

A close-up photograph of a white bowl filled with fresh salsa. The salsa consists of diced red tomatoes, white onions, and green herbs. A slice of lime is prominently placed on top of the salsa. The background is blurred, showing more of the bowl and some green leaves.

SALSA

Devotional

Sisters Alive in Leadership, Spirituality and the Arts



Gabrielle Martone (GM)

I am a woman of God, a pastor, a shepherd, a wanderer, a simultaneous sinner and saint. I am, in many ways, Peter in 2018! I am a daughter and a sister, an Abby (to my goddaughter), a mom to my cats.

I am a human- a beloved creation of God.

I am a provisional Elder in the United Methodist Church and currently serve as the associate pastor at Central UMC in Linwood NJ. I have served 2 congregations prior to my appointment here.

I am blessed beyond measure to get to serve God in this way every single day.



Gina Yeske (GY)

Family is my center. I am a wife, a mother, Oma, sister and daughter.

I am a encourager, a pastor, a disciple of Jesus.

All these relationships make life rich.

I am passionate about food, making it eating it, enjoying it with friends. I firmly believe some of the best ministry occurs over a meal. I am casual, and easygoing. Music is essential, all different styles!

It is my mission to imagine new and creative ways to help others see the value in connecting with the people where they are, to build relationships and to share the hope found in faith in Jesus.



Fran Noll (FN)

Lover of ALL people, for God loves us all. Mother of Dave, Chris, Kaitlyn and Andrew. Grannyfranny to Sarah, Sophia Becca, and Kiran.

Pastor for 37 years and now retired - 13th woman ordained in NJ - passionate about the homeless and those who live on the margins of life.

Life coach, Soul Sister - Artist and Interim pastor of many, Angel of happy everything. Prayer warrior.

Lover of travel-bicoastal - California and New Jersey. I will see you at the beach or at the movies.

Dear friend to many - Student of life - Celtic Theology and creation - Activist for justice for ALL people, for All means All.



Vicki Miller Brendler (VMB)

Earth Mother and Pioneer

Third generation pastor and pioneer clergywoman, learner and teacher, gardener and grower of God's beautiful flowers and delicious veggies, passionate about ecology and organic living, swimmer, reader, camper, lover of travel, advocate for the least, last, and lost with a heart for missions. Wife of Larry for forty-six years, mother of four grown daughters who are educators, counsellors, and a pastor. Grandmother to three grandsons and three granddaughters. Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church who spent a life serving in varied ministry settings for 40 years before retirement to live at the Lake House in northwestern New Jersey and caring for aging parents and other family needs.



Francie Preston (FP)

Lover of God and God's people and God's creation. Teacher; pastor; writer; friend; activist; worship leader; hiker; knitter. Mother of four grown sons, grandmother of three grandsons and two granddaughters, wife of forty-eight years. Lover of creation and creation spirituality, I write reflections - "lectio" divina - on nature, believing as the Celtic Christians do that Creation and the Bible are God's books of self-revelation. Advocate for justice for all people and for creation; activist for change when things are not right. Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, retired after twenty-two years serving six churches, now enjoying living in Philadelphia.



Diane Dyson (DD)

I have lived out my call as a Deacon through both my practice of nursing and my service in the local church. I have connected the congregation to the world through family and children's ministries. I have served as a small group leader and women's ministries.

I have a special passion for mission, local community outreach and regional and global mission trips.

I am married to my best friend.

We have a house-full of children and pets.

Give me a good book and the beach and I am happy. I have enjoyed serving the Lord and look forward with great anticipation to the years ahead.



Jana Purkis Brash (JPB)

From the time I was a young child, I have been very aware of God's presence.

I experience God when walking through the forest, at the bedside of someone who is ill, quiet chats with my grandchildren, worshipping in a sanctuary with sisters and brothers in Christ.

I cherish God's call on my life to serve through the church, as a mother and grandmother, as a follower of Jesus, and in my current role as the Executive Director of the United Methodist Stewardship Foundation of Greater New Jersey.



Lynn Mears (LM)

I have been a local pastor in the GNJAC for the past fourteen years.

I also worked as a servant of God as a registered nurse for 33 years at Somerset Medical Center in ICU and Recovery Room.

I have been married for 37 years and have two grown children.

My BA in nursing is from Albright College and my Masters of Divinity from Drew University.

I enjoy quilting, card making, gardening, cooking, nature, and being with friends.



Jean Arlea Eriksen (JAE)

I feel called to preaching and teaching in the local church connecting to the community through creative evangelism and small groups.

I have served as Associate Pastor at Bound Brook and Chatham, Behavioral Health Clinician at St. Clare's Hospital and Pastor in Residence at Whitehouse UMC. I hold an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, a Master of Divinity from Drew Theological School and a Master of Clinical Social Work from Rutgers. I am finishing her Doctor of Ministry from George Fox University. I am very grateful for my loving family including husband Chris, daughter Thea, and cats Ham and Fig.



June Tamburro (JT)

I was ordained as a deacon in full connection in May 2018. I am currently serving as an Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Bridgewater UMC where I am primarily responsible for small group ministries, ministries of justice and outreach, pastoral care and worship assistance. My passion is working with those on the margins and equipping people to live out their faith in the world.

I have been married to my husband, Gerry for 33 years and they have two young adult children, Kristen and Johnny. In my spare time, I enjoy working out at the gym my husband and I own in Chester NJ, reading, spending time with family and friends, and travel--especially to her home away from home in Key Biscayne, Fl.

“How is it with your soul?” is a question that comes from the early Methodist class meetings. These meetings were not social gatherings, Bible studies, or prayer meetings. Instead, the soul care of the membership was the agenda. Since September of 2015 this group of clergywomen have gathered together to share their love for God and the church. From our first meeting we knew this was going to be something special. Over the years we have celebrated and lamented together. We have studied, prayed, played and tended to each other's souls. It is our hope that this devotional offers you a glimpse into our lives, our prayers, our hopes and joys. It is our prayer that it enlivens your ministry and your life. Thank you for sharing your year with us.



We begin our reflections with this new church year, Advent Week 1 New Beginnings

Sunday

A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, "Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." Jesus' father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too." Luke 2:25-35

On Thanksgiving weekend we usually put up one of the Christmas trees at our lake house. Last year, one of the Christmas ornaments that had a new depth of meaning for me was a cross ornament. It wasn't the most beautiful ornament in the box, nor the brightest. It didn't light up or play a tune. It had no moving parts. Yet, I paused as I added it to the tree to reflect on the depth of God's love for me that we celebrate at Christmas. Emmanuel; God is with us!

I have a number of cross ornaments that we place on the tree each year, some are beautiful and ornate; others are simpler or more rustic; but they are all powerful reminders that we would not be celebrating Christmas at all if it were not for the offering of Christ's love crucified for us on the cross. There would be no birth nativities, Christmas trees, garlands, and lights were it not for the power of God's eternal love that overcame the grave in the resurrection of Christ on Easter morning. Christmas and Easter are intricately woven together to form the main strong threads of our Christian faith. The fibers of Pentecost and then the lesser festivals which define and enrich our understanding of God's continuous work of salvation throughout human history are held together mightily by the bookend stories of the in-breaking of God meeting us in human form; and gift of eternal life with God.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple for dedication and circumcision, Luke tells us that they met elderly Jews who had been promised by God in their youth that they would live to see God's Messiah. Simeon, the elderly gentleman, recognized Jesus at once as being the One; and thanked God for the fulfillment of the promise of salvation in his young life. But he also brings a more ominous prophecy: that in meeting Jesus, some people would be lifted up and others brought low in accordance with God's revelation. And he warned Mary and Joseph that their hearts would also be wounded because of their love for their child; for there is no greater pain than to see one's child suffer and die. The season of Advent helps us begin this journey again. Take a moment to reflect on the love and strength of Mary and Joseph for their son; and for their God as they model obedience and sacrificial love. (VB)

Prayer: Loving God, as we reflect on your great love for us shown in the life-giving cross of Christ, help us to count the cost to you, to Mary and Jesus' family, and to Jesus himself. Life is full of challenging situations, but rarely are we asked to give so fully in love for others. Thank you for your great gift to us in Jesus Christ. Help us to honor you and the legacy of love of all the characters of that first Christmas as we live out our faith each day. Amen. (VMB)

Recipe



Monday - Fruitcake

“He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' “ (LM)

Great Grandma's Fruitcake

2 lbs Red & Green candied Cherries (mixed)
1 lb mixed candied Pineapple
2 lbs mixed candied fruit
2 lbs white raisins
¼ lb pecans,
¼ lb walnuts,
¼ lb black walnuts
Flour fruit with extra flour the night before making care. Cut up pineapple and chop nuts. Leave the cherries whole.
Batter:
1lb butter (softened)
1lb flour (4 cups)
1lb sugar (2 cups)
1 doz eggs
1tsp nutmeg, 1tsp cinnamon, ½ tsp ground cloves
1 small bottle (1oz) vanilla extract
1 small bottle lemon extract
1 tsp baking powder

Cream butter, sugar and eggs.
Add vanilla and lemon.
Add flour sifted with spices and baking soda.
Mix the batter with the fruit by hand in a large bowl.

Grease and flour 2- 10 inch tube pans + 1 9x5 loaf pan (if you cut the recipe in half it will fill 6 small loaf pans – cooking time will be less also)
Cook at 250 degrees about 3 hours (until it leaves the side of the pans)

Making fruitcake has been a family activity for Christmas for several generations. My great grandmother taught my grandmother. My mother watched my grandmother and then wrote down the recipe. My mother taught me how to make the recipe and we have made some revisions. This year I made it myself but my Mother watched to make sure I did it correctly. I also have the pans that my great grandmother used.

Prayer: Dear God of Love, Thank you for the gift of traditions that connect us through activity, aroma, and taste for the present time and through the generations. Amen.



Tuesday

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”Revelation 21: 1-6

My first year in seminary was a wonderful new experience. I drank in all the new ways of considering my faith. One of my greatest blessings was weekly community worship at the seminary. A professor who I journeyed with for many years wrote this beautiful prayer for one of these services. I have used this prayer every year since in my local church advent services. (GY)

Another beginning ...
another season ...
another year ...
but also, another ending ...
another page turned ...
another chapter concluded ...
God of endings and of beginnings,
may your presence be felt in more than subtle ways
healing the wound...
forgiving the failure...
smoothing the jagged edge...
filling the void of life already spent ...
so that we may embark on this Advent journey
with a fresh desire to see and to celebrate
your not so subtle movement among us ...
planting seeds of hope
whispering words of encouragement
inspiring gestures of grace
blessing our “everyday” living
each and every day
of this new season.

(Glenn Stoudt)

Wednesday

"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" 1 Corinthians 1: 18

The message of the cross reminds me again of Christ's love--and that the babe in the manger grew up to be my Savior. Thanks be to God! New every morning are the ways I experience the grace and love of God. No matter how grumpy and tired I might have been when I went to sleep, each day I can experience anew the salvation of Christ. Take a few moments to think deeply about how God's great love for you will make a difference in how you spend your time today.

Prayer: Savior of the world, as I prepare for your coming afresh in this Advent season. Help me not to lose sight of the power of your cross which is life-giving to me--especially in the midst of these days which can become frantic. May I know the power of your peace and delight in the power of your salvation! In Christ I pray. Amen. (GY)



Thursday

Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way. Psalm 37: 23

This Is A Day Of New Beginnings

This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,
love's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference,
as faith and hope are born again.
Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

Brian Wren, 1978 UMH #383



Friday



And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Matthew 13: 52

Sharing recipes together is an age-old pastime of women in many cultures. When we find some way to nourish our family with deliciousness, we find joy; and we want to share that with others so they can know that joy as well. Sharing food at table builds our relationship as family; it secures our friendships with others; and it extends the table in faith to help all feel at home and included as part of community. As a young woman, I collected myriads of 4"x6" cards filled with recipes from my grandmother, my mom, and my mother-in-law. I still have them now, yellowed with age, some handwritten by folks who have gone on to be with the Lord. But for today's world, that becomes bulky (especially since I have four daughters who all love to cook too)! The info below is an online tool that we use. I hope it works for you! Enjoy and share your wealth with others you love! (VMB)

WebRecipeManager. This is a tool that my family has subscribed to for a number of years to organize and share our family recipes with one another. As we find new recipes online or in our massive collection of cookbooks and try them out, we all add them in so we can share them with one another. Of all the cookbook programs we have researched, we have found it to be the most user friendly for sharing our love of cooking together. All anybody needs to do is go to <https://www.webrecipemanager.com/> and then sign up for a new id.

You can download it on your mobile devices and save the shortcut to the URL after you download it. In order to set up additional ids for other family members one simply goes to the Tools -> Admin -> Create Users menu option and then creates the ids necessary

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the gift of food to nourish our bodies and the ability to share the goodness of the table with those we love. Amen.



I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43: 19

Saturday, Christmas Quilt Square

A special quilt square made with love by Lynn's mom, a twist on an old favorite. (LM)



Week 2 Sunday, Putting on a New Self in Advent

Sunday

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. “Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

Each year as I approach the season of Advent, it is for me a new beginning. It is the start of a new liturgical (church) year and for me time to reflect on a new start spiritually. The four weeks of Advent are a time of putting on my new self.

In the Advent season, I focus on spiritual practices that will help me to prepare for Christ to come into my life in a new way. What do I need to “put off” to walk more closely with Jesus? The word translated as “put off,” described taking off clothing. The writer of Hebrews used the same word when he urged his readers; “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” (Heb 12:1) It could be materialism, or pride or fear of failure...

The four weeks of Advent is a wonderful time to renew my mind. In this season, I either commit to an Advent Study or work through on my own Advent resource that will renew mind and spirit. The Greek word translated “made new” or “renewed” is the only use of this word in the New Testament. The verb is passive, which means that this is something done to us by the Holy Spirit. The spirit gives us a new mind, a new way of thinking, a new way of looking at things.

But this is something you and I need to work at as well. Paul urged the Christians in Rome to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” (Rom 12:2) God is active in us but we have a role to play in transformation as well. Advent is a wonderful time to open ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit to transform us in a way that allows us to be a gift to someone else.

