our needs simultaneously. He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and He saves. He's the Almighty God who guides and keeps all his people. He heals the sick. He cleanses the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharged debtors. He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek. That's my King.

Tuesday, March 27, 2018 - Cont'd

Do you know him? Well, my King is a King of knowledge. He's the wellspring of wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. He's the master of the mighty. He's the captain of the conquerors. He's the head of the heroes. He's the leader of the legislatures. He's the overseer of the overcomers. He's the governor of governors. He's the prince of princes. He's the King of kings and He's the Lord of lords. That's my King. His office is manifold. His promise is sure. His light is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His Word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I wish I could describe Him to you...but He's indescribable. That's my King. He's incomprehensible, He's invincible, and He is irresistible.

I'm coming to tell you this, that the heavens of heavens cannot contain Him, let alone some man explain Him. You can't get Him out of your mind. You can't get Him off of your hands. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him. The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree about Him. Herod couldn't kill Him. Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him. That's my King.

He always has been and He always will be. I'm talking about the fact that He had no predecessor and He'll have no successor. There's nobody before Him and there'll be nobody after Him. You can't impeach Him and He's not going to resign. That's my King! That's my King!

Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Well, all the power belongs to my King. We're around here talking about black power and white power and green power, but in the end all that matters is God's power. Thine is the power. Yeah. And the glory. We try to get prestige and honor and glory for ourselves, but the glory is all His. Yes. Thine is the Kingdom and the power and glory, forever and ever and ever and ever. How long is that? Forever and ever and ever and ever... And when you get through with all the evils, then...Amen!

S. M. Lockridge, Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, San Diego

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

GIFTS DIFFERING

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” (ROMANS 12:6)

Everyone has a gift. You’ve heard it said, “Don’t hide it under a bushel.”

What if Bach had done that? Imagine how hard it was for him to practice in a cold, unheated church, having to climb several flights of stairs to get to the organ and needing a crew to pump the bellows. How was he able to write down all of his considerable compositions in addition to playing for services—writing and conducting a new cantata every week? Imagine walking 280 miles (each way) to attend an organ recital by the well-renowned Dietrich Buxtehude! Easier to stay at home, one would think. But think what we would have lost!

Imagine Vincent Van Gogh as he painted while fighting his many demons. Vincent—who gave us “The Starry Night” and “Wheat Field with Cypresses”—who tried to paint God’s love in his use of blues and yellows—who painted over 2,100 paintings but sold only one during his lifetime! How much easier it might have been for him to conform to society’s expectations. But how much we would have lost!

Imagine Christ in the garden of Gethsemane—how much easier to cave in to his accusers than to bear the cross! That would have been our loss!

How much easier to not write a Lenten devotional—after all, others will do it much better than I! Not forcing myself to do that would have been my loss!

We can hide or we can try. Failure often goes before success, but only if one tries in the first place! How much more personal satisfaction it will be to have tried and succeeded. Then it is our collective gain!

Giving and Gracious God, help us to recognize our gifts and to use them for your glory. Amen.

Ruth Hughes

Maundy Thursday, March 29, 2018

Matthew 8:19-20

The Scriptures tell us a scribe came to Jesus and said, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*" No doubt he had heard Jesus's inspiring words or may have seen some of his mighty miracles.

How surprised the scribe must have been to hear Jesus's reply! How often Jesus surprises people when they think they have everything figured out.

People are surprised because they do not consider the weighty cost and discipline it takes to follow Jesus, and to be "*in the world but not of the world.*"

The Good News is that God in Christ is with us in every trial and temptation in life for Jesus has gone before us and says, "*Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*"

Brother James L. Caffrey, Jr., OSL

Good Friday, March 30, 2018

Jesus
cried in a loud voice
FATHER
into thy
hands I
commend my
SPIRIT



Richard Briggs

Saturday, March 31, 2018

“What about you?” he asked them, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 8:29)

In one of the Grimm fairy tales a beautiful young woman gives birth to a child who is kidnapped by an old man and held for ransom. The old man promises to return the child if the woman can guess the old man’s name. Over a period of days, she tries: Caspar? Melchoir or Balthazar? Short ribs, Sheepshanks, Laceleg? Finally, she gets it right: “Rumpelstiltskin!” The child is returned.

“Who do people say I am?” asked Jesus. The disciples spouted a few things hoping one of them would stick: “John the Baptist,” they said. “Some say you’re Elijah. Others say you’re one of the prophets.”

But now Jesus makes it personal. “Who do *you* say I am? It’s a question for the ages and for each of us. Who is Jesus, really? A pop-culture, new-age spiritual guru? A motivational, self-help enabler? One of many prophets? Is he simply a historical figure whom people of all faiths can agree existed?

There are no less than two-hundred names and titles for Jesus in the New Testament alone, not to mention whatever else is ‘out there’ in the world’s ether. The choices are infinite. Take your pick. But Peter got it right. “You’re the Messiah,” he said. His answer was sufficient. Jesus is the Messiah. We remember that all the way to the cross.

Prayer: *Still us, O God. Silence our souls and center us. Open our eyes to the Messiah. Amen.*

Chuck Nash

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

Be blessed! Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

John 20:1-18

Easter is all about a four letter word — and Christians are full of it. Or at least we're supposed to be full of it. The four letter word is LIFE. New life. Whole life. Abundant Life. Redeemed life. Resurrected life. The purpose of life is not death, Easter says. The purpose of life is life . . . a life that triumphs over death forever.

