



**ST MARK**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Lenten Devotional

2021

## *Lenten Devotional 2021*

We are so grateful to those who contributed to this devotional and pray it will be meaningful to all this Lenten season as an opportunity to not only reflect on God's Word, but to hear from the hearts of members of the St. Mark family.

*February 17 – Ash Wednesday*

From Allison Boykin

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.*

Psalm 46 1-5

Jesus was Baptized and then led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to prepare for his crucifixion and also be tempted by Satan, where he fasted and prayed for forty days. In Christ Jesus, we are reborn to the life eternal. Just as Christ sacrificed himself for our sins and was resurrected, in dying, we too shall live. We take this time to prepare for celebration of Christ's death, resurrection and reunion with Our Father in Heaven.

May we take these next forty days to remember how our Lord is ever present, gives us strength, and eternal life. Let us take time to discipline ourselves to live like Christ as his disciples. Think how we can celebrate the awe and wonder that is this upcoming joyous Easter holiday with gratitude. May we always remember that God never fails us and always surrounds with His eternal love

and support.

*February 18*

From John Stassi

*Each of us should use whatever gift we have received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

1 Peter 4:10

Lent is a season of penitent giving or giving up of. Most of us think of it as sacrificial denial of a pleasure or vice and most of us fail.

Meditate for a minute on 1 Peter 4:10. It clearly states that each one of us has freely received a gift, (some more than one). That means you. Are you aware of what gifts you have? It also specifically states what the giver intends for us to do with these gifts, (give them to others). Lastly Peter the Apostle explains to who the glory is to be given, God. This Lent I encourage you to give something up that has been freely given to you. Share your gifts with others for 40 days giving God the glory. If successful, in 40 days you will have blessed a multitude of people. Certainly, easier than giving up desert.

They say continuing to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result is the definition of insanity. If your Lenten preparation in the past has not filled your heart with joy over the Risen Lord, try another path.

*Prayer: This Lent we pray that we can look beyond ourselves. Father you have blessed us beyond measure. You have freely given us the tools to be your hands and feet. In preparation of celebrating your son's resurrection, help us to fill the needs of others with the gifts you have given us. I pray that this becomes a*

*habit. I pray that all the glory be given you. I pray in the name of the one that gave His all that we may know you. Amen*

*February 19*

From Rev. Joan Watson

*See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.*

Isaiah 43:19

The word, *Lent*, literally means “Season of Spring” or “Spring.” Not gloom and doom, as we are inclined to think given it is a season of reflection and repentance, as we enter the final days of Jesus’ life...his words and actions, his betrayals and suffering, his death.

Instead, Lent is about streams in a wasteland...lifegiving water for those who are dying of thirst; it is about a way in the wilderness for the desperately lost, those tired of the aimless wandering in places that make no sense.

Lent is a season of hope because of all Jesus did for us; hope that reaches us in our tiredness of living with the same ole things that haunt us that burden us, that trip us up. Hope that there might be a new way where we can leave behind those same worries and regrets, those festering wounds and endless longings...and begin to see the new thing God is doing in our midst, even in us.

So, this season, ask yourself the question that Isaiah puts forth to us from God: “I’m doing a new thing...do you not perceive it?” This is not a season to give up things we like in order to practice sacrifice, rather a season to give up things we’ve come to count on more than we count on God...familiar sins, familiar habits that aren’t so lifegiving. This should not be a season like any other

Lenten season. It is meant to be a season of fresh beginnings-- beginning with new attitudes and expectations-- because we live on this side of the resurrection.

*February 20*

From Elsa Poole

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth shall change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

Psalm 46:1-3

We have been challenged for almost a year by Covid 19. Our lives have been changed a lot by the inability to hold church services in person, by not being able to hug family and friends, by not visiting friends and family when we or they have been ill.

Every change we have made, including wearing a mask, has seemed to be a chore, much like the earth changing, mountains shaking and waters roaring.

It makes it very important to read Bible verses like Psalm 46: 1-3 and let God help us to be aware of all the help God has and will give us to cope with all the changes that help us to avoid contracting the virus or giving it to others.

Relying on God also helps us to be more patient, caring, calm and unselfish with others.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for every day of health in the past year, and the opportunity to look forward to receiving the vaccine, and the opportunity to reconnect with friends and family at home and at church.*

February 22

From Stephanie Snyder

My grace is sufficient for you! Let those words sink in. God's grace is enough. 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

So many times we completely forget this. We work, we strive, we try to do the right things but always fall short. Why, because being weak is where we need to be. Not very popular. Definitely not the American way. Aren't we supposed to pull ourselves by our own bootstraps? Weaknesses, insults, distress, persecutions, difficulties, Paul had these in spades. So do we.

This last year has been beyond difficult for us all, have we embraced it? Have we allowed God's un-measurable grace and power work through our weaknesses? If so, take some time to write a few of these down. Then take a few minutes to acknowledge the difficulties in your life and lift them up to God and let His grace manifest in you.

*Prayer: Dear God, I know that your power is made perfect in my weakness. Help me to rely on your grace to be my sufficiency. Let me boast in your work as I give all my worries and problems to you.*

*In Jesus name, Amen.*

February 23

From Aidan Grover

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.* Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

While fishing off an arm of the Cibolo, I came upon a massive beaver dam. I had to wonder - what purpose do all those logs and sticks serve besides a house for that beaver?

I came to realize that, as always, God has a plan for everything, even sticks. The dam serves not only as shelter for the beaver; but because it retains the water on one side, water lilies and plants grow on the other. Deer come to dams to feed off those plants. Predators know to check the dams in the Spring for beavers that did not make it through the harsh winters. Life goes on, just as God established it.