The verb is also in the present tense, which means that this too is ongoing and continuous. We are called to be in the process of renewing all the time, every day, every week, every year. The ongoing conversion of our lives is directed by our minds. We make up our minds to move in a new direction and invite God’s Spirit to lead us to transformation. (JPB)

In this Advent season, may you be renewed in mind and spirit!

Recipe



Monday Springeries



Springerles

8 eggs
2 lb confectioner's sugar
2 lbs + flour
2 tb butter
1 ½ tsp anise oil
1 tsp hessia salt or ammonium carbonate

DIRECTIONS

Beat eggs for 5-7 minutes with electric mixer. Add sugar a little at a time. Add butter while beating. Add oil of anise. Dissolve hessia salt (ammonium carbonate) in a small amount of hot water and add to the flour, a little at a time. Place on floured board and knead until dough comes together without sticking. Roll out inch thick. Roll with springerle mold and/or cut with a pastry wheel. Cut out and set on a tablecloth overnight, covered with rest of cloth.

Bake 5-7 minutes at 375 degrees. Allow cookies to stand at least 2 weeks to harden.

Originally this recipe came from my best friend's German grandmother who measured it in handfuls and pinches. One year, a long time ago, she worked with her grandmother to equate the handfuls to pounds and the pinches to measuring spoons. My friend and I have now gathered to make these cookies just after Thanksgiving every year since the early 1980's...a tried and sure tradition we share and the testimony to the power of lasting friendships that are so important to women everywhere!

Prayer: God of eternity and of not yet, thank you for the traditions of the season which give cadence to our days of preparation. May the blessings of friendship keep us marking these days as we wait. Amen.-(VMB)

Tuesday

Christmas is a multi-sensory delight; the chill in the air, the fragrance of pine, the beautiful lights, the tempting treats, the lilting carols. We will come together to share our stories and experience Christmas through our senses.

Zechariah and Elizabeth

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. Luke 1:11-13

Opening Ourselves

Let us set aside the cares of our day and open our eyes to the wonder of God. With an attitude of empathy to the people of another time let us open our hearts and minds to God. Let us experience God's word to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This begins the Advent season, what are some of the ways that you practice Advent in your life?

What are the smells of Advent?

Enter the story

Smell the incense - Frankincense would emit a fragrance of pine and lemon

See the angel – is the angel glowing, clothed in white?

Hear the silence – how does silence affect you?

Are there any other senses that are lifted up in the passage?

How might God be speaking to me in this passage?

What might God be inviting me to be or to know or understand?

The angel's first words are "do not be afraid" - is there an area in your life that God is instructing you not to be afraid?

Wednesday, Unexpected

"Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." - C.S. Lewis

It's the call that you never expect and definitely do not want to receive, "If you can get to the hospital today we need you." It was the day after Christmas, I had a cold since mid-December and my plan was to not leave my bed that day. Then suddenly a single call changed not just my day, but my world.

The call was from the daughter of my closest friend, the young lady I had baptized only a few weeks before. Her mom had been hospitalized shortly before Christmas, Lyme's Disease they thought – but I knew from her voice that it no longer mattered that I had a cold – I needed to be there – urgency. Needing attention very soon, especially before anything else, because it's important.

Church life in general can be hectic, but add a major holiday like Christmas and it can become all-consuming. I know that most of you by now are fully immersed in the details of Christmas, the bulletins, special music, refreshments and that all important Christmas Eve sermon. It's easy to be overwhelmed and set-aside your own celebration of Christmas. Baking cookies, decorating your home and visiting friends might seem like a lavishness rather than important. Too often it takes the urgent to point out how important the everyday might actually be.

For the next 48 hours being with Phyllis and her family was the most important thing. However, it was the less urgent yet equally important things we had done for the previous 30 years that made being there so critical. It was the holidays spent together, working side by side, the ordinary Friday night pizza dinners, the girl's nights out, the chatting on the phone, and Facebook likes that had knitted our lives together. It was also the birthday parties, the weddings, birth of grandkids and a baptism that blessed us over the years.

As I said goodbye to my friend I was grateful for our journey together. I was especially thankful that I had not passed on a dinner invitation a few weeks before she passed. At that time we had no idea she was sick, and life was super busy. I can't even remember what seemed so urgent that night that I had even considered skipping out on that dinner. We could get together after the holidays I thought. But God blessed me with a nudge to set everything aside for that night with my friend. This is a memory I will always treasure.

You will work hard to do wonderful things in your church this Christmas, but remember God calls you beyond your work at church. We know Jesus spent the holidays with family; he celebrated weddings and had dinner with friends too. He gave space in his busy life of teaching, and healing to live life fully. Give yourself permission to have some fun this Christmas. Don't miss the opportunity to live your life abundantly, because that's really important too. (GY)



Thursday, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

*Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.*

*By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

Charles Wesley, 1739, #196 UM Hymnal



Friday, Christmas Redemption

I love Christmas movies – now not the Hallmark channel variety, instead real classics The Christmas Carol, It's a Wonderful Life, Charlie Brown Christmas, The Grinch and even Christmas Vacation!

In all these movies the spirit of Christmas unleashes itself and even the worst Grinch is set free. Free from materialism, free from worry, free from greed.

But for all these characters from George to Ebenezer to Charlie Brown himself they need to move through a process – an advent of sorts. It is not a magic trick where there is instant transformation, but instead it is a process of realization. They are redeemed.

This Christmas Eve as you sing in the darkness. I invite you to drink in the deeper meaning of Christmas. A reminder of God's desire to free us from the things that keep us captive and set us free. In the quietness accept the love of God once again for yourself. (GY)



Saturday, May this Christmas be more than just a season, but a way of life. Consider a tradition from Christmas you carry throughout the year? One year we left up our outside lights, they brighten the winter and were unexpected in the summer.

Week 3 Girl Talk Magnificat

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. Luke 1: 46-56

In one of my classes during my doctoral studies at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC we had to figure out how to make the scripture come alive for our congregations. Our group was assigned this passage in Luke 1, often referred to as The Magnificat.

This passage not only shows that somehow this girl-child Mary was well-acquainted with her scriptures, she also had a depth of understanding beyond her teenaged years as to the mission and purpose of God’s in-breaking into human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. That much we knew before our group began our quest to begin to make this familiar passage somehow have a new sense of life for our people.



We read it a few times together as a group to hear it in some new ways. Often the part of this passage that is read in worship begins at verse 45. Mary is already singing her song of praise to God at this point. On that January morning, as our group read the text, we decided to read the whole of the first chapter to really try to get the context, hoping that we might get some new significantly profound insights.

And we did. What we realized is that at about verse 39, the women run to greet one another, excited to be together since they lived in different towns and wouldn’t have had much time or opportunity to visit. Mary bursts into this marvelous poem spontaneously in the midst of greeting, catching up with, and embracing her cousin Elizabeth.

This is girl-talk. These beautiful words spoken to glorify God, were spoken in the midst of an intimate and life-giving conversation with her dear cousin. These two women had both been given incredible gifts from God, which sometimes felt a little more like a burden than a gift. Elizabeth would have a child in her later years of life; for she was well passed the normal age for childbearing.

Mary, was at the other end of the spectrum, a young teenage girl, still a bit confused about the birds and the bees, and yet able to submit herself fully to God for the sake of God’s intervention in history. She did so risking the condemnation of her family and friends. Seeing this passage in the context of two women greeting one another in love and sharing each other’s joy and apprehension gives it a whole new twist for me.

I hear and understand this text differently when I read it in its entirety. I think of the many conversations I’ve had with girlfriends over the years; life-giving conversations of encouragement and grace; challenging words that helped me grow; and words of unconditional love which surrounded me, even when I didn’t deserve it.

Yes! That’s it...it makes perfect sense that God would use these two faithful women to keep each other strong. I am thankful for the women in my life (many of whom you will meet on these pages) that journey with me even as Mary and Elizabeth journeyed together. (GM)

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the amazing and wonderful women in my life who journey with me; encourage me; and help me to stay faithful to you and your call on my life. I ask your very special blessing on them today that we might strive to hold each other accountable to stay of good courage in the midst of life’s obstacles. In Christ we pray, Amen.

Recipe



Monday, Cookies

Pepper Kakor Cookies

- 1 lb butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cups light corn syrup
- 1 cup heavy cream, whipped
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tsp ginger
- 2 tsp soda (scant)
- 1 tsp ground cloves
- 1 tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp salt
- 8 cups flour

DIRECTIONS

Mix all ingredients well. Chill overnight. Roll and cut with cookie cutters. Decorate with colored sugar. Bake about 8 minutes at 375. Makes a BIG Batch!

This is a recipe that I grew up with...I remember making them with my mom as a teenager, then with my daughters when they were little, and now I make them with my grown daughters and grandchildren on our annual Christmas Cookie baking day! So much fun to share with family (and sometimes friends). We make this dough the night before so it's ready to go! (VMB)



Tuesday. Reflections on Wrapping

There are some people who are gifted to be artistic and can quickly create beautifully wrapped gifts that bless the receiver with a stunning presentation for whatever gift may be encased within. I have been on the receiving end of such gifts a few times, and I was almost sorry to open them and destroy the beauty of the presentation. I am not one of those persons. I love to choose beautiful paper, and I have finally, after many years of practice, learned how to crease sharp corners and trim down the paper to avoid large lumpy sections on the ends of my packages, but I remain ribbon challenged—and can't seem to keep pre-made bows from getting squashed on the way home from the store. I also believe that gift bags are one of the best inventions every made! So, my wrapping consists of trim boxes with stick-on quality gift tags and a collection of bags that I purchased a number of years ago and recycle from year to year with new tissue paper inside. And I wrap everything!

When my daughters were little, we had very little money and I got in the habit of wrapping even the smallest gifts so they had a number of gifts (it's really an interesting feat to wrap underwear, Chapstick, and, homemade dolly quilts)! The habit stuck...so that I kept wrapping the small stuff even when we could afford a more sizable gift. Even the stocking gifts were wrapped. Over the years of active ministry, I would try to sneak in an hour or two of wrapping between the time the girls left for school and when I needed to be in the office. Each gift, large or small, was wrapped with love and a special choice of paper so that they had a variety of colors and patterns under the tree. But then I would get to crunch time!

When it got to be a day or two before Christmas I would begin to get frantic...how would I get all the wrapping done, the Christmas Eve sermons done, and the baking and food prep finished? So began the midnight madness of wrapping...my husband and I would be up until after midnight wrapping up a storm and listening to Christmas music after the girls went to bed. There were even a couple years when they were in high school that I taped up boxes and enlisted them to wrap one another's gifts for me! And still everything, everything, everything was wrapped.... As I took a pause this year, the first year I had everything completely wrapped and under the tree BEFORE Christmas Eve (no Christmas sermons to prepare or shut-in visitations to make this year since I retired last summer), I took a moment to reflect on my compulsion to have everything wrapped and decided that it had a lot to do with the fact that anticipation is part of the wonder of the season of Advent and the miracle of Christmas. It is in unwrapping God's gift of love once again in this season that we are renewed in our blessing of know a loving Savior. When we open the gift, we receive once again the love that is wrapped therein. Love that is shared in this season of incarnation.

Prayer: God of waiting and revelation, give us the grace to unwrap the gifts of love given to us this year and to experience once again the greatest gift of all, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (VMB)

Wednesday, Christmas Cookie Baking Madness

Every year my four daughters (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Jessica) and I (and now our granddaughters) gather to participate in a family day of Christmas cookie baking madness. We bring ingredients to share, our baking sheets, plenty of tins to carry home the bounty of our day, and the anticipation of the joy of the day. We actually begin the night before; with a shared meal for those who can make it early. The cookie doughs that need to sit overnight (like our famous Pepperkakor cookies) are made and set in the refrigerator or cold garage to marry the flavors of the spices. We organize the ingredients, review which traditional family favorite cookies we will make the next day, and share any really good sounding new recipes we have discovered that we'd like to try. After the evening's prep is done and the kids are settled for the night, we play games and talk and catch up with each other; talk of family, of work (2 pastors, 3 educators), and upcoming Christmas schedules for family gatherings. It's a wonderful evening of girl talk.

Early the next day coffee and bacon are put on to begin breakfast preparations while someone (usually Rachel) begins the job of rolling out the dough for the sugar cookies. The cookie cutters have been in the family for decades and each of us has some favorites. I often have the job of decorating, which I share with the youngest of our crew who love to add the sprinkles, the red hot cinnamon hearts, and the little silver balls. What a joy to share with the next generation recipes and traditions that had been handed down to us from grandparents and great-grandparents. Batch after batch are mixed and baked. Sometimes we split up between the homes of our daughters who live near each other for part of the day so we have more oven space to bake. And in these moments deep conversations often have a chance to happen while the cookies are formed, rolled in sugar, pressed out, or taken off the cookie sheets piping hot from the oven. We come together to eat and laugh. Time together with purpose; time shared in relationship. (See Picture)

These are the kinds of conversations that women and their daughters have been having for thousands and thousands of years...conversations about the business of living, of the men in our lives, of the things that matter most to us...everything from babies to politics. Girl talk. Was this what Mary and Elizabeth did in those months when Mary went to visit with her older cousin? Intimate conversations about everything under the sun. Too soon the day is done. Cookies are divided up so that all have plenty for their needs and a good variety too! Hugs and love are shared. And even though we are bone-tired, we are happy; sated with accomplishment, and a day filled with love. (VMB)



Thursday, "What Child is This"

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

William Dix, 1865 #219 UM Hymnal

Friday, "Baking is love made edible."



Prayer:

Lord, thank you for times together. Whether it is a day of cookie madness or other times of preparing to celebrate your incarnation.

Thank you for times we set aside to be together— mothers and daughters and granddaughters or friends—to share traditions, laughter, worries, and hopes for our future.

Thank you for the love that binds us to you and to one another in these almost magical times.

These times don't happen often, and they aren't always perfect, but we know that you are there with us as we share with one another everyday special times of love. In Jesus I pray, Amen.(VMB)



Week 4 Getting Ready

Sunday, "The Divine Waiting Room"

They don't tell you this but, I will. It's not your body, your work-life balance or your date-nights with your partner. No, its privacy. It's the one thing that becoming a mother will take away from you, the one thing you will never, ever, ever, ever, EVER get back! Seriously: NEVER!