Celebrating Easter is the best thing that the church can do because it is a celebration of all that is good, all that is true, and all that is beautiful. In fact, I would make the case that celebrating Easter is the greatest public service the church can perform for the world. Why? Because it is the reality of Easter that makes everything else we would do possible.

Remember Jesus' final words on the cross? "It is finished." On Easter "It is finished" becomes "Now it begins." Life begins anew with the resurrected rhythms of that Easter heart. It is an Easter heart that the resurrected Jesus offered to all who believed in him, all who read the signs and symbols of new life God had left at the empty tomb.

Do you have an Easter heart? Here are some ways you can tell.

- 1) *An Easter heart is full of new life.* An Easter heart is full of a new mission. An Easter heart is full of new possibilities. An Easter church that is filled with Easter hearts continues to offer signs of new life to the world.
- 2) *An Easter heart church throws off the old grave clothes.* Have we shed our shrouds? Death shrouds separate the dead from the living. Death shrouds wrap sinking, stinking corpses in fine linens and sweet spices — but they cannot stop the inner decay. Instead of wrapping ourselves in costly, starchy grave clothes, a church full of Easter hearts wears blue jeans. An Easter heart church is a blue jeans church. It lives its faith in everyday, working day clothes: clothes that are tough and sturdy and made to get dirty. In fact, jeans get softer and better the more they are worn and

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018-Cont'd

washed.. In point of fact, the best jeans of all are ripped at the knee, and the blue is creased and whitened by years of use.

- 3) *An Easter heart church is full of rock-rollers.* Notice I didn't say rock-and-rollers . . . I did say Rock-Rollers. The first sign of the resurrection, as noted by a distraught Mary Magdalene, was that the rock had been rolled away from the tomb's entrance. Everybody, even Jesus' resurrected body, needs to be offered a way out. Rock-rollers offer ways out to all sorts of people, trapped in all kinds of tombs. Strengthened by an Easter heart we can We can roll away despair, and reveal a path to hope. We can roll away delusions — delusions like "If I was rich I'd be happy;" delusions like "All I need is one more drink, or smoke, or hit . . .;" delusions like "The next promotion will get me everything I want." We can roll away fear — and entice tomb-dwellers to step out into the light. Rock-rolling isn't a one-person job. It takes a community of Easter hearts to get those rocks rolling the right direction.
- 4) *An Easter heart church is always in a state of arrhythmia, always experiencing adrenaline surges, always skipping beats, and always a racing pulse.* An Easter heart is an arrhythmic heart because in an Easter heart church the unexpected is always happening. Resurrection happens. Miracles happen. Truth happens. Goodness happens. Beauty happens. Jesus happens. Thomas doubted all the stories. He defied anyone to produce Jesus with all his wounds. Thomas then said he would only believe if he could put his fingers into the nail holes and spear wound. And then, suddenly, Jesus stood before him in that locked upper room, offering himself to be poked and prodded. Knocking upside down his whole concept of reality, Thomas could only exclaim "My Lord, and my God!" If you have an Easter heart, you learn to expect the unexpected. To relish the ridiculous. To savor the sensational.
- 5) *An Easter heart church is filled with laughter.* The resurrection is a testimony to the adage, "he who laughs last laughs best." The Sanhedrin thought they had the last laugh. The Roman authorities thought they had the last laugh. The cruel crowds and sadistic soldiers thought they had the last laugh. But the resurrection proved God has the last laugh.

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018-Cont'd

Those who thought they had triumphed over Jesus were soundly trumped by his triumph over death itself.

6) *Finally, and this is the most important "sign" of an Easter heart church of them all: an Easter heart will be a broken heart.* The promise of Easter Sunday is not that your heart won't break. In fact, the promise of Easter Sunday is that if you love, your heart WILL break. For God so loved the world, God's heart broke. The cross is a symbol of God's broken heart. A broken heart is the price of love. Anyone here have children? If you have a child, your heart will break. The price of love is suffering. The price of love is a broken heart. But if Easter is not the symbol of a heart that will never break, it is the symbol of this: that out of that broken heart, God will birth a new heart, a whole heart, a beet-red blood rich heart.

I want to close this with the earliest extant record of prayer in the Jewish-Christian tradition. You hear it almost every Sunday. It's this Priestly Benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26. Here it is in its original form:

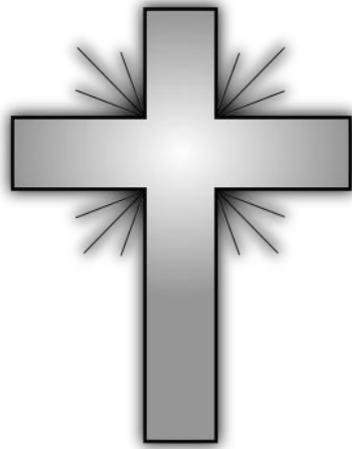
"May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace."

Here it is in its form altered by Easter Sunday:

*"May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace . . .
. . . and a beat-skipping, blue-jeans laughing, rock-rolling, broken heart.*

Be blessed!

p.net



He is
KING OF
KINGS

First United Methodist Church
of
Greensburg, Pennsylvania