When encountering something in nature that makes no sense to you, stop and try to see it from another angle or from someone else's viewpoint. It is amazing how many times our eyes can be opened to see God's work when we look through the eyes of someone else.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, please keep everyone safe from everything going on. Thank you for giving everyone a purpose even in these difficult times. We thank you for every day we get on this beautiful planet. Amen.*

*February 24*

From Valsa Jacob  
The Lord's protection over us

*This is a favorite psalm of my father-in-law.  
This is a psalm of ascents or a traveler's psalm.  
Israelites sang this psalm when they were  
traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals.  
Jesus himself would have sung this psalm  
as he journeyed to Jerusalem with his parents.*

Psalm 121: 5,6,7,8

This psalm is so comforting and so beautiful. Psalm talks about our creator God who began everything, and he is the God who sustains all things, and he controls everything, directs everything for his good purpose. The psalm talks about the Lord's protection over his people. It is personal, perfect, and permanent. It is personal, the Lord watches over you, the Lord is your shade at your right hand. And the Lord's protection is perfect, the Lord will keep you from all harm, he will watch over your life. And the Lord's protection is permanent, the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now for evermore.

*Prayer: Lord, we thank you for these promises and we pray that you help us to trust you and sing this beautiful psalm as we also are traveling towards our heavenly Jerusalem, the beautiful Zion.*

*February 25*

From Rev. Mary D. D'Alessio

"How much longer, Daddy? Are we almost there?" "Mommy, I'm tired of riding. Will we ever get to Grandma's?"

Perhaps you remember as a child saying such things on road trips. You wanted to get to "where you were going" and you wanted to be there NOW! Cramped in the back seat of the car, tired of playing silly road games, irritated by your siblings who were trapped with you, your whining cry was, "How long?!"

I think that's our cry as the pandemic rages and we're trapped on a journey that seems to have no end. "Will this ever be over? How long? How long, O Lord?"

Such a cry is not new to us, however. It is one that can be heard throughout scripture as cries for relief arise to God. *“I am sick at heart. How long, O LORD, until you restore me?”* [Psalm 6:3]. *“How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”* [Psalm 13:1]. *“How long, LORD, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions”* [Psalm 35:17]. *“Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants”* [Psalm 90:13]. *“How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?”* [Habakkuk 1:2].

We cry, “Help us, God. We are tired. We are afraid. Our hope wanes. Grief overtakes us. Fear stalks us. We are homesick for the way life used to be.” We cry, “How long, LORD?” and God listens.

Yes. God listens, but are we listening, too, for scripture lets us overhear God asking us, “How long?”. *“The LORD asked Moses, ‘How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions?’* [Exodus 16:28]. *“The LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?’”* [Numbers 14:11]. *Jesus replied, “You unbelieving and perverse generation. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?”* [Matthew 17:17a].

You see, it works both ways: we ask God, “How long?” and God asks us, “How long?” Do you see the raw beauty in all of this? There is longing and pain on both sides—ours and God’s. We wait for God to rescue us. God waits for us to run to him, believing in him, trusting him.

Friends, we are on a journey, and we are making that journey together, joined through our love of Christ. We don’t know how long this pandemic will last or if it might have no end at all, but we, like Christ, are to live in the knowledge that we have come from God and will be returning to God, and while we are here, we, like Christ, are to serve one another [see John 13:3-5] and

love one another, trusting the One who holds our future, trusting the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we make our way to the cross in this season of Lent help us journey well, remembering each step of the way who we are and to whom we belong so that our lives bring glory to our Heavenly Father. Amen.*

*February 26*

From Cindy Bagwell

*Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*                      Isaiah 40:27-31

My Mom passed from her earthly dwelling of 91 years to her heavenly home in the afternoon of February 12, 2020. We miss her greatly. I am grateful my sister lived close by and was with her that day. God guided us through many decisions last January. One of which enabled Mom to spend her last days in her home rather than a nursing home.

We planned her memorial service to be held mid-March, at her independent living community center so that her many friends, being elderly could attend. Family planned travel to Chicago. Then Covid came upon us and all our plans had to be cancelled.

I miss our daily phone calls and we have yet to be able to have a memorial service. Mom wanted Eagle's Wings to be part of her

memorial service. Though I cannot call and speak to my Mom on the telephone, I can sing this song and am grateful in my prayers for God allowing me to have such a wonderful Mom.

*Prayer: We all have loss and missed opportunities throughout this past year. Our faith in our one true Lord Jesus Christ will carry us through. My refuge, my rock in whom I trust, Amen.*

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord  
Who abide in His shadow for life  
Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"  
And He will raise you up on eagles' wings  
Bear you on the breath of dawn  
Make you to shine like the sun  
And hold you in the palm of His hand  
The snare of the fowler will never capture you  
And famine will bring you no fear  
Under His wings your refuge, His faithfulness your shield  
And He will raise you up on eagles' wings  
Bear you on the breath of dawn  
Make you to shine like the sun  
And hold you in the palm of His hand  
You need not fear the terror of the night  
Nor the arrow that flies by day  
Though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come  
And He will raise you up on eagles' wings  
Bear you on the breath of dawn  
Make you to shine like the sun  
And hold you in the palm of His hand  
For to His angels He's given a command  
To guard you in all of your ways  
Upon their hands they will bear you up  
Lest you dash your foot against a stone  
And He will raise you up on eagles' wings  
Bear you on the breath of dawn  
Make you to shine like the sun  
And hold you in the palm of His hand  
And hold you, hold you in the palm of His hand

Source: [Musixmatch](#) [Songwriters: Michael Jonas](#)

February 27

From Charlie Sapp

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."*

Philippians 2: 14-15

In this era of prolonged COVID-19, the leading topic of conversation usually begins with "have you been able to be vaccinated?" We were fortunate that a medical facility had an excess of 88 doses and we were able to receive free doses of the vaccine. The 88 fortunate recipients were all nearby neighbors and even with social distancing and masks it was rewarding to feel a sense of normalcy.