Once you become a parent, you can kiss solitude, meditative reflection on your own and sheer physical space goodbye. Your children will lie horizontally spread out in your bed while assaulting you repeatedly and getting the best sleep of their lives.

Your child or multiple children will sit on your lap in a room while several couches and chairs sit in the same room, empty and available. Your children will follow you from room to room, not allowing you to even attempt the simplest household duties without their perpetual presence.

And best of all: you will never use the bathroom without the interruption or even inclusion from your child again. They don't tell you this in birthing classes or during pre-natal care but really: privacy is the first thing you lose. And really, it begins before the baby even comes. There will be approximately 68 people in the room when you have the baby and nobody will care about your privacy.

Because of this, I decided that when I had my last baby, I was going to experience some privacy. I scheduled my C-section so early in the morning that there were barely any cars on the road or people in the hospital. My other two space invaders (children) were being watched by my mother and our delivery room was empty upon our arrival.

I smiled from ear-to-ear, and then it happened: The nurse who walked into the door exclaimed, "Good morning, Pastor! Good morning, Nicole!" Just my luck, our attending nurse was a woman named Minnie, a member of my church! I shook my head, realizing that no matter what I planned or plotted I would never, ever have any privacy.

I imagine that these thoughts crossed Elizabeth's mind too. When we find her in the first chapter of Luke, she's in the midst of a self-imposed seclusion. She's hidden herself away after learning from an angel that, despite barrenness and an AARP membership years in the making, she and her husband would be having a baby. When she heard the news she wanted some privacy and for five months she remained alone in her home, waiting.

Elizabeth is like so many of us when we're waiting on something from God. Whether it's a baby to be born, a diagnosis to be confirmed or a prayer to be answered, we're uncomfortable having other people in our spiritual waiting rooms. Because the truth is, we don't like the way we "look" when we're waiting. We don't want other people to see us when we're desperately trying to figure out if after all of this is said and done, will God do what God promised? We don't want other people to hear us praising God one day and doubting God the next. We, like Elizabeth, want to close the door and witness the miracle in private where our vulnerability won't be public.

And while that may be how we work, that's never how God works. God doesn't do miracles for our private benefit; God does miracles for public blessing. And so, just when her third trimester began, Elizabeth had an uninvited guest. Her little cousin Mary came knocking on her door, bursting into her privacy, hoping they could wait on God together.

Elizabeth had a choice just like I did. Like we all do. She could invite Mary into her waiting. She could risk her own vulnerability and together they could witness God's miracles or she could continue going it alone. While I'm no Elizabeth, here's what I know for sure: Its better together. When we invite other people into our divine waiting rooms we invite blessings we didn't know we needed. Elizabeth didn't know she needed Mary. She was the daughter of priests, married to a priest, carrying the harbinger of the Son of God, but none of that had connected her to the Holy Spirit in the way Mary did. It was only in waiting with Mary that she received what she didn't know she was even looking for.

As I prepared to welcome my third baby, I needed Minnie. I didn't know she was a supervising nurse and because of her presence and position I would be treated like a queen for every moment of my stay. But God knew. (Guest Writer Nicole Caldwell Gross)

And so in this season of waiting I challenge you to risk to look for the witness: Who is God calling you to wait with? Who is God calling you to invite into your divine waiting room? For when you do you WILL lose your privacy (forever) but you'll find blessings you didn't know you were looking for.



"Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others."

Booker T. Washington

Saturday, Getting Ready

This is a fond memory of Christmas at my first church. When we were "getting ready" to do our first "adopted families" Christmas. People from the church signed up to adopt families who needed a little extra help with Christmas that year. As always, my office was working chaos, but it was a reminder of how a little bit of everyone coming together spreads love even further (GMB)



Recipe



Monday, Cookies



This recipe is known to many as Tea Time Tassies, but my Grandmother called them Dearest on Earth Cookies. They took quite a while to make and very little time to eat. She would encourage us to slow down and enjoy them. She did love making them for us. Thank you Grandma! (LM)

Dearest on Earth Cookies

1 (3 oz.) cream cheese
1/2 c. butter
1 c. flour
1 egg
3/4 c. brown sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tbsp. soft butter
2/3 c. broken pecans

Soften cheese and butter at room temperature; blend. Add flour. Chill about 1 hour. Cut into 24 pieces. Press into ungreased 1 3/4 inch muffin cups. Press dough on bottom and sides. Beat together egg, sugar, 1 tbsp. butter, vanilla and salt just until smooth. Divide half pecans among pastry lined cups, top with egg mixture and finish with remaining pecans. Bake in slow oven (325 degrees) 25 minutes. Cool. Remove from pans.



Tuesday

“Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

Luke 6:39 MSG

I used to think receiving was much better than giving, in my teen years that idea turned upside down. As a child, I would think about all the gifts I would receive for Christmas, I would be so obsessed that I would go hunting for my gifts when my parents weren't home. I would often find them and open them and then carefully rewrap them. I will say it was anticlimactic on Christmas morning when I had already unwrapped and seen my gifts.

And then the turnaround year came and all I could think about was the special gifts I would buy or make for others. I could identify with the sentiment: “Giving, not getting, is the way.” It was such a joy to give gifts that brought joy to the receiver. I was happy to be generous with my money and time to bring joy to others.

One of my favorite ways to give a gift is to make something. In using my hands and creativity I love to create gifts for people. My hope is that the time and care given to making the gift expresses the generosity of my love and care for the recipient.

Christmas has never been the same since that year that I flipped from receiving to giving. My life has never been the same since that year. I can truly say that as I became more focused on generosity I have experienced for myself, that in giving away my life, I find life given back.

May we all experience the joy of living generous lives!!
(VMB)

Wednesday, Blue Christmas

*“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.*

*Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man. “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,
because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors
treated the prophets. Luke 6:20-23*

Cries of “Merry Christmas!” and non-stop caroling contrast with the feelings of many at this time of year. For those suffering from the recent or impending death of loved ones and for those whose families are in crisis, Christmas can be a very isolated and dreary time.

The holidays can remind many people of what they have lost or have never had. The anguish of broken relationships, the insecurity of unemployment, the struggle of addiction, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation - all these can make us feel very alone in the midst of the celebrating and spending. We need the space and time to acknowledge our sadness and concern; we need to know that we are not alone.

If you are suffering the anguish of a broken relationship, the anxiety around unemployment, or the cloud of poor health, we wish to share a message of hope and healing.

May the message that Jesus came into a dark and weary world bring comfort and hope for you who are having trouble entering into the joy of the season. Today we pray for those who find rejoicing hard.

“O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.” (GY)



Friday, Lessons from a Christmas Tree

- * Be a light in the darkness.
- * We all feel fall over sometimes.
- * You can never wear too much glitter.
- * Bring joy to others.
- * Sparkle and twinkle as often as possible.
- * It's okay to be a little tilted.

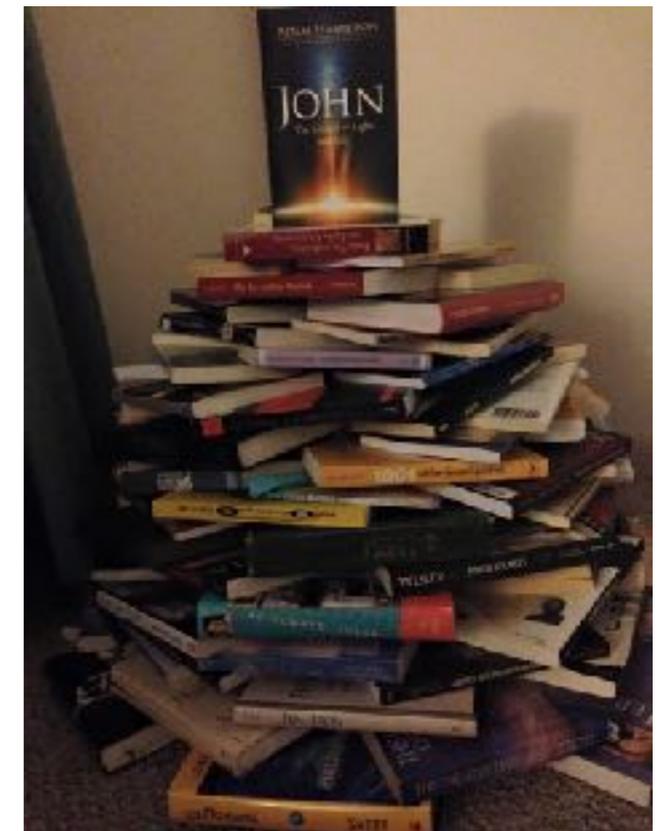
Thursday, Oh Christmas Tree



O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Thy leaves are so unchanging
O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Thy leaves are so unchanging
Not only green when summer's here
But also when it's cold and drear
O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Thy leaves are so unchanging

O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Such pleasure do you bring me
O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Such pleasure do you bring me
For every year this Christmas tree
Brings to us such joy and glee
O Christmas tree, o Christmas tree
Such pleasure do you bring me

#237 UM Hymnal



I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. ~ Luke 2:10-12

Saturday, Christmas Altar

“Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw them were certain that they had witnessed a Christmas miracle right before their eyes” Legend of the Poinsettia



Week 5 Birth

Sunday

Almost thirty years ago I gave birth to a baby boy on Christmas. He was not my first child but his birth changed my family's world. This was the only Christmas before that time and since that time that I was ready ahead of schedule for Christmas. My family had all come to my house for Christmas. When I went into labor on Christmas Eve, three weeks ahead of schedule, I waited to the last possible minute to go to the hospital so I could spend time with my family. My husband and I traveled an hour by car to the hospital. It was an anxious hour ride to the hospital and it was gently snowing. I can only imagine what Mary was going through as the hour for her delivery came.

We don't know who was there to help Mary with birth of her baby boy, but I had a young female, Jewish doctor because all the Christian Doctors were off on Christmas. She was amazing and just who I needed. I know Mary must have had just who she need also. I know that God was with her because I know that God was with me also. God is with all of us in times where new life is taking place. These are unplanned times of often very planned lives.

I did not have many visitors on that first morning with my son-because it was Christmas. I even had someone else's breakfast, someone who has left because it was Christmas and there were limited people working in the hospital kitchen. My husband went home to sleep and we have video of an exhausted family sleeping while my two-year-old daughter ran around the house in Christmas excitement. She didn't realize that her life was about to change with addition of a baby brother. The world had no idea that life would change with Mary's baby son, born in Bethlehem. My daughter was brought to see her new baby brother just as the shepherds also had to come and see the new baby. Her reaction was more like Herod the King than the Glory and the wonder of the Shepherds. She had an absolute melt down on the way home from visiting her new brother.

New life is has so many unexpected aspects, just like the bringing of a new baby into a family. We can plan and prepare our lives and our hearts, but there will always be aspects that are unexpected-that is why it is new. I learned as a new mother to just accept and embrace these unexpected aspects of life. I don't know if Mary had any idea what the baby Jesus was to bring to her and to the world but I know that she was there to be the love that her baby needed to start life in the world. Cherish the times of new birth in your life-no matter what stage- and be the love that gives strength to the changes that new life is to bring. Know that God will give you what you need for that new life even when others reaction to new life is more like King Herod than the wonder of the Shepherds.(LM)

Recipe



Monday,

Fruited Wreath

2 pkgs yeast
½ c warm water
1 ¼ c buttermilk
2 eggs
5 ½ c flour
½ c butter, softened
½ c sugar
2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp salt
½ c chopped pecans
1 tbs grated lemon peel
1 c chopped mixed candied fruit

DIRECTIONS

In large bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Add buttermilk, eggs, 2 ½ c. of the flour, butter, sugar, baking powder and salt. Blend 1/2 minute on low speed, scraping bowl constantly. Beat 2 min at medium speed. Stir in remaining flour, pecans, lemon peel and fruit. Turn dough

onto floured board. Knead 5 min or about 200 turns. Roll dough into strip 24inch x 6inch. Cut into 3 strips, each 24inch x 2inch. Braid loosely. On greased cookie sheet, twirl braid onto wreath shape and pinch ends together to seal. Let rise in warm place until double (about 1 hour). Bake at 375 for about 30 minutes. If desired, brush top with glaze.

It has become our family tradition to make this bread every Christmas Eve and enjoy it Christmas morning with coffee, juice, and a pan of scrambled eggs. Enjoy! (VMB)

Prayer : Thank you, O God of incarnation for the gift of love which greets us Christmas morning! Amen.

Tuesday. Do you hear what I hear?

Do you hear what I hear?

You know what Mary, Joseph, and everyone else who came from Bethlehem were going home to do? This trip was all business no pleasure, it is was a government-dictated homecoming and they were all going there to pay taxes.

For Mary and Joseph, this decree meant a 90-mile trip to pay taxes. A 90-mile trek with a woman 9 months pregnant.

Did you hear the sound of the first Christmas?

I would imagine the travelers Mary and Joseph walked alongside or came across on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem may have been less than thrilled about making such a long trip so the government could take their money. Just imagine having to walk or ride a donkey for three days to get to the line at the government bureau. There was probably rumbling and grumbling, and complaining?

So is that what you have heard?

What are the things that have caused you to stress and complain this Christmas? Are you ready to let them go and instead hear the sweet whisper of God calling your name.

Do you hear the words of the angel that came to both Mary and Joseph saying do not be afraid, God is with you.

Are you frightened? Listen! I hear God calling you by name, saying, "Do not be afraid."

Are you sad? Listen! I hear God saying to you, "I am bringing you good news of great joy!"

Are you worried? Listen! I hear God telling you, "To you is born this day ... a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord!"

Do you hear what I hear?

Listen! Do you hear your name, this Christmas? Do you hear God calling you by name? I do.

Do you hear what I hear?

I'm hoping there will be a lot more rejoicing than complaining. What's it going to be for you? The angels said the joy, the good news was to be for all people, a Savior for you

That includes you—if you'll listen. Merry Christmas!

Wednesday, Singing

Singing and Christmas are intertwined. My family had to immortalize singing and Christmas each year through pictures. People will sing Christmas carols when they will not sing at other times of the year. These carol's reach back through our generations just as our Christmas scriptures reach back. We carry these songs and memories forward in our memories and our hearts. (LM)



Dear Lord, Hear our songs of praise from our past, in our present and in the years to come. Amen.

 **Thursday, There's A Song in the Air**
*There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer
and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King!*

*There's a tumult of joy
o'er the wonderful birth,
for the virgin's sweet boy
is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King!*

Josiah G. Holland #249 UM Hymnal

Friday, Christmas At Grammy's (VMB)

Grandchildren are the crown of grandparents, and parents are the glory of their children. Prov 17:6





Week 6 Tell the Good News

Sunday

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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

Go spread the good news that God is at hand! These are the words that stick in my brain left over from camp Aldersgate, and the many many weeks I spent at a variety of Vacation Bible Schools growing up. But it is a line that speaks true to me every single day.

This is the core of the commandments in the Gospels- go! Spread the Good News! During Christmas time we go and spread the good news that Christ has been born. We talk about how life changing it is that God poured God-self into human form and lived and walked among us. How stinking incredible is that???

The best part about learning songs at camp and Vacation Bible School, is that you never actually learn how to sing them, you just learn how to sing them from your heart. Songs become less about the beautiful music that you make and more about the joy, bravado, and VOLUME you can reach. There is such enthusiasm in these spaces, and the tunes never ever leave your brain. They become a part of who you are, a part of your identity you can never erase. You learn to tell the story of God's redeeming love in a way that you can never forget.

What if we applied those same principles to the way we share the Good News in the world today? What if sharing the Good News about the birth of the Savior, about his life and death and resurrection reflected the way I learned VBS and Camp Songs: not about getting the story or the witness perfectly, but about talking about our faith journeys and how life changing it is for the transformation of our lives and the kingdom of God with deep enthusiasm. What if we told the stories of how our lives have been changed through God were told so often and so enthusiastically that it stuck in the minds of our friends and the strangers we encounter.

I am not advocating for attacking people and screaming our witness, but if we were to embrace our stories and tell them with joy- that unto us a Savior has been born and the world is forever CHANGED, imagine how much Good News could be spread, and how the kingdom is at hand. If we truly embraced the story of God's redeeming love was written on our hearts, a part of our identity we could never forget, one that we HAD to share with everyone we met. May we embrace the telling of the Good News this day and every day. May we be like the angels and the shepherds and the wise folks who could not help but proclaim that unto us a Savior had been born. (GM)

Holy, Gracious and Eternal God, you are amazing and you have done amazing things in this world. Help me to be like the shepherds and the angels and the wise folks in spreading the good news that unto us a Savior has been born! Give us the strength to be the people who speak your Good News, our Good News with joy and enthusiasm. Help us to live fully in the light of your amazing love. In Christ's Name, Amen.

*Rejoice, for God is with us — Emmanuel.
In the darkness of our world shines God's holy
light. Now there is reason to hope, to love, to
laugh, to live. God is truly with us. We are not
alone. Thanks be to God!*

Saturday, Candlelight

*Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor,
Almighty God, Emmanuel, Emmanuel, God with us, Emmanuel.*



Church With
MiMi (JPB)



Recipe



Monday

St. Andre with Red Peppercorn Bath

½ pound (wedge)

St. Andre Cheese, could substitute Brie

3 Tbs (whole)

red peppercorns

3 Tbs extra virgin olive oil

2 Tbs (fresh) parsley,

2 Tbs finely minced

2 Tbs (fresh) thyme sprigs

DIRECTIONS

Cut the cheese into 2 or 3 wedges and place on a serving plate. In a small bowl, combine oil and peppercorns warm in the microwave for about 60 seconds. Pour over the cheese while warm or let sit to room temperature and use when needed. Strip some of the thyme leaves over the plate and garnish with small sprigs of thyme. Dust with the finely minced parsley. Serve with crackers (I like stone wheat crackers) or toasted baguette slices.



Wednesday

My Father and his brother in front of the Media Methodist Episcopal Church that my grandfather served. My Grandmother hand painted the color on each card. (LM)

Thank you, God, for the marking of time with Christmas cards! Bless all those who sent Christmas wishes this year to me.

Tuesday, Passing on Traditions

“Today I know that such memories are the key not to the past, but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work he will give us to do.” Corrie Ten Boom

Share a tradition in your life that you hope is not forgotten.



My son in law Eddie is passing on the tradition of marching in Phial New Year's Mummers' Parade to my grandson Tristan.(GY)





Thursday, New Year's Prayer

Most Holy God, we begin our new year with you, hoping that this year will be different and better; hoping we will be better persons; hoping our work will be improved; hoping our marriages will be better; hoping our families will be stronger. Lord, we place our hope in you for you are the author of our lives.

We pray for the churches of our nation and for our church, that your Holy Spirit will be alive for all to experience you. We pray for our country as we go through the transition of leadership—that the values of compassion, justice, and caring for the least, the last, and the lost will be a priority for our leaders, and for their decision making. We pray for our world; that relations among all your people will be better, that strife will cease, that refugees will find a place of peace and life, and that those who hunger will be filled.

Lord, as this New Year dawns, we embrace you in our lives once more. We welcome you into our new year of living. We pray that you will sow light in our hearts, that it might germinate and grow and bring forth fruit. Birth in us something new. Let your peace take root. Let your love blossom with patience and compassion. Let it strengthen forgiveness and understanding. Let your life emerge in us, through us, around us, bringing newness to all it touches.

Holy Creator, we may not know what this year holds, but we know who holds us. And because it is you that holds us, we place our faith and trust in you. Lord help us to have our eyes open to your light, your ways, and your presence as we go throughout this year. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen. (VMB)



Friday "O God Our Help in Ages Past"

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home.

Issac Watts, #117 UM Hymnal



I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him.

1Sam 1:27

Saturday, Baby's First Christmas

*What a precious bundle of joy
You are cute from head to toe
You melt our hearts with your sweetness
Everywhere you go
You're a special gift this Christmas
Sent from heaven above
A perfect little angel - Thea (JAE)*



Week 7 Stars



Sunday

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'”

Despite being seemingly late for the birth, and bringing some pretty strange gifts I lean towards giving the wisemen some leeway. I wonder if given the chance if I would even have made the journey to follow the star. Then I ponder how many shining stars has God set before me that I have failed to follow.

If you are like me, maybe this Epiphany we could take a few lessons from the wisemen. An epiphany according to Wikipedia is a sudden realization or appearance, originally meaning and insight into the divine. In the liturgical sense the season of Epiphany begins with the celebration of the magi's journey. They followed the star to find the newborn king and worship him.

A journey to follow the star begins with a spirit of openness. You can't find anything if you are not looking. The wise men were studying the stars, it was part of their practice. They were paying attention to changes. How are you studying the world around you? How are you studying the world around you? Do you pay attention to the changes that are happening around you, especially those that might not be having a direct effect on you? How many families are struggling in our neighborhood?

The magi saw the star and they had a willingness to take action. They needed to leave everything to follow. When was the last time you took up something new – took on an adventure that you did not control the outcome?

That star in sky was shining in the distance, their journey was not an easy one, they even got lost. The magi pursued the logical path, a king was born to the Jews, so we should ask the King of the Jews, Herod for directions. This was not a great move, I personally believe this incident is why me to this day do not ask for directions. However, when you are on a search for something that matters you should expect that you will run into problems.

Yet they remained focused on the goal, following the star. Despite the long trip and the bad stop at the palace of Herod they continued, they were not going to be satisfied with half baked goals.

Finally when they reached their destination they instinctively worshiped Jesus the king and showered him with their treasures. Part of their worship included giving generously. Their generosity may have allowed for the Holy family to escape when needed to Egypt, however their gift was not about the need it was a response to the presence of God.

The question before us this Epiphany is not what we will bring to Christ, but what will we take away from him, knowing all the costs. (GY)

Recipe



Monday, King's Cake

The King's Cake is traditionally baked to celebrate the visit of the Magi to the Christ child. The cake is served throughout the Epiphany season and in some settings made for Mardi Gras.

*Bless the food before us
The family beside us
And the love between us Amen.*

2 packages (1/4 ounce each) active dry yeast
1/2 cup warm water (110° to 115°)
3/4 cup sugar, divided
1/2 cup butter, softened
1/2 cup warm 2% milk (110° to 115°)
2 egg yolks
1-1/4 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
3-1/4 to 3-3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 egg, beaten

Glaze

1-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 to 3 tablespoons water
Green, purple and yellow sugars

In a large bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Add 1/2 cup sugar, butter, milk, egg yolks, salt, lemon peel, nutmeg and 2 cups flour. Beat until smooth. Stir in enough remaining flour to form a soft dough (dough will be sticky).



Turn onto a floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic, about 6-8 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease the top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1 hour. Punch dough down. Turn onto a lightly floured surface. Roll into a 16-in. x 10-in. rectangle. Combine cinnamon and remaining sugar; sprinkle over dough to within 1/2 in. of edges. Roll up jelly roll style, starting with a long side; pinch seam to seal. Place seam side down on a greased baking sheet; pinch ends together to form a ring. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour. Brush with egg. Bake at 375° for 25-30 minutes or until golden brown. Cool completely on a wire rack. For glaze, combine the confectioners' sugar, lemon juice and enough water to achieve desired consistency. Spread over cake. Sprinkle with colored sugars. Yield: 1 cake (12 slices).



Tuesday, Herbs

Since the early days of Christianity, Biblical scholars and theologians have offered varying interpretations of the meaning and significance of the gold, frankincense and myrrh that the magi presented to Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:11). These valuable items were standard gifts to honor a king or deity in the ancient world: gold as a precious metal, frankincense as perfume or incense, and myrrh as anointing oil.

Two of these gifts are herbs. Frankincense and myrrh are both are resins derived from trees. Frankincense is sweet-smelling and is often used as a cosmetic. Myrrh, despite its bitter taste, is used as a major ingredient in Eastern medicine traditions.

The herbs and spices are an important part not only of this story and ancient life, but of our lives. They not only improve the taste of foods but can help preserve them for longer periods of time.

They are plants that are known for their beauty, aroma, zest, and healing benefits. Some have antibacterial and antiviral properties and many are high in vitamins and trace minerals. Most herbs and spices also contain properties of disease-fighting antioxidants—sometimes even greater than other fruits and vegetables. Herbs and spices come from plants, barks of trees, roots, and even salt from the sea.(VBM)

Prayer: Thank you God, for the gift of herbs and spices which give us flavor and help our bodies to heal and be whole. Amen. (GY)

Wednesday: Star Words

Epiphany is an important celebration for the people of Simply Grace. We have a wonderful service filled with music, then a wonderful brunch. But the most special aspect is the tradition of receiving "star words". As the magi were guided by a star we will contemplate our word to consider how God might be guiding our life in the new year. Over the years we have had all kinds of stars, girl scout made us glitter covered stars, we had small tin stars, and shiny blue vinyl stars. The stars with their attached word are displayed somewhere where the receiver can see them daily. Over the year, we share stories how the star guided our faith journey over the year. The tradition has become such a success even members who have moved away ask for their "star" to be sent to them each year. Below are some of the words we use each year. GY

kindness	innocence	faith	honor	obedience	loyalty	guidance
caring	prayerfulness	consideration	contentment	thoughtful	rejoicing	hospitality
sharing	praise	fellowship	imagination	responsible	respect	foresight
giving	gentleness	unity	commitment	patience	insight	trust
compassion	knowledge	teaching	friendship	forgiveness	selflessness	learning
love	happiness	singing	freedom	humility	righteousness	proclamation
openness	laughter	celebration	creativity	faithfulness	assurance	encouragement
pardon	acceptance	perseverance	devotion	hope	justice	trustworthy
understanding	self-control	judgment	joy	tenderness	honesty	inspiration
discipleship	restraint	discipline	strength	enthusiasm	wisdom	wonder
servanthood	mercy	courage	comfort	evangelism	awareness	flexibility
stability	truth	confidence	leadership	healing	tolerance	grace
hopefulness	peace	clarity	discernment		wholeness	graciousness

Thursday, Star of David

When my Mother moved away from California, she received a quilt from her friends. It was a friendship quilt. Each person chose her own fabrics and whether she machine quilted or hand quilted her block. A little part of each person's personality is seen in each block created. As you can see from the picture, it is the interaction of each block with the blocks around it that creates the beauty and movement of the quilt. Just as in life, our individuality combines with each other to create life. (LM)

Dear Lord, we thank you for all the blessing of friends and the variety of our lives.
Amen.



Friday, Star Child

*Star-Child, earth-Child,
go-between of God,
love Child, Christ Child,
heaven's lightning rod,*

*Street child, beat child,
no place left to go,
hurt child, used child
no one wants to know,*

*Grown child, old child,
mem'ry full of years,
sad child, lost child,
story told in tears,*

*Spared child, spoiled child,
having, wanting more,
wise child, faith child,
knowing joy in store,*

*Hope-for-peace Child,
God's stupendous sign,
down-to-earth Child,
Star of stars that shine,*

*Refrain: This year, this year,
let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!*

Shirley Erena Murray #2095 Faith We Sing





Week 8 Wise Guys

Saturday

Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing. Isaiah 40:26



Sunday

I am so terrible with directions. It's so bad that I'm still making those "L" with my pointers and my thumbs to determine which side is my left. When I used to teach karate and I had to mirror my class... well that was always an adventure because I could never mirror and give instructions to the class all at the same time.

I lived in Southeastern Kentucky for two summers while I was in college working for Red Bird Mission. This is the place where I learned to love God in a new way, where I learned to love my neighbor, and where I learned to love the person God was calling me to be. I have many sappy and amazing stories from Red Bird. But here is the part that's important for this story. Those two summers that I was living there, out of cell phone range (and thus out of GPS range) my friends and I still managed to get around pretty well, but that sense of direction was quickly lost when I left.

The next summer when I returned to Red Bird with my mission trip fleet of 145 people, I was asked to be a crew leader for one of the teams going out. That morning one of the staff gave me directions, and drew me a picture on the back of my instructions for the site. DJ's directions went a little like this-"you know the church on mud creek, go out there, turn left, keep going, the road is gravel, when you see the powder horn there's a sign, I don't know what the sign says, but there's a sign, turn left there. Got it? Okay. See you out there in a couple hours."