Unfortunately, there was some confusion with the scheduling and the times for immunization were modified. A couple of people began to grumble, including one who had a "dog walking scheduled with a neighbor which would have to be changed because of this mismanaged scheduling." The grumbling continued as more soon to be vaccinated people expressed their displeasure with the ineptness of the people running the facility. The provision of a generous offer to supply the much-needed vaccine, highly desired, provided at a very convenient location and free of charge—seemed buried with the inconvenience of a lost hour in time. It is easy to see the log in another's eye, and I readily admit to grumbling about multiple things during this pandemic. Observing the log in the eyes of my neighbors gave me an appreciation of being free from the dreaded disease in the past and the promise of the future.

Philippians 2: 14-15 reads: *"Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."*

Prayer: *In this season of Lent we look forward to celebrating our risen Lord, whose death on the cross has given us the promise of his salvation in a new heaven and a new earth. Forgive me Lord for grumbling.*

*March 1*

From Rev. Mary D. D' Alessio

*Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

John 12:1-3

My husband Dave and I lived in Cambridge, England in the late 1980's to study at a theological college. Our flat (apartment) was one of three crammed into a small space in the attic of the college president's home. Often, we joined other students in Ruth and Andrew's flat which was next door to ours. We'd all squeeze into their tiny lounge (living room) to read scripture, pray, share and sing. It didn't matter that the furniture was sparse, the carpet threadbare, and the room drafty because we gathered to fellowship.

I remember the first time we sang *May the Fragrance of Jesus Fill This Place*, a song written by Graham Kendrick, (who'd also given the Church *Shine Jesus Shine* and *Knowing You Jesus*). I'm still caught off guard when its words and melody waft through my thoughts.

On that long ago night as we fellowshiped and sang Kendrick's new song, the small attic space became holy, for the fragrance of

Jesus, the **fragrance** of Jesus filled that little lounge, filled us, filled me! Love came down and Jesus blessed us.

To know, to truly know, that Jesus is with you—well, it's a miracle, isn't it? His presence can come as a sweet, sweet fragrance, surely surpassing that of the costly perfume that Mary poured over his feet and spread with her hair as an act of extraordinary love. I yearn for moments like that, don't you—moments when you are filled with the fragrance of Jesus?

In these Lenten days as we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross may we all learn from Mary who turned her full attention to Jesus, extravagantly and unashamedly pouring out for him, not just her expensive oil, but her priceless love.

*Prayer: Sweet Lord Jesus, in these challenging days of the Pandemic we long to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and together worship you. As we yearn, help us remember that your presence has no bounds, and that even while physically separated one from another, we can share in your fragrance as we keep our eyes, our thoughts, our hearts turned to you. May your extraordinary, sweet, sweet love fill us. Amen.*

*March 2*

From Carol Trono

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12: 30-31

It's So Simple

In January 2019, I accepted St. Mark's invitation to read the One Year Chronological Bible. For the most part I did the readings daily, only getting behind or reading ahead a few times. This was the first time I had read everything in the bible rather than

studying particular books or passages. There was so much that I had never even looked at before. I came to appreciate the rich history of the people of God, the context and beauty of Old and New Testament writings, and the complex, inspired, God loving & fearing, but also frequently flawed individuals whose lives are recorded there. But I also came face-to-face with the vengeful, jealous God who commanded his people to commit heinous acts and even genocide, and punished both the innocent and the wicked. As the months went by, I found myself anxiously awaiting September 24, the day I would finally get to the New Testament.

Reading the New Testament after spending 9 months in the Old opened my eyes and cemented my faith in the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. I finally grasped that Christ was indeed God in the flesh, walking among us, revealing His true nature, and giving us the key to understanding His plan. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus unequivocally states that of all the commandments and Old Testament Law, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 are the essence of God's desire for each of us. Loving God and loving one another – *“There is no commandment greater than these.”* It's so simple! Yet, it's so hard. The sin inherent in being human in this world makes living this commandment virtually impossible. But through prayer, conscious choice, true repentance, and embracing the Holy Spirit, we can strive to achieve this and realize the promise God gave of a future existence in His presence – eternal life if you will – which is love in its essence.

Dear God, thank you for the unconditional love you have for this world, your magnificent creation. Out of that perfect love, you came to show us the way. Be with us as we travel this path and struggle each day to live in and to share your love. Amen.

March 3

From Lynn Bellow

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Colossians 3: 12-17 NIV

Love & inner joy flourish when we commune with God & share the love of God with each other. All too often, our inner pain grows when we fail to share our love fully. During times of social distancing, the greatest source of our suffering is not always the virus we're avoiding, but the accompanying feelings of being alone, being unloved and being without purpose.

Let us remind each other to come together as the Body of Christ to use our talents for the good of our community whether physically together or from afar through the internet, letters or phone. We, the Body of Christ, are called to help & support all of God's people; let's open our hearts wide to learn what that love looks like.

*Prayer: Our loving God who is in the very air we all breathe. Surround us in peace, love & respect for all people on earth, those we know, & those we have yet to meet. Instinctively we know all on this earth are our siblings & should be loved by us. Help us to want to love without reservation. Use us oh Lord for your benefit. Amen*

March 4

Cathy Cockrell-Newton



*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

John 3:16

I lost my Mother, Lila, in August 29, 2019, then five weeks later my sister, Carol, October 4, 2019. That comforting Bible passage was delivered at both memorial services, as a reminder that the reason God sent Jesus to earth was because he LOVED us!