I did not get it. I had actually no idea where we were headed. I managed to make it to the right general "holler" that we needed to get to, but beyond that, I got everyone lost. My driving partner and I wound up stuck in the mud at one point and had to wait for someone to come by and help pull us out... we wound up stopping at one convenient store 4 or 5 times to get directions-THE SAME ONE.

At one point I decided to just start asking people I found in the holler. Most of the hollers in Kentucky are small enough that everyone knows everyone and everyone has a generally different name. We ran into enough people that we showed up at the house we thought we were supposed to be at....

And like the Wise Men when they first arrived at the home of King Herod, we realized we were very very very wrong. When I asked for the woman we were looking for, the nice man on the porch with the shot gun replied that she was in jail.

We didn't need angels to tell us not to go back that way and get out of there... we knew to go.

Eventually (after a few phone calls at that convenient store...) I managed to help guide our group to the house where we were supposed to be working. There we found God-we found God in learning to work with one another, in learning new skills and in getting to know our homeowner. We found God in each other as the group came together

during our day off to purchase our homeowner a rocking chair so she could sit out on her newly constructed porch with her friends and family.

The wise men took a long journey to find Jesus. They may have made a couple of wrong turns, or thought about giving up on their journey. They showed up at the wrong place at first and didn't know what they were going to find. When they realized they were not where they were supposed to be, they kept on their journey, following their course until they found and experienced God.

We are all on a journey. Sometimes we are bad with directions, make a few wrong turns or flat our refuse to ask how to get to our destination. Sometimes we wind up in the wrong place- and we have to discern whether to stay or to go... The journey is long, and hard but here's what makes it worth it-the end, and the friends.

The people you have with you on your journey-it was not just one wise man traveling alone (and I had my very very good driving buddy Connie with me!) those people matter. Your traveling companions for this road will help make or break your style. They'll be the ones that help you find the path again when you've lost it or when you've wandered from it. They will help you figure out which side is your left side.

The end of the journey is an experience with God-encountering God in a new and profound way.

Let us be open to the path that God is leading up to. Let us be open to the friends God has provided with on our journey. The journey is long and windy, but it is worth it. (GM)

Recipe



Monday, Pork and Sauerkraut

My husband's family is German, every New Year's Day we would go to a family member's home for the traditional meal of Pork and Sauerkraut.



According to the German Food Guide,

"Eating Sauerkraut on New Year's Eve is a long-standing tradition in Germany. It is believed that eating Sauerkraut will bring blessings and wealth for the new year. Before the meal, those seated at the table wish each other as much goodness and money as the number of shreds of cabbage in the pot of Sauerkraut. The pig has long been a symbol for good luck and well-being. Because of this, many people believe that eating a meal with pork will bring luck in the coming new year."

*God is great!
God is good!
Let us thank Him
For our food.
Amen.*

1 3-pound, boneless pork roast
(shoulder is the most tender)

1 (32-ounce) package sauerkraut,
undrained

1 medium apple, cored, cut into thin
wedges

4-5 pieces of garlic

1/4 cup chopped onion

2 tablespoons firmly packed brown
sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon pepper

2 tablespoons butter

Heat oven to 350°F. Season pork,
Take a knife and cut holes to stick
garlic. I like to do about 4-6 slits then
shove a piece of garlic in to give
flavor. Add butter to a Dutch oven.
Cook over medium heat, turning
several times, 7-9 minutes or until
browned. Remove meat from pan.

Sauté onion and apple in juices.
Drain and wash sauerkraut, combine
sauerkraut and brown sugar Add
sauerkraut mixture. Return pork to
pot, cover. Bake in oven for 1 1/2-2
hours or until pork roast reaches an
internal temperature of 160°F.

Tuesday

Three Wise Women

Would have asked directions

Arrived on time

Helped deliver the baby

Brought practical gifts

Cleaned the stable

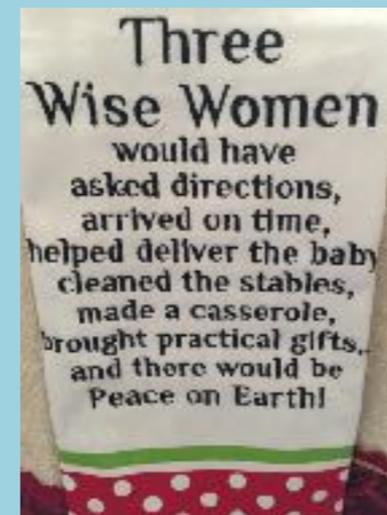
Made a casserole

And there would be peace on earth!

A few years ago a friend gave me a dish towel with the above poem. It got me thinking...On many levels, I can affirm and embrace (with a smile) this sentiment.

I do think that the caring functions provided by women would have helped make the barrenness of the stable less austere and welcoming; but I'm not convinced, knowing some women who are rulers that it would have been any more (or less) peaceful. (I wish, but I'm not convinced.)

Women can be amazing caregivers! I will attest to the power of the caring women following surgery in my own life—the food that showed up faithfully for four weeks. I can tell countless stories of women who have helped with other people's children, have cleaned homes for ailing friends and relatives, and have cared for aging parents and neighbors. I give thanks for women who live out their faith in tangible ways.



Prayer: God, thank you for faithful friends who arrive on time and give us practical gifts that sustain us. Amen. What might God be inviting me to be or to know or understand?

The angel's first words are "do not be afraid" is there an area in your life that God is instructing you not to be afraid? (VMB)



Wednesday, "We Three Kings"

*We three kings of orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain
Moor and mountain
Following yonder star*

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King for ever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign*

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light*

*Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high*

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light*

*Myrrh is mine
Its bitter perfume breathes
A life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone cold tomb*

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light*

John Hopkins 1859, #254 UM Hymnal

Thursday, Chalk Blessings A Blessing of the Home

Leader: The Lord is with you;

People: And also with you.

All: Peace be to this house and to all who live, work,
and visit here.

Leader: The three wise men came to Bethlehem in search of the Lord. They brought to him precious gifts: gold to honor the newborn king, incense to the true God in human form, and myrrh to anoint his body, which one day would die like our own.

Let us pray. O God, you once used a star to show to all the world that Jesus is your Son. May the light of that star that once guided wise men to honor his birth, now guide us to recognize him also, to know you by faith, and to see you in the epiphanies of the daily experiences of our lives.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord — Jesus born of Mary — shall be revealed.

People: And all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

All: As the Wise Men once sought your brilliant light, O Lord, so may we seek to live and work in your splendor.

Leader: O God of Light, bless this (our) house and this (our) family. May this be a place of peace and health. May each member of this family cultivate the gifts and graces you have bestowed, dedicating our talents and works for the good of all.

Make this house a shelter in the storm and a haven of rest for all in need of your warmth and care. And when we go out from this place, may we never lose sight of that Epiphany star.

People: As we go about our work, our study, our play, keep us in its light and in your love.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>



Friday

I recently read about a wonderful ritual in the Hispanic tradition, called Las Posadas. The word posada means 'shelter'. Adults and children take on the role of Mary and Joseph and for nine nights prior to Christmas they process through the church and the neighborhood, stopping at designated stations that represent the innkeepers. At each encounter ancient words are exchanged. Joseph says to the innkeeper: 'In the name of God, we ask those who dwell here, give some travelers lodging this evening.' In response a chorus of voices cries out: 'This is not an inn; move on.'

This is repeated over and over again with the voices becoming more and more angry. This continues each night for eight nights and on the ninth night which is Christmas Eve an innkeeper is so moved by their plea that he opens up his barn, and this humble posada becomes the birth place of Jesus. Much celebration follows when children are showered with gifts and people in the community recall how the stranger at the door can actually be the presence of God

Hospitality means living life with an attitude of openness, welcome and acceptance toward others. When we can live with those attitudes it brings a quality of posada, a sheltering quality to people around us. Your gender, or skin color or cultural background aren't relevant. The stranger in us all longs as Mary and Joseph longed, for posada.

What made Jesus' life so compelling was the availability of his life. Jesus himself was a stranger his entire life, but what we also know is that Jesus continues to be a stranger in this world until we practice the attitude and actions of hospitality.

We have to constantly remind ourselves that the world is a lot bigger than what is in front of our eyes each day. There are people going hungry in Africa and Asia but also right down the street. There are people who cannot heat their homes this winter and people who don't even have a home. When we start with hospitality then we start to take care of those people's needs. When we start with hospitality we start to have a heart that looks like the King we serve.

(GY)



Saturday

*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.” Mat 2:6*

*Beautiful poinsettias often grace our altars for
Christmas Eve. It is often tricky keeping these
tropical plants alive.*

Here are a few tips:

- *Keep the room temp a comfortable 65-75
degrees*
- *Poinsettias need light, even indirect sunlight*
- *Punch holes in the bottom foil cover so that
water can drain into a saucer.*



Week 9 Light in Darkness

Sunday

In the fall of 2016 about 20 ladies from Simply Grace gathered together at my home for a painting party.

We were lead to creating our own versions of “Starry Night” by Vincent Van Gogh. I knew I wanted to use our Starry Night paintings for Epiphany Sunday, however I had not fully considered how this would fit into worship.

As I prepared for Epiphany I came to learn far more about Vincent, his art and his faith. His is a story of a man who had a call on his life to share the good news of God’s love. A man who struggled with relationships, a man who was disappointed.

Vincent Van Gogh was destined to have become a minister. All the men of his family were devoted clergymen. However, Vincent’s efforts were not affirmed by his denomination. It was not until the age of twenty-seven, that van Gogh actually decided to paint. Prior to this Van Gogh had been a salesman in an art gallery, a French tutor, a theological student, and an evangelist among miners in Belgium.

The shift however from the world of ministry into the world of art was extremely difficult. This minister wanted to bring light to the dark world. He couldn’t preach but he could paint so he painted. The sermon of Starry Night is that in the dark we must look up, only then can we experience the light and the movement of God.

Starry Night was inspired by the work of Victor Hugo, Les Miserables. Hugo’s saintly bishop shared the same heart for God as Vincent:

“He was there alone with himself, collected, tranquil, adoring, comparing the serenity of his own heart with the serenity of the skies, moved in the darkness by the visible splendors of the constellations, and the invisible splendor of God, opening his soul to the thoughts that fall from the Unknown. In such moments offering up his heart at the hour when the flowers of night inhale their perfume, lighted like a lamp in the centre of The Starry Night...mysterious exchanges of the soul with the universe.”

An epiphany is an illuminating discovery, God offers us little epiphanies throughout our lives. Moments that if we just take a moment to peer at them they will be as alive as Van Gogh's sky.

If this is truly a "joy to the world" year for you, then praise God. Enjoy it. That's a gift. But maybe like Vincent you are peering through the lens of brokenness, know that God is real, the light of the world is present.

Like the magi who were searching and looking for the star in the East which was a star of hope, let us joyfully remember and celebrate the birth of the Savior Jesus, God with us always even if the Christmas season ends.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Bear witness to that light. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Stephen's French Onion Soup

In our family, French Onion soup is always a part of our celebrations. My husband has taken over the preparation of this special treat. His special care to slice the onions precisely the same thickness and slowly caramelizing them makes a big difference. So I encourage you to make this recipe often and with care. (GY)



5 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
6 large thinly sliced sweet onions
1/2 cup dry, red wine
1 carton (32 ounces each) beef broth
1 carton (32 ounces each) chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1 tsp thyme
8 slices French bread baguette
3/4 cup shredded Gruyere or Swiss cheese

Melt the butter and oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onions and cook until the onions are very soft and caramelized, about 15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Add wine and bring to a bit add broth, simmer for 20 minutes. Taste for seasonings.

Cut bread and toast. Float toast on top of ovenproof bowls. Top with cheese. Put bowls in oven to melt and slightly brown cheese.

*After a meal, satisfied,
bless God, your God, for
the good land he has
given you.*

Duet 8:10



Tuesday

This Little Light of Mine

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine;
this little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine;
this little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine;
everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine;
everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Afro-American spiritual #585 UM Hymnal

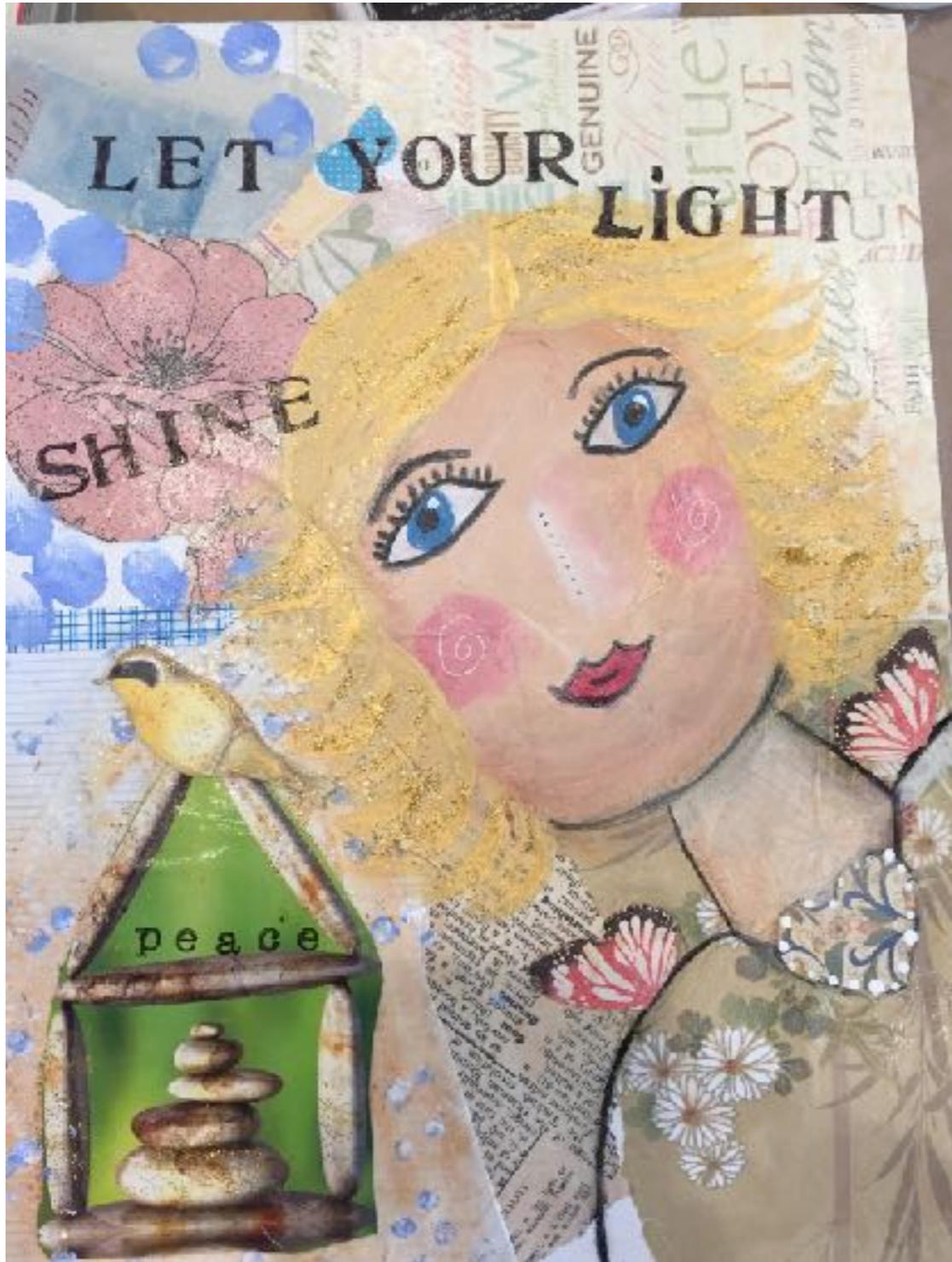
No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Luke 11:13



Wednesday, Let Your Light Shine

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."