God sent his son Jesus into the world not to judge the world but to save the world through him. What comfort we have in that message. When we confess our sins and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will have everlasting life with God in His Kingdom.

*Prayer: Dearest Heavenly Father, thank you for the knowledge that God shows his love for us in that while we are still sinners, we are forgiven. Jesus paid it all, all to him we owe. May we share God's love with the world so they may know this love and peace. Amen*

March 5

From Jackson White

*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the*



their perfectly paved path to achieve their destinies. Meanwhile I was still trying to cut down the vines to even see my path. I was scared I had been making wrong choices and that I could never find my path again. I honestly just felt like I failed before I even hit my roaring 20s. I was ready to put down the sword and just stare at the vines that entrapment me.

So because I was in a dark place I prayed to God asking him to reveal my path. I just wanted him to give me a pat on the back to let me know "Hey kiddo you're doing great! Keep it up." After that prayer, something told me to go to his direct word. Naturally, I opened up google and typed in bibleversegenerator.com. I know this is very unorthodox, but I was always a firm believer that God always speaks to you in the most unorthodox way. That's when Philippians 2:13 and I met for the very first time.

The first feeling I received from this was a surge of rarity and exclusiveness. For the first time in a long while, I remember how I was different from everyone else he had ever created. Maybe someone would look like me here and there, but I had my own individual passions and dreams. That's when it hit me. My life is different from everyone else. Their problems are different from mine. Their definitions of success are different. Their path is unique to them. So yes, I can take advice from others, but I cannot judge my self-worth based on the life of someone who's not even me.

The next realization pulled me out of the thicket. God produces the desires in me. At first glance, it's like yeah obviously next. But like I said the words are the same, but the response is different. I realized God doesn't just put you in a car and hopes you figure out the road you must take. He has given us a GPS for us to listen to. The desires are in our hearts for a reason. There's a reason math is the bane of my existence, perhaps being an engineer is not the way I'm destined to go. For example, a doctor is usually a doctor for at least one of two reasons: they love money, or they love helping people. Regardless, if one love could be considered

sinful, it still put that individual on a path where he/she saved Agatha from a bullet wound. Our desires put us on God's path. My desires, what I want to do, is his will.

The greatest lesson from this one verse is I must be receptive to his signals. I wasn't listening before. He was telling me this whole time if I was on the right track or not. Being receptive is not just anticipating his message but also acting on it. Let's go back to the fun little car analogy. When using a GPS, you don't turn right when the nice robot indicates a left, unless you wanna delay getting McDonald's or, in this case, eternal bliss. We must receive him when he presents us with an opportunity. Of course, all of us are thinking "I would immediately accept his opportunities; he just hasn't given me one". Now that's depressing. It would be an unpleasant world if that were true. Now this is the tricky part. What do they look like? Some are in big blinding lights sure, but the majority are not. My mom sometimes says to me after drinking her 6th cup of coffee, "Challenges are misunderstood opportunities." I won't lie to you. I cannot see how every adversity is designed to help me or a disguised opportunity. So, let's start small and with something relatable. There's always that one guy or girl or child even that is just really testing your ability to act as a child of God. But when these people come into our lives, I promise you they will teach us. They could show us what not to act like, how to show grace, or they present us with the opportunity to be our best Christian self. In short, any challenge that presents itself to me I must look at it as an opportunity shrouded in mystery. As my friend Philippians 2:13 says God has given us the ability to overcome whatever it may be and please him and learn from him.

My path is not one I can skip on, but it is certainly one destined for me. Only I have the ability to walk it.

March 8

From Nancy James

*Long ago the Lord said to Israel, "I have loved you my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself."*

Jeremiah 31:3

Over thirty years ago I was participating in a Bible study group that required homework. One afternoon, I labored over it and couldn't seem to get one word on the paper. During my struggle I received a phone call from my daughter in Corpus Christi. Of course, I began complaining about my task. She listened to me and then suggested we pray about my problem. After ending the call, I sat down and miraculously wrote several pages. I couldn't believe what I had been able to do. Then I heard a voice so clearly (though I was home alone) saying, "I love you." I was filled with more joy than I can explain. I knew I had heard God.

March 9

From Layla Garber

Precious than Gold

*So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold- though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

1 Peter 1: 6-7

We all have experienced at least something difficult in our lives. It could be from a loss of a loved one, broken bone, anxiety or depression, etc. God never said life would be easy (and I think

we all know that). But what God did promise us is that He is always there by our sides through everything.

So what does this mean? Well, when it says “So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead though you have to endure many trials...” it gives a sense of hope that the trail will not last forever. It gives us hope for a better future that we know we will spend with Him. The trials may seem like forever, but if we have faith, things may go smoother. With these trails, our faith is being tested, “tested as fire tests and purifies gold”. Is your faith really genuine? Are you calling out to God when all feels lost? Do you have faith in Christ? Then it goes on to say “your faith is far more precious than mere gold.” This is very meaningful because God values and loves our strong faith as much as He values and loves us. So if God thinks our faith is more precious than mere gold, which is precious, then that says a lot about our God on how loving and grateful He is. Finally, when our faith is strong through all our challenges, Jesus will praise and honor you, your hard work to grow your faith will get recognized. Whenever Jesus comes to reveal Himself to us, we will get recognition for what we have built with Jesus.

How is your faith with Christ? Is there anything you are lacking (trust, confidence, having doubts)? How can you build your faith and how can you help others with their faith?

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the faith we do have that You helped us with. Help us to continue to grow our never-ending faith and help us to help others. Help us put our trust in You and thank You for the promises You have made for us. Amen.*

March 10

Showing kindness

By Marzi Rust

*God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*

John 3:17

God so loved us he sent an alternative, not an ultimatum. Our Lord Jesus Christ overcomes by replacing, not condemning.

As I was traveling to visit my daughter in Amsterdam, I was having some issues with my, a bit overstuffed, carry-on. I also had a bad back. As I was really struggling with it the agent just stood there with folded arms, not rude, but not helpful either. Ahead of me was a much younger woman who very kindly helped me, also reminding me to take out my phone and Kindle. She helped me at the other end get it all back together and got a person to get me a wheelchair to my gate. I thanked her over and over again. I never learned her name or even where she was going...I just know she was kind and helpful.

Her kindness and actions showed my deep conviction about the church universal: The Church is God's compensation for a hurting world.

To compensate is to reduce or balance out bad effects of loss, suffering, or injury by exerting an opposite force or effect. We are God's opposite effects; we balance out pain and suffering. Compensation doesn't change what happens, but it can reduce the effect.

As Christians we know how to love and are part of God's great compensation plan for a world that seems to have forgotten how to be kind and smile.

*Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for loving me despite my sins. Forgive me for all my sins even the ones committed unknowingly. As I start this day I pray for your guidance and direction. Direct my path and teach me the right thing to do. Let my words and actions be ones that bring honor to your holy name. Amen.*

*March 11*

From Richard Fossler

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

About five or six years ago, I was sitting in a CVS pharmacy waiting in a long line to get my annual flu shot. In order to have something to do to speed up the wait, I picked up a paperback book to have something to read. It was a book of "100 Verses and Prayers." As I glanced through the pages, I happened upon these verses in Proverbs 3:5-6. Ever since that day, this passage has been one of my favorites. It is easy to memorize and it contains a lot of truth, comfort, and common sense.

This time of year is a time for hope, quiet reflection, and waiting. We need to pause, to breathe, to walk, to sit, to pray, and to center ourselves in the presence of God. It is also an opportunity to realign our lives with God's purposes. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Submit to Him in all that you do. Share words of love and gratitude with those around you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let our faith be in you and you alone. Without you we are weak, but when we put our trust in you, you make our paths straight. Guide us as we go forward, trusting in your wisdom and your boundless grace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

*March 12*

From Kate and Bill Dalton

*You're my place of quiet retreat; I wait for Your Word to renew me. ... I lovingly embrace everything You say. I shiver in awe before You; Your decisions leave me speechless with reverence.*

Psalm 119: 114, 119-120 THE MESSAGE

In Genesis 1:2 it is written, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep..." In our world as it is in this moment, we can relate to these words; it seems our world is in darkness and chaos. In verse 3 "Then God said, 'Let there be light; and there was light.'" "Our Christ knows darkness. He knew what awaited Him in Jerusalem. At the time of the crucifixion, "...there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour..." He knew the darkness of the tomb as the stone was rolled across the door. And then there was light! When Mary Magdalene and another Mary came to the tomb, they encountered a shining and brilliant angel who spoke with them. Christ had risen!

Christ is with us. As we make our way through life, He holds our hand to keep us from stumbling; He links His arm through ours to keep us strong and steady; He puts His arm across our shoulders to protect us when we are threatened with despair. He is our light and we wait for His Word to renew us.

*March 13*

From Bridget Cleary

*There is a season for everything and a time for every matter under the heavens.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Starting College is difficult, both physically and mentally. That being said, the first semester of college for me was an experience in itself. I had to challenge myself physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. Moving away from family and gaining new friends in the midst of a pandemic pushed me to new limits resulting in me questioning God's existence.

There was one specific moment last semester where I felt as though I was hopeless, and God was nowhere to be found. It was after my first visit home after leaving back in mid-August. It was after this visit that I came to the conclusion of how homesick I actually was. After coming back to Waco, I felt as if I had no energy and was not meant to be at Baylor. After days of doing nothing but going to class and laying in bed, I picked myself up to do the only thing that might clear up my mind-- going to the local church. The minute I walked in I was confronted with a verse that has since that day lived with me. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reads, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven". I went home that day and realized that whether I am in Boerne or Waco my life is in God's hands. As said in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight". I truly believe that regardless of where you are and what you are doing, you have a purpose. God will indeed make straight your paths and lead you truly where you are meant to be, and for me, that was Baylor University.

*March 15*

From Rick Eckersley

*A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was*

*happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

Luke 19:2-10 (NRSV)

When I read this passage, I am reminded that although I am imperfect and have many faults, Jesus sought out individuals who were considered the lowest of the low in society and chose them for salvation based on nothing more than their faith in him and willingness to live a more Christian life. If Jesus is willing to forgive such people, I am reminded to not only strive every day to more fully live my own Christian values, but also to forgive both myself AND OTHERS for the inevitable shortcomings that we as humans have. It also strongly reinforces the idea that I am here to serve others and not to judge them, regardless of their actions; such judgement is reserved for our Lord alone.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us each duty that our purpose and privilege is to serve you in advancing the light in the world. Assist us in living our values and carrying your message through the world not only by our words but by our actions, and to recognize and accept that we will inevitably fail to love up to your perfect example, but that such failure is forgiven by our continued faith and service to you in this world. Amen.*

March 16

From Mary Jane Ely

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

John

14:27.

This benediction in the book of John offers a promise of peace; however, it may not be the worldly peace wished for. Worldly peace is a huge wish and so often we feel overwhelmed living in a world lacking peace.