"Angel of Light" (FN)



Thursday, Wesley Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.



Friday, I Believe

Anonymous Jewish poem, arranged by Mark A Miller

I believe in the sun, I believe in the sun
Even when, even when it's not shining.
I believe in love, I believe in love,
I believe in God, I believe in God
Even when, even when God is silent.



And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. Gen 1:3-5

Saturday

Think of a time when God has used somebody to enable you to "see the light".

How has it helped your faith?

Thank God for the people who have made a difference to your faith.

Ask God to enable you share your faith with others - pray for specific people and/or communities.



Week 10 Groundhogs and Fear



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

In the dark of night, this furry rodent is snatched from his warm home at the library. A short time later, he is being dropped into a cold field filled with 1000s of rowdy onlookers... and somehow we are surprised that this frightened animal goes running for the nearest hole. Groundhog Day!

Most people have at least one serious fear. A fear that sends us scurrying for the nearest hole. What is it for you? People fear poverty, unemployment, cancer, chronic pain, Alzheimer's, death of a partner or child, growing old, being alone. The current political climate amplifies our fears. Most people fear change, be it the need for change or the fear of change.

Our world seems to be growing smaller so the fears of the world come spilling into our lives regularly. Fear blurs our perceptions, the bad test result, the uneven market, the unknown – so on and so forth. When fear takes over that is when we likely forget God.

However I suggest today that we rely on the faithfulness of God when we face fear of the future rather than the voices of doom that invade our lives.

Often people believe that faith and fear are opposites—that if you trust God then you should have no fear. Nice idea until you have that knee-shaking, earth shattering moment.

When someone was recently lifted up for being brave, they countered with this claim that really resonated with me. Someone who is brave is able to face frightening situations without fear. Whereas someone who is faith-filled follows God into situations even when they are scared.

As we take steps of faith, as we look at how others have taken steps of faith in the midst of fear, hopefully our faith will push away our fears.

Instead of praying that fear will leave us alone, we can pray that when we are afraid we will trust and have confidence that God has provided all we need in this circumstance.

Combat fear with goodness. In the midst of the real and present danger and fear, do not allow yourself to be paralyzed. No, instead be the light of Christ in the midst of a crisis.

If we are able to face our fear, embrace our vulnerability – our fear can teach us about grace, help us to develop empathy and open ourselves up to the movement of God's spirit. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Chili Bake

I make chili when I have a lot of veggies that need to get used up in some way- so it's a clean out your fridge kind of recipe. Here's some basics to get you started

Whatever veggies you have left over- I use corn, carrots, peppers, kale whatever I have in my fridge

Cans of beans- don't be afraid to mix it up! I use white, garbanzo, kidney, whatever!

Tomatoes on tomatoes on tomatoes- whole tomatoes, diced tomatoes, canned tomatoes, crushed tomatoes, they make a fabulous base

Cumin, chili powder, hot sauce, oregano- mix it up! There are no set limits here, taste it as you go along.

If you want to add meat to this chili-brown some turkey in a separate pan and toss it on in.

Let it simmer for a couple of hours-the longer the better. Low and slowwww. Let all the flavors marry together.

I especially like chili on snowy days. I'll wake up in the morning, prepare my chili and put it on the stove to hang around while I work from home, get some cleaning done or binge watch some Netflix.

I'll serve my chili over a sweet potato or some brown rice and sometimes I'll top it with some avocado, cheese and sour cream (or any combination of those!). (GM)

God is great and God is good, And we thank God for our food;

By God's hand, we must be fed,

Give us Lord, our daily bread.

Amen.



Tuesday

"If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;

they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

*"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation." Psalm 91:11-16*

Oh, Lord, I am afraid; fear has captured my heart.

Where are you Lord?

I can't feel you in my heart.

Fear is consuming me.

Oh, my child, open your eyes and know I am in your heart. Let go of your fear and fill your heart with love. I love you and I am always with you until the end of time. (FN)



Wednesday, Be Not Afraid

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.
Isaiah 43:2-3*

Be Not Afraid

**You shall cross the barren desert,
but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety
though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words in foreign lands
and all will understand.**

**You shall see the face of God and live.
If you pass through raging waters in the sea,
you shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames,
you shall not be harmed.
If you stand before the pow'r of hell
and death is at your side,
know that I am with you through it all.**

**Blessed are your poor,
for the kingdom shall be theirs.
Blest are you that weep and mourn,
for one day you shall laugh.
And if wicked tongues insult and hate you
all because of me,
blessed, blessed are you!**

**Be not afraid.
I go before you always.
Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.**

Bob Dufford

Thursday, Faith Overcomes Fear

All of us can face times of doubt in our life. Most of us are living life at an extremely rapid pace. Maintain an exhausting schedule without moments of refreshment can impact you spiritually, causing you to question and doubt God's presence, power or purpose in your life.

C.S. Lewis, who was once a man with serious doubts and questions concerning faith, writes these words in his classic book Mere Christianity. "There will come a moment when there is bad news, or he is in trouble, or is living among a lot of other people who do not believe it, and all at once his emotions will rise up and carry out a sort of blitz on his belief. Now faith, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods."



Friday, Fear Not

"...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" Isaiah 40:31

When my mother suddenly landed in the hospital, it was my prayer that God would help her not be afraid. Although she did not run, actually she never walked again, she regained her strength and went home again.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. In sometimes mysterious, and sometimes not so mysterious ways they will be able to get back up and continue running. They will be dusted off in order to walk again. They will help each other up in the name and power of the Lord. And they will be there for the next person who is fearing the terror of the night.

And together, side by side, hand in hand, we will face the future, waiting for the day when Jesus will gather us up into His powerful eagle arms for the last time and wing us to the top of God's eternal mountain, where the complete intensity of this promise in Isaiah will be fulfilled and where there will be no more weariness or tiredness, or sorrow or crying or pain. For then, the old way of things will have passed away.

Then, indeed, we will run and not grow weary. We will walk and not be faint. (GY)





Saturday

Scripture: But now thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, the One who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. - Isaiah 43: 1-3a

In January of 2011, my husband and I journeyed with about 30 of our church members and their friends to the Holy Land. We had a marvelous and inspiring tour, first enjoying the beauty of the Galilee and then spending the last few days in Jerusalem. At the end of the tour, about half the group returned home, but the other half (including us) had chosen to spend an additional few days touring in Egypt. We began the long journey by bus from Jerusalem down past the Dead Sea and Elat, to the border, where we were joined by an armed guard, courtesy of the Egyptian government. We drove an additional six hours down the Saudi Arabian Peninsula to see the sight of the burning bush at St.

Catherine's monastery near Mt. Sinai. The accommodations were rustic, but the experience was wonderful—and I was really looking forward to the rest of our Egyptian journey—especially seeing the pyramids! In the morning we boarded the tour bus for another 8 hour journey into Cairo, where some of the group would tour and others would begin a short Nile cruise.

As we turned onto Cairo's main thoroughfare, our bus window was shattered by a young boy who through a glass soda bottle at us. There were crowds of people rushing through the streets, and our bus driver and tour host made the decision to stop at the first safe hotel they could rather than journey through the city to the Pyramid Hotel, our destination. Without our possessions or identification papers, we were led off the bus, The lobby became even more overcrowded as other tour buses were also stopping rather than try to make their way through streets that were becoming overwhelmed with rioters carrying fire torches as the darkness began to fall.

We chose to stay together in a second-floor ballroom of the hotel, where we took turns keeping watch over the proceedings in the street below, praying together, reading scripture, and quietly singing hymns together. It was truly one of those moments where our faith was put to the test. The words of Isaiah 43 comforted us as we waited for the night to pass and the dawn to break free once more. It would be two more days of journeying through tense times until we were out of Egypt, but our faith was strong, and we were thankful for the presence of God and those persons who guarded us during this experience.

(VMB)

Prayer: Help us rely on you more fully, O Lord, that we might trust you more deeply and remember that you are with us, no matter what happens in the midst of the storms of life. Amen.

Week 11 Mission

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."and turn and be healed." Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus calls all of us to go into all nations, everywhere to make disciple. Where ever we go, whatever we do we are to bring the Good News to all the world, that is our command. My husband and I had two sons but there was always a yearning inside of me to have a daughter.

We all know that's impossible so we decided if I was ever going to have a daughter, we would adopt. We also felt that there were so many children in the world that were homeless so adoption would be the answer. When our sons were 16 and 13 we decided it was now or never. We connected with an adoption agency who said we would have a baby within the year. We asked for an infant girl.

We were also told to contact any one we knew in any country and the agency would work with them. We had a friend in Colombia,SA. So we called her and she was delighted to help us out. And then one day the phone call came from Colombia. My husband was on the line upstairs and I was down stairs so we couldn't see each other. The voice on the other end of the line said the magic words we had been so waiting for: "We have a baby girl for you AND. And what? We had prayed and prayed for a little girl to complete our family and the voice said she was born. And the voice went onto say AND she has a little brother. We have a set of twins for you. WHAT? Did we hear right, twins? I was more than excited but had no idea what my husband was thinking upstairs so I politely said , "We will have to call you back."

My husband came downstairs, he was as shocked as I was, I looked at him and he looked at me. I said, "Well?" He said, "Of course!" I now often say to people be very careful what you pray for our God is a very generous God. We took our call to go out into the mission field and make disciples seriously. God gives us all opportunities to be in the mission field. All we have to do is say, Yes, here I am Lord ! (FN)



Fran and Bill's twins
Kaitlyn and Andrew

Recipe



Monday - Meatloaf Brownies

Good food,
Good meat,
Good God,
Let's eat.
Amen.

1 lb. lean ground beef
¼ cup chopped onion
1 cup cracker crumbs
½ cup milk (can substitute almond or soy milk)
SAUCE INGREDIENTS:
3 Tbsp. brown sugar
1 Tbsp. vinegar (Branch & Vine Mission Fig Balsamic is yummy here)
1 Tbs Worcestershire sauce
¼ tsp. chili powder
½ cup water
½ cup ketchup

Mix the meatloaf ingredients in a large bowl and season to taste.

Spread the meat evenly in the bottom of a brownie pan.

Mix the sauce ingredients until the sugar dissolves, then spread over the top of the meat.

Bake covered at 350° for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake for an additional 30 minutes or until meat is no longer pink.



Meatloaf brownies sustained us well for our work at Red Bird Mission.

Tuesday



I've been going to Red Bird Mission every single year since I was 12 years old. It has been the place that has shaped me and formed me in hundreds of ways. While I was in college, I interned at the mission.

Every project I did in college was somehow affected by my time in Kentucky, and every sermon I have preached has been influenced by learning about God through my time in Kentucky. Now Kentucky isn't for everyone, but for everyone there is a mission.

Where is God calling you to go?
What is God calling you to see in God's creation?
Are you willing to go?
Will you step out of the box to experience something new?
(GM)





Wednesday

For years I had thought, dreamed and prayed about going on an international mission trip. I had opportunities over the years, but it never seemed like the right time. My kids were too little, my husband was too busy at work for me to leave, and there always seemed to be a more important use for the money than for me to use it on myself, even if it was for a church trip.

All of this changed a few years

ago. My daughter who was finishing her junior year in high school had attended several mission trips with her youth group to Philadelphia to work at The Phila. Project or T.P.P. She spoke with our pastor and shared that she really wanted to go on an international mission trip, and did she think it was the right time for our church to go.

The next thing I know we are planning a trip to Honduras together to partner with a church there building Sunday school rooms. We also had the opportunity to work at an adult day care center, an elementary school, and worship at King of Kings Church. The trip was amazing! I am not going to say that I did not worry about a few things. The only Spanish I knew was thank you and where's the bathroom. Then there were questions like would my daughter be safe? Do they have mac and cheese there? And since I am a nurse, where is the nearest hospital?

But seconds after we arrived there all of my fears disappeared. The parishioner who planned and ran our trip, Dulce, was from Honduras. Her family was so incredibly welcoming and went out of their way to make us feel welcome and comfortable. Dulce, her family, and her church were amazing.

All of the years that I had passed up opportunities to experience other cultures, meet people, and serve besides potential new friends all in the name of Jesus and loving our neighbor. I missed them. I certainly

believe that things happen in God's time, but I also think God presents times for us to do things and we say let me think about it. Let me pray about it. The great commission tells us to go into the world and make disciples of all people. Maybe I need to do more going and less thinking about it. (DD)



Thursday,

I have been to Guatemala twice now with our dentist Dr. Trish Gardner. We go into remote villages in Guatemala and give dental care to people living there, some of whom have never seen a dentist. This year I was a dental assistant which was not easy. I had to know what instruments the dentist would need to perform his duties. But it was so gratifying to serve the people living there, who live in extreme poverty and are happy with what they have. We would be treating people who had been living with rotten, hurting teeth or even abscesses in their mouths and helping them. Now they would have no more pain. It is humbling to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ and know that we were making a difference in their lives though the grace of God. I thank God for all that I have and for being able to give back to God what God has given to me. If every Christian would serve the Lord with gladness we would have more love and peace in the world. When you are given the opportunity to serve, just say yes! (FN)



Friday, Katrina

Scripture: Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.-Hebrews 13:16

I'd been the pastor at Bridgewater for about a year when Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating hurricanes ever, hit the Gulf Coast in August of 2005. We wanted to grow in the practice of hands-on mission opportunities for adults without requiring people to be a chaperone on one of our 3 youth/college age week-long summer mission intensives. We were looking for a location to live out our call to serve others in the name of Christ when the opportunity to serve through the Volunteers in Mission (VIM) became available. We began to send teams into New Orleans, as well as Gulfport and Waveland Mississippi to help rebuild. The earliest crews did a lot of mucking out and tearing down to the studs in damaged homes. Later teams provided wall board, spackling and painting, flooring, and beautification. We kept going back for 5 years—for a total of six week-long trips, becoming familiar with the people of the area and invested in their future well-being. People sacrificed vacation time, money for travel and materials, but knew we were loving as Jesus would want us to. We were blessed to learn the honor of serving and celebrating our connection with them in Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we give you thanks for opportunities to look beyond our own needs to serve others in faithfulness. Amen. (VMB)



Week 12 Mountaintops & Regular Life

Saturday, Prepared for Mission

As Jesus gave the apostles the instructions as to how to pack for their first missionary journey, there are some important things we can glean as we walk this journey of faith.

Step One: Remove the trash and unwanted items

I don't know about you but there are always some things lurking around my car that I don't want. As you take a step of faith – it is important to take a look at the things you might be holding on to that would hold back your journey. They don't have to be bad things, like it's not a bad thing to have an ice scraper in my car – but probably not a necessity in the summer – if we can only carry so much it needs to be the best for this season in life. Are their relationships, activities, even a job that is holding you back from being the most effective disciple?

At the same time we might need to let go of some not so healthy things in our life to lighten our load. Are you a people pleaser? Or maybe you're holding on to some aspect of your past. Are your failures in the past keeping you from trying something new? Don't pack anything for the journey that isn't going to bring you hope, love and peace.

Step Two: Keep essentials within reach

Sometimes as we prepare to step out in faith we become consumed by the details. I know as I began my journey towards being a pastor there were so many steps along the way it often became overwhelming. But when I focused on the day to day necessities and left the long term obstacles to God – I could manage. So what are the essentials I needed to take that journey? Keep a close dialogue with God, pray without ceasing. Keep in relationship with other believers, be in small groups, and worship, and a mentor. It was important to know what I needed to do each day would eventually lead to the completion of my journey, yet not stress about the details constantly. I knew I packed all I needed, but trying to read all the books, write all the papers, prepare for all the classes in advance would have been impossible. What do you need to complete today's journey. Worrying about tomorrow is not helpful. Being fearful in the face of a new challenge does not constructive. Instead, know God has given you the directions – so take your steps of faith in confidence.

Step Three: Have an emergency kit

Jesus did not allow the disciples to bring any of the ordinary means to take care of an emergency on their travels. They needed to lean on God and their faith in all circumstances. What are the things that help you lean on God when problems arise.

When you need direction, pray.

Discipline yourself to memorize some scriptures. I know that seems ridiculous in our connected world. However, You in an emergency you might be caught without your Bible or your Bible app on your smartphone.

You don't think you can memorize? Here's an easy way to do it. Choose one verse, just one. Write it out several times and place it where you will see it.

Repeat it to yourself every day, several times a day for seven weeks.

Keep reviewing it. Last winter I wanted to memorize a rather lengthy passage, I put it as my screen saver for my computer and read it every time I opened and closed my computer. Soon, it will be imprinted upon your heart, ready use when you need it most.

I know that God has each of us on a journey of faith. We have a path set before us that requires us to leave behind what is comfortable and go out under his authority.(GY)

Sunday

Six days later, three of them did see it. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them. Mark 9:2-3

After celebrating a summer family reunion in Colorado, I fulfilled a dream of hiking above 12,000 feet, led by my mountaineering-trail running son. What would I see? What would it feel like? Would it live up to my expectations, my imaginings? How might it change me? We climbed a winding and wide path through trees, through high meadows dressed in wildflowers refreshed by small streams; above tree line we scrambled up along small rocks. The “big sky” was endless; in the distance, more mountains covered with snow. After reaching my goal, I watched my son continue while I sat, breathed the air, marveled at the view and at the experience, engulfed by creation. Up the “trail,” winding around and behind a rise and back in sight, going higher; almost out of sight, he pointed back toward me and there were mountain goats! Or rather more mountain goats, since I had been with one all day! I returned energized, filled, empowered, encouraged, in love with God and all creation.

My experience climbing the mountain? Everything I imagined and a lot more; everything and nothing I had expected. Along with others, literally and figuratively I felt closer to God; I was closer to God; I felt an integral part of God's creation. I did not want to go down. But I had to, just as Peter James and John returned to life in God's creation with all its distractions, pain, discord, disappointments, crushing defeats. The memories sustained them, and will us, even as we look for times in our “regular” lives when God gives us comfort, success, joy, celebration, presence, all mountain top experiences if we allow them to be, exciting us, lifting us up, enlivening us, equipping and empowering us for the long times in between. (FP)

Prayer:

God of the mountaintops, God of every day, may we know your presence in all things. May we be sustained and encouraged and energized by memories of the high times of our lives. May we love you and stand in awe in our everyday lives. Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Yamarina Yewotete Dabo

(Ethiopian Honey Bread)

Yemar means honey, yewotet means milk, and dabo means bread in Amharic, one of the main languages of Ethiopia. Most dabo (bread) does not have honey, eggs, nor milk as part of the ingredients, which makes this bread unique.

"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey"
Exodus 3:8

1 pk dry yeast
1/4 c luke warm water
1 egg
1 tsp coriander
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp cloves
1 1/2 tsp salt
6 tbs honey
1 c luke warm milk
6 tbs butter or shortening
4 c flour, (4 to 4 1/2)

DIRECTIONS

Sprinkle yeast on water and let stand 2 minutes. Mix and let stand until double. Mix egg, honey, spices, and salt. Add yeast, milk and shortening. Beat well. Add flour - 1/2 cup at a time. Knead well. Put in oiled bowl. Cover and let rise 1 hour. Punch down and knead again. Shape into loaf and put in greased bread pan. Let rise 1 hour. Bake at 300 degrees for 50 minutes.
NOTE: A double recipe yields 3 loaves.

This bread has become a staple of our holiday seasons, but it originally came from a mission celebration from the church I grew up in. It is a deliciously sweet and spicy bread, which comes alive with the addition of butter and honey. I can't eat it without thinking of the land of milk and honey that God has promised it.

Prayer: Thank you God, for the gift of bread which gives sustenance to life. Thank you for the sweetness of honey and the complexities of spices with which you bless us. Amen.



Tuesday

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!
When I look up at your skies, at what your fingers made — the moon and the stars that you set firmly in place— what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them?
You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!
Psalm 8

Early in my ministry God presented me with an opportunity to accompany a youth mission trip. Mission trips in that church included every four years a "green" trip – in mission to support God's creation. My year was to Costa Rica, arriving shortly after government leaders had made policies to deliberately protect mature forests, among many natural resources Costa Rica is gifted with.



Beginning in a national park set in the central mountains, tasked with re-building the trails into and through the forest, we slept in tents under cover of trees, listening to wonderful night "forest" noises. One evening in a cabin near the Arenal volcano, we experienced an earthquake that accompanied an eruption, aware of the mighty power of creation to be both beautiful and disruptive. We moved, by way of an extinct volcano and a rare sighting of the beautiful Quetzal, to another forest on the Caribbean, living in raised tents and sleeping to the music of howler monkeys. On Wednesday, the rainy season began; after days of clear dry days, at 2pm the heavens opened and it rained the rest of the trip.

The highlight for me of all the high points was a beach where loggerhead turtles lay their eggs. The beach is patrolled to keep poachers out (eggs are believed to be an aphrodisiac). Watching for mother turtles, rangers carefully measure and note location, depth, the order of eggs after they are laid, then move them to a protected part of the beach, putting them in the sand at the same distance from the water edge and at the same depth, with eggs piled in the same order they were laid. On a hot muggy night under a full moon, dressed in hiking boots, long sleeves and pants, socks pulled up to keep sand ticks out, we watched and waited. At last a turtle – she seemed the size of a small car - climbed the beach, a difficult journey using flippers designed for swimming; she dug a hole, lay her eight precious eggs each a little smaller than a tennis ball, then filled the hole and went back to the sea. I was overwhelmed with wonder; I truly felt and still feel I was present at the creation itself!

Blessed Creator, thank you for the precious moments you surprise me with, in which I am struck with awe and praise for the wonderful creation you have gifted us with. Help me to care for all your creation with the same loving protecting care you give to us. Amen. (FP)



Wednesday, Pass It On

It only takes a spark
 To get a fire going
 And soon all those around
 Can warm up in its glowing
 That's how it is with God's love
 Once you've experienced it
 You spread His love to ev'ryone
 You want to pass it on

I wish for you my friend
 This happiness that I've found
 You can depend on Him
 It matters not where you're bound
 I'll shout it from the mountain top
 I want my world to know
 The Lord of love has come to me
 I want to pass it on

Kurt Kaiser #572 UM Hymnal



Thursday

I had the privilege of going to Taize, France where Brother Roger started a religious community many years ago. I went with a group of youth from our Annual Conference. There were 5,000 youth from all over the world there that week because it is such a deeply spiritual experience. We slept in cabins together. We ate together and each group had chores to do every day. We had Bible Study with those in our age groups and we worshipped three times a day. Taize services are unique as they only have prayers, Taize songs, and eight minutes of silence in them. Eight minutes is a long time when you are not used to it. But when do teenagers ever experience silence or for that long? At first the girls I was in charge of resisted going to church but once that got into the rhythm of the day they loved it and what was their favorite part of the service? The silence. God was so palpable that week in the lives of all of us. (FN)



Friday

This was a HUGE mountain top moment for me- the night of my Commissioning with two of my SALSA sisters! (GM)



Lord, you bring us to places that are higher than we have ever expected. You lead us to places where we experience new things and highs we do not want to let go. Lord, as we find ourselves coming down from those high places, help us to remember the sound of your voice. Help us to live our regular lives with mountaintop experiences Lord. Amen.



Saturday, Open Up the Heavens

I have a new favorite song of the band, *Open Up the Heavens* by Meredith Andrews. Now it could be because – in American Bandstand Fashion – it has a good beat, and you can dance to it.

But, after relooking at the Transfiguration story - I have come to see this in a new way, open up the heavens - I have to wonder am I really wanting to see the real Jesus – or am I looking for some version I have created that works good in my life. Am I really ready for what happens when the skies open up?

The transfiguration is a story on change, not just the physical change of Jesus, but also the change that takes place in the disciples. Woodrow Wilson once said, “If you want to make enemies, try to change something.” For the disciples at this time – Jesus has been putting before them that they need to change. They had already made some drastic changes in their lives, but Jesus conversations on suffering and death points to the fact that there was more change in the wind. The suffering servant was not the kind of messiah they had expected to follow. They really were not so keen on that plan. Actually - Peter went as far as scolding Jesus about his suffering talk.

We might not be tell Jesus off, but are we really listening to him? When we sing Open up the heavens we want to see you – are we expecting a God of our own design - who will make our lives easier, flood us with warmth and good feelings – or the real deal?

Transfiguration continues to remind us that Christians are people of change. We read about it, we pray for it, and we sing about it, but are we ready to live it out. Or are we like the disciples looking for the change that matches our expectations? Maybe we need to travel with Jesus up that mountain to experience transfiguration for ourselves.

In the end, Jesus was not the only one changed up there on that mountain that day. He took three disciples up there, and he did it because there was something he wanted them to see. He wanted to show them something that would change their lives. And when Peter and John and James saw it, things changed. When they come down from the mountain they head to Jerusalem – where soon Jesus will suffer and die as he has shared, but now they have in their memories a vision of the resurrected Christ.

I invite you to consider living out your desire to be changed by God. Will you pray intentionally for God to begin a work of transfiguration in you? In your church? In your community? In our world?

In Jesus we are changed – forgiven, renewed, transformed. In Jesus we see the heavens open and hear the voice of God. (GY)

Enjoy Open Up the Heavens https://youtu.be/eF9pVCDHN_4

Week 13 Watching the Sky



Sunday

“So—*who is like me?*

Who holds a candle to me?” says The Holy.

Look at the night skies:

Who do you think made all this?

*Who marches this army of stars out each night,
counts them off, calls each by name*

—so magnificent! so powerful!—

*and never overlooks a single one? Isaiah 40:26
(The Message Translation)*

Between two old oak trees I relax in a hammock, looking up through the leaves at the sky. Cares of the world disappear; the wonders of creation surround me. Leaves, bark, sky; birds and squirrels make their home here. So do I, for these brief moments; I take a deep breath and am refreshed, renewed. Early in the morning, the sky has the soft gentle colors of sunrise, gently easing me into my day. The afternoon light mottled as it comes through the leaves pull me back from hectic days. At sunset, the more robust bolder colors give me strength and rest for the next day. And the stars, peaking through, visible then not, then reappearing, like shooting stars, “So magnificent! So powerful!”

“Look at the night skies” the divine creator invites us; remember who gives us the skies, marches out the stars each night, eternal and so always with us, faithful and so ever renewing and strengthening us, loving us through it all, and to the end.