The big “but” is knowing the peace given by God to each of us. During this time of Lent as devotional time allows introspection, seek God’s peace in the quiet of your heart.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, giver of peace, help me focus on the inner peace you promise so that I can better serve you in the world. Amen*

March 17

From Joan Gohn

*Be still and know that I am God.*

Psalm 46:10

Growing up in the mountains of Montana, I became aware of the beauty of God’s creation. As I moved around and traveled to several countries, I found more images of god’s wonderful gift to us.

It is no wonder, then, that when I am out among nature, I pause to reflect on our wonderful creator. Psalm 46 comes to mind each time and I feel closest to God when I am experiencing his creation.

Having grown up in the church and having been a part of the Presbyterian Church for 44 years, I do enjoy being part of a fellowship of believers. I do enjoy hearing the choir sing, scripture read and words from the pulpit. Still, when I go outside to a quiet place, I feel closer to God and I find myself repeating the words to the psalm:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your beautiful world and for creating each and every one of us. May we all take time to be still and feel your presence. Amen.*

*March 18*

From Dave Bagwell

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12:21

There is so much evil and wrongdoing of all kinds these days, it is difficult to even know where to turn. But if we take each moment of each day to live that moment in a way that reveals our Holy Spirit, it will lead us to project peace, happiness and good cheer to all we encounter. Sometimes it is the many small things, taken together that make a big difference in this world.

*Prayer: Lord, I pray that I will stay close to you this day, never far away from my thoughts, and that you lead and guide me in a path that is right and true to your calling. In Christ's name I pray. Amen*

March 19

From Mary Jane Ely

*I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from the mountains? No, my strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.*

Psalm 120:1-2

Many years ago, while on a weekend youth retreat, I sat on a hillside as the sun rose meditating on these verses. It was very chilly; the ground glistened with moisture and it was very quiet. It was more than quiet, it was still. I felt God's presence and knew to my deepest understanding the promise of this psalm. Psalm 120 has always been a bedrock of my faith.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, Praise be to you for all you promise and that we can live each day in your presence. Amen*

March 20

From Ireland Owens

*May the God of hope fill you with all 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

This Bible verse deeply speaks to me for this new year, as my word of the year for 2021 is joy. I feel that this verse is a great example of how God can comfort you and provide you peace and joy when you need it most. Overall, 2020 was a very strange and scary year for many of us, and in the midst of so much uncertainty it can be easy to lose our peace, and our trust in God can be negatively affected. Despite the weirdness and uncertainty of 2020, I am choosing to have joy in this new year. Whatever this year has in store for me, in 12 months time, I would like to leave 2021 behind having grown stronger in my faith and trust in God,

and full of more joy. I believe that it is a choice to choose joy and positivity, no matter what struggles you may be going through. Sometimes we all need a gentle reminder of how much God loves us and is willing to take care of us. I believe that Romans 15:13 is a great example of this.

I pray that all of us can go through this bright new year with more joy everyday, radiating positivity and peace, like this verse says.

*March 22*

From Theresa Gateley

*They will not labor in vain,  
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,  
they and their descendants with them.  
Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.*

Isaiah 65:23-24

This passage captured my attention because I see it as God telling me that through the painful lows in life, He has a plan for me and before I have even formulated by prayer to Him, He is giving me an answer and preparing the way for me.

When I was younger, one of my mother's very good friends told me "Everyone has at least one heartache in their life". I wondered when my heartache would strike and how I would get through it. I have come to learn that most people, including myself, have more than one heartache in life. It comes with lost love, losing beloved people, hurtful words that sting well past the end of an argument and feeling powerless when others need you.

As I look at this passage, I am reminded we are not meant to go through his life without difficult times, nor were the ones who went before us. But after the heartache, God guides us to rebuild. I don't believe he wants us to try to capture what was lost but rather, create something new. The children we bring into this

world and the relationships we take care of are reflections of God's guidance for us once we move through the heartache. I share this passage with you in hopes that each of you will come through a heartache knowing how valuable you are to God.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, watch over those who strive to get past a heartache. Give us the strength to continue to do Your will even in the most difficult of times. Guide us with your ceaseless love. Give us a vision of the 'new' creation we can invest our lives in so our labor is to Your glory and it is not in vain. Amen*

*March 23*

From Caleb Ackerson

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.* Ecclesiastes 3:11

In times of uncertainty, like the present, it's important for every person of faith to keep our existence and purpose in perspective. It is all too easy to get hung up on the material things of this life, the negative things and the events we cannot control. We must remind ourselves every day that how we humbly serve others as brothers and sisters in Christ is a true purpose and cause for our short and physical presence on this earth.

As much as we would like to know all, or concern ourselves with the dealings of others and of this world, it is important to understand that we may never truly know until our time in eternity comes. As the scripture says, *no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

As children of God, we must have faith in more than just belief and existence of Him, but faith in His actions and cause throughout our lives. When we can remind ourselves everyday of an eternity incomprehensible to us, it often makes our qualms or dealings within this world a moot point. To know this truly is a feeling of overwhelming relief and joy; it puts our material lives on

hold, for an existence of humble service to our God and his people.

Prayer: God, may you help remind us, as Your children through Christ, that our time here is to serve you and others. Set eternity in our hearts, so that we may know what it is to be of You, and not luke warm in our faith. Help us understand that your all-knowing guidance is what sets us apart from this world and of worldly things. In Your name we pray, amen.

March 24

From Paul Mebane

*“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.”*

*“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

Jeremiah 31:31-33

Lent is an opportunity to contemplate what our Lord has done for us. The prophet Jeremiah brings us the promise of a new covenant and a renewed relationship with God through Jesus Christ. His words are addressed to a people in exile, far from home and bereft of hope. The prophet speaks of a new covenant — like the one made at Sinai — between God and Israel. God promises, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” This relationship is not new. God continues to love His wayward people, even today; they continue to be God’s treasured possession. Still, what is “new” about this covenant is not so much its content, but the means by which God will bring it about. Unlike the old covenant, written on stone tablets that can be broken and scrolls that can be lost, the new covenant will be

written within the people, on their very hearts. This is how God wants us to follow Him.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, let us take this time of Lent to open our hearts so that we may soak your Word in and allow it to lead our lives. Amen*

*March 25*

From Alan Reyes

*And BE NOT conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of GOD. Romans 12:2*

My understanding of education was limited to school. Get up, do your work, pass and move on to the next. That was the habitual norm and after years of adult living it seemed like my life was bad, unacceptable and surely not perfect. From personal, family issues to friendship and financial drama. This word gave me Hope; it shone light in an area where most humans forget to look when it comes to finding answers and change. Our own mind! That was the turning point for me. Renewed my mind, my values and my expectations. Not only found proof of what is this Good will of God but the reasons for my many chastisements. (Hebrews 12: 6) =)\*

*March 26*

From Nina Morgan

*Jesus wept.*

John 11:35

This verse captures 2020 for me. The pandemic brought much sorrow to my heart. Thousands of lives lost. Many

people died alone. Social injustices were exposed. No one agreed on politics. Families are divided. There were many reasons to feel sad, alone, full of despair.

I think of this verse, the shortest verse in the Bible, every time I seek God's comfort for our troubles on Earth. In this story, Jesus is deeply troubled and saddened by Lazarus' death. He felt compassion and love for this loss. He knew others were full of sorrow. That moved him. He wept. He wept like we do over human pain and suffering. He understands when we hurt, how we hurt, for what things we hurt from. Jesus, our Friend, understands our pain. That's what I take away from this verse/story at this time: Jesus' empathy. I feel less alone and more comforted.

Prayer: We thank you God for Christ, our Savior from this wretched world. Thank you for understanding our pain and sharing our burdens in the hardest of times. We praise Your Holy name no matter what we are going through here on Earth. Amen.

*March 27*

From Susan Penrod

*The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

*"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Blessed is the king of Israel!"*

*Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had*

*performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"* John 12 (NIV)

There was no stopping the news of the miraculous raising of Lazarus that spread from town to town. Crowds had abandoned livestock, hammers and bread boards to witness for themselves acts of love and grace. No matter how the Pharisees attempted to marginalize Jesus, the message would not be silenced and the whole world had gone after him. The crowd swelled with joy and praise, for riding into Jerusalem on a humble donkey was the very embodiment of hope in the face of poverty and despair.

Then, just as today, hope springs eternal deep from within the human soul. To hope is to be alive with joy and peace. The good news is that a hope-filled life leads to optimism, renewal and gratitude for each new day and away from discouragement and sadness. With resolve and a sense of hope, a patient endures another round of chemo, an addict casts off dependency, an unemployed parent braces for another interview and a woman is transformed as she achieves her educational dream. Faith, Hope and Love abide, these three.

Prayer: Dear gracious and loving God,  
We praise you for your mighty acts revealed in your son, Jesus. Help us to be faithful followers, just as the crowd who shouted "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." Let the message of Easter fill us with hope, renew our spirits and propel us toward acts of love. In your son's holy name we pray, Amen.

March 29

From Curt and Calleen Friedel

A Charcoal Fire and Jesus' Disciple Peter: Peter's denial of the Lord and Jesus' mercy, grace and restoration of Peter.

See also Luke 22:33-34

New American Standard Bible

*Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a **charcoal fire**, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.* John 18:18 (full story John 18:15-27)

See also Luke 22:61-62

*So when they got out on the land, they saw a **charcoal fire** already made and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." So Simon Peter went up and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.* John 21:9-10 (full story John 21:1-22)

## The Love Question

A **charcoal fire** is only mentioned two times in the Bible. As you have read above it was when Peter denied Jesus three times when warming himself by the charcoal fire and when Jesus came back from the dead and was on the shore nurturing them with fish being cooked on a charcoal fire.

Peter's three denials of the Lord was the complete failure of Peter to be loyal to the Lord he claimed to love. Jesus told Peter he would deny Him; he knew Peter would fail, YET he still offered Peter a seat at the table. After the Lord's resurrection, Peter still had influence as a natural leader. "I'm going out to fish", Peter said to some of his

apostle buddies. Despite Peter's failures and arrogance, the other apostles followed Peter into the boat and went fishing (John 21:1-3). Peter may still have been a brash natural leader, but Jesus didn't want a natural leader. The Lord wanted a restored spiritual leader. Jesus loves us even with our sins and wants to restore us from our shame, guilt, pride, etc.

Every human and human leader will fail at some point. The issue for Jesus was that Peter had to own his failures. Peter needed to humble himself before the Lord and before those he let down with his arrogance and denials. Only then could the Lord raise Peter back from failure and restore him to leadership/ministry.

People can fail miserably and be restored. The goal is not just forgiveness, but restoration. We can move past our own sinful failure and be restored to ministry and to our relationship with Christ.

Jesus worked to re-route the smell of charcoal in Peter from failure to restoration, from sin to grace, and from unfaithfulness to called back to ministry.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for never leaving us and always wanting to redeem us. Help us to recognize our sins, humble ourselves, own our failures, repent and ask for forgiveness. And for You, Jesus, not only to forgive us but to restore us in newness with You and Your service. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

*March 30*

From Debbie Heitzke  
Behold I am making all things new

*...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, for the first things have passed away. 'Behold, I make all things new.'*

Rev. 21:4-5

My Uncle Gene Anderson, my mom's only brother, died on March 25, 1964. I was only 3 1/2 years old, so my recollections of him are few. However, I do vividly remember playing his piano that last Christmas we were all together and singing "Jesus Loves Me." My mom snapped a photo with her Brownie camera and a framed copy of it sits on a shelf in my music cabinet. My Uncle Gene and my Aunt Jane were twins and were born on the day after my Grandma Anderson's birthday. So, the days of March 25 - 26 were always days of celebration for my mother's family. And in years when Easter occurred around this time, it was even more fun. It makes perfect sense to me now, that Easter was always my mom's favorite holiday.

But, on March 25, 1964, on my Grandmother's birthday, and the day before Uncle Gene and Aunt Jane would have turned 33 years old, Uncle Gene died in the hospital from injuries he had sustained nearly a week earlier in an accident at the steel plant where he worked. Easter in 1964 fell on March 29. The days of March 25 - 29 were not joyous that year.

I still can remember when we arrived at my grandparents' farmhouse that Easter weekend in 1964. My mother cried, running into my grandmother's arms as she ran from the back porch to greet us. This was my first experience with death and grief, and even though I was very young, I remember it. There's much I don't remember from that time, though, and so I looked for a copy of Uncle Gene's obituary in the family Bible I received after my mom passed away a few years ago. There were copies of every family obituary tucked in-between the pages, all except Uncle Gene's. His death is simply recorded, handwritten on a blank page at the back of the Bible. A day too sad to even remember.

When my Aunt Jane's husband, my Uncle Harold, died in 2007, my mom told me that she was still so appreciative of how he had so thoughtfully given Easter baskets to my brother and me that weekend in 1964. In the midst of a weekend filled with sadness and mourning, it had been a reminder that even in those times

that Christ is always present and is always our hope. We don't have to fear death, and know that our tears are only temporary, because Christ overcame death on Easter morning. Through Christ's promise, Uncle Gene has eternal life. We know that Christ makes all things new.

Dear Lord,

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we are thankful for the reminder that you have overcome death and that we can have new life through You.

Amen.

*March 31*

From Becky Graham

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

*Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

Psalms 51:10-12

While singing with the choir at St. Mark, we presented Mueller's *Create in me a Clean Heart O God*. My heart was filled with gratitude as the choir sang the scripture --"restore to me the joy of your salvation --".

One year I was liturgist for the Ash Wednesday service. My reading was Psalm 51 and once again my heart was filled with assurance of God's love and forgiveness. Psalm 51 is considered the greatest of all penitential prayers. "Through the centuries people with a burden of guilt have been led to the very throne of grace by its words."

The season of Lent is a time of renewal from the inside out together with forgiveness. Salvation in the scripture means for

me a joyous fellowship with God, deliverance from sin, and the creation of the new heart.

Thanks be to God.

*April 1 - Maundy Thursday*

From Toni Hensley

I Am The Vine You Are The Branches

*“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*

John 15:4-5 NRSV (full story John 15 1-11)

I remember sitting around the library table at Pulaski Heights Presbyterian Church, Little Rock, AR with the other confirmands and hearing John 15: 1-5. Those powerful words, “I am the vine and you are the branches...” resonated that day, as I took my first communion, and continues to fill me as I come to the table each communion and especially during Maundy Thursday services. It's like being present that night as Christ broke bread and drank from the cup. In the world today I feel the need to be closer to Him and the need to abide in Him. It helps me to stay fully connected to Him, the True Vine, and receive all that You are and all that You desire for me. A vine is connected to the branch in a symbiotic relationship. Others see this not as symbiotic but connected.

Whichever it is, without the Branch, fruit cannot be born, for it is in the Branch the lifeblood flows; the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Abide? How does one do that? The Greek tells us they were to “remain or continue”. So, continue following His teachings and

examples and ways, as though He would always be with you. Follow His teachings and much fruit will be born.

*April 2-Good Friday*

From Marilyn Bonaguro

*So those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

Colossians 3: 12-13

During Lent we have an opportunity to reflect on what the Lord has done for us sinners, He died so we would be forgiven. He left instructions for how we are to live as a forgiven people—to not only put on the above virtues mentioned in Colossians but to bear with one another and especially to forgive others: “Jesus answered, “I say to you not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” When we keep un-forgiveness to others in our lives, we lose out on the blessings of peace and joy we can extend to those who have offended us and the inner joy we can experience in fellowship and relationships.

So we must ponder these words of expectation from the Lord and seek His face to understand the sins His Spirit reminds us of during this Lenten season.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, we confess that in our inmost being we desire to hold onto offenses made against us. Help us release these feelings to you and seek your forgiveness. We praise you that you hear our prayers and answer them according to your will.  
Amen!*

April 3

From Angela Grover

*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.*

Mark 15:37-38

I asked Alec how he thought the disciples might feel the day after Jesus died. They didn't know Sunday was coming. Each believed Jesus would save them and how could he now that he is dead? "They were probably sad," Alec said. I think we would all agree.

The inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies was so sacred only the priests could enter it through the curtain after a rigorous cleansing process. Access to God was limited, dangerous, reserved for only a few. But on the day Jesus died the curtain that separated us was torn in two from top to bottom. We can see inside now. Access was granted through the death of Jesus. Even before he is risen, he has saved us from a life cut off from the Father.

*Rejoice in all circumstances* is not an easy command, yet this is a beautiful example of God's great love in the face of grief and despair.