Prayer: Blessed Creator, like those who have come before us, when we stop and look around, we are in awe of you, your creation, your everlasting love for us, for me, even me. May I remain aware of your presence and love “never overlooking a single one.” And when I am blinded by distraction, bring me back into awareness, that I may praise you in all that surrounds me. Amen. (FP)

Recipe



Monday - Chicken and Stars

"Blessed are those who laugh at themselves for they will never cease to be amused."
Anonymous

2 tbsp. olive oil

1 cup cooked boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized pieces

1 cup finely chopped carrots

½ cup finely chopped onion

1 cup finely chopped celery

32 oz. chicken broth

1 c. star-shaped pasta

1 tsp. salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

A B C D E F G

Thank you, God,

For feeding me.

Amen.



Heat oil in large pot, add onion, celery and carrots. Cook 5 minutes do not brown. Add salt. Add chicken broth and chicken and bring to a simmer. Add star pasta and cook till tender. Season with pepper.



Tuesday



When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awaking cries:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work and prayer,
To Jesus I repair;
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Does sadness fill my mind?
A solace here I find,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Or fades my earthly bliss?
My comfort still is this,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

When sleep her balm denies,
My silent spirit sighs,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
When evil thoughts molest,
With this I shield my breast:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

The night becomes as day
When from the heart we say:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
The pow'rs of darkness fear
When this sweet chant they hear:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

In heav'n's eternal bliss
The loveliest strain is this,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Let earth, and sea, and sky
From depth to height reply,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Be this, while life is mine,

My song of love divine:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Sing this eternal song
Through all the ages long:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Wednesday, Let Your Light Shine

*"You are the light of the world.
A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."*

The light of God is there from dawn to dusk. Even when storms threaten to wipe out the light - we discover a rainbow. Take sometime to look up.



Thursday

Gracious God, every time we look at the stars we marvel at your infinite wonder. You have created every star in the sky, placed them in their rotations. You who created this unimaginable beauty, you also created us. Give us the strength to remember how deeply you care for us, how deeply you care for the whole universe.

Help us to never forget your awesome and amazing love God. We watch the sky to see your amazing handiwork, we watch each other to see the awesome work of your hands, and we look within ourselves to remember that we too are your creation. Amen. (GM)



Friday, Watching and Waiting

Are you watching, are you paying attention? When was the last time you heard this or said this yourself. I know not only am I the bearer of this message but too hear this from those I love. Are you paying attention. Mom are you looking, Oma watch this! There never seems like enough time to just watch.

How about you? Are you watching, are you paying attention? When was the last time you actually just watched anything? A sunset, a movie, a baby sleeping ... now I mean really watch – full attention – no device in your hand – no ear buds. The complete opposite of multitasking.

Watching is a lost art. Sitting contently and simply daydreaming or observing the surroundings is rarely done. Even for those who do not have all the techno distractions – often just watching is disrupted by endless chatter.

It is so odd to sit and pay attention to the present – that we often feel awkward, or unproductive. To watch – to be observant allows us the ability to be creative, to learn in new ways, to drink in the experiences around us rather than just those experiences we choose to engage in.

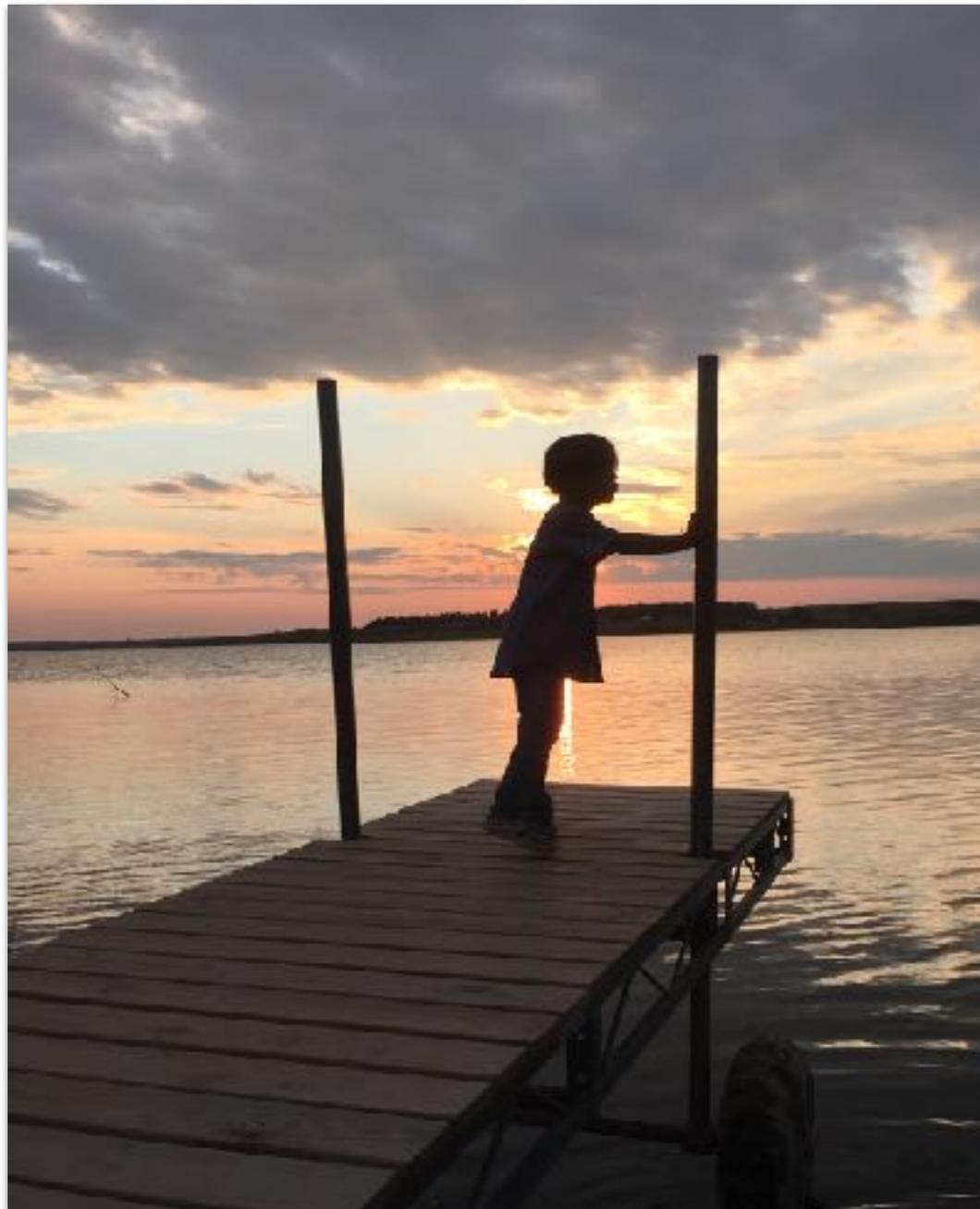
Take some time today and watch. (GY)



*Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?*

*He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.*

*Because of his great power and mighty strength
not one of them is missing. Isaiah 40:26*



Be still and know that I am God.

Week 14 Times of Life

Sunday, Voices

There is a story about a little girl whose parent just brought home her new baby brother. In the midst of all the excitement the little girl asked if she can be with the baby alone. The parents were unsure why and maybe even a little uneasy – but they honored her request. To be on the safe side they stood near the door quietly listening. To their surprise they heard her say to her three-day-old brother, “Tell me about God – I’ve almost forgotten.”

Each of us has an intimate connection with God, yet time and life strip away the beautiful voice of God and replace it with so many other voices. There are many voices that speak into our lives. Voices that tell us we are beautiful, special, and smart. There are those that point out our failure, who bully, who crush our spirit.

When they heard the sound of God strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.

God called to the Man: “Where are you?”

He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

God said, “Who told you that you were naked?”

Did they not know they were naked before eating the fruit? Of course they were familiar with their condition – but now they are ashamed of their nakedness – and not just ashamed, but they believe it is wrong, and unworthy to stand in God's presence.

A voice – not God's voice – judges them. And that's where other voices begin to overtake the voice of God.

Erwin McManus states in his book *The Artisan Soul*, “When we choose to go along with a voice that goes against the will of our creator we are embracing a narrative that is lesser than who we were made to be.”

Who are we?

Is it who we really are?

Or who we really want to be, or should be?

Too often we become who we are based on other people's projections. Adam and Eve became fearful of God because of the voice that named their nakedness as wrong. What are the voices that are causing us to hide?

Whoever or whatever these voices are – soon they become our own. I cannot do... I am not... I am... fill in the blank for yourself.

Self doubt is crippling. Self doubt comes from voices that we have hidden away. They are words and actions that have shaped us. Once the voice takes hold it becomes our truth, it steals our dreams. It causes us to deny our God given purpose. (GY)

Recipe



Flax & Soy

There's a season for everything and a time for every matter under the heavens: a time for giving birth and a time for dying... from Ecclesiastes 3



There's a season for everything... seasons of my life include being blessed with happy childhood, good education, marriage and four children, time at home, time in ministry and service, times of travel and play. When my husband's job took us overseas to Holland, it came at the time my body was changing, maturing, "dying" to some, "the change" our mother's generation called it, one of the taboo-to-speak-publicly-about "passages."

Gail Sheehy wrote about in the 1970s and revisited later in its own book: menopause. It wasn't an easy transition for me physically, lots of "inconvenient" (my Dutch doctor called it as I rose out of my chair into her face screaming: "inconvenient doesn't describe it, I wear a white robe!"), unpredictable episodes that restricted public appearances; but it was a transition that is a "time/season" in and of itself, this peri-menopause.

Always looking first to a natural way to deal with my health, I was delighted to find a book – in English in a Dutch speaking country - on including flax seed and soy products, sources of plant estrogen, to combat hot flashes and other evidence of change. The bottom line: 2 T of flax seeds and ¼ c of soy milk daily.

Alright, the author acknowledges that not everyone likes soy milk, including her and perhaps you. I do, so I mix the flax seeds with the soy milk and eat it every morning, now also with chia seeds, some chopped walnuts, cinnamon, blueberries, pepita and sunflower seeds for an energy-packed start to the day. For those who don't like the taste of soy in any form, the author provides recipes from breakfast to main dish to desserts that disguise the taste.

Now, twenty years later, the internet is filled with many more possibilities to treat our bodies a more natural way, honoring who we are, are created to be, and the season we are in: a season of life!

Prayer

Blessed Creator, you created us in your image, and pronounce us "very good." I thank you for leading me to honor my body as it is, in its season, even as our culture idolizes youth and an artificial idea of beauty. Help us to live healthy productive lives that honor you in all we do, whatever stage of life we are in. Amen.

My Breakfast Recipe (more elaborate ones for muffins , etc., all over the internet): take 2 Tablespoons of flax seed, 1 T chia seeds, 2 T chopped walnuts, 1 T each of pumpkin seeds and sunflowers, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, ¼ cup of soy milk and eat.

Tuesday Do you have breathing room in your life?

Are you living your life at an unhealthy pace, beyond your limits? Are you stressed that you don't have the time, the money, the energy you need to live life fully? Are you spending to your limits? Are you always running 15 minutes late? Does your family complain that you don't spend enough time with them? Have you let your friendships fizzle? Do you spend more time reading about God than in a relationship with God?

If you have answered "No" to most of these questions – well Amen – you have healthy boundaries and have created good margins and breathing room in your life. However, if you are like me you have answered "yes" to too many of these questions and in the next 30 hours we hope to inspire you to allow for Godly breathing room in your life.

When our lives are cram packed we will suffer physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually.

Look at your calendars – rethink the last conversations you have had with people you care about- consider your anxiety level when traveling to appointments.

Determine one area in you life that you would like to have more breathing room.

What might be a step you need to take to reach this goal?

Who will hold you accountable?

Example: I want to have more time to enjoy my family - Turn off notifications for news, social media, emails on your computer or phone after work hours. Limit your social media/schedule the when and how much time you will spend on your accounts. Consider some activity/hobby we might enjoy together moving us away from tv and computers.



Wednesday, Mysterious Woman

***The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
Psalm 103:15-16***



Thursday, Wonderful Words of Life

*Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of life,
Let me more of their beauty see,
Wonderful words of life;
Words of life and beauty
Teach me faith and duty.*

*Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life;
Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life.*

*Christ, the blessed One, gives to all
Wonderful words of life;
Sinner, list to the loving call,
Wonderful words of life;
All so freely given,
Wooing us to heaven.*

*Sweetly echo the Gospel call,
Wonderful words of life;
Offer pardon and peace to all,
Wonderful words of life;
Jesus, only Savior,
Sanctify us forever.*

Philip P. Bliss (1874) UM Hymnal #600

Friday

I forgot to call my son on his birthday (but I paid for him to take a trip to visit friends on his birthday so does that count?); I didn't send a card to my parents on their anniversary. I haven't seen the top of my kitchen counter since school started and my car still has filled with items from the youth trip in the summer...

It is not hard for time to get away from me, how about you. It can be especially hard to set time apart to deepen my connection with God. If we don't make time for what's important time will slip away.

How are you claiming time for Jesus?





*My friends, I beg you to listen as I teach.
I will give instruction and explain the mystery
of what happened long ago.*

*These are things we learned
from our ancestors, and we will tell them
to the next generation.*

*We won't keep secret the glorious deeds
and the mighty miracles of the Lord.*

*God gave his Law to Jacob's descendants the people of Israel.
And he told our ancestors to teach their children,
so that each new generation would know his Law
and tell it to the next. Psalm 78:1-6*

Saturday,

In my research I discovered a new word, I love new words and even make up some of my own, but this is a real one –

Generativity.

It is the motivation or the capacity to emotionally invest in the strengths and the developments of others.

It is essential that each and every leader in this church is willing to empower and encourage others to do what they currently do, and remember that they might do it differently.

Generativity in the church means that we are creating conditions where others can see the love of God.

I have always been impressed that those who went before us to build many of our sanctuaries in this area did not have 100-200 people coming to church on Sunday morning, yet they had the vision and the desire to empower the next generations to grow. Because of their generosity we have our church buildings to use today. I am sure that many of them made some great sacrifices so this building could be built.

How have we sacrificed for generations to come. Am I providing plans and resources that the next generation will need to carry out God's will for their lives? If we use up everything for ourselves and our pleasure what are we leaving for our children and their children.

Am I surrounding the next generation with people who will encourage them to carry out God's will for their lives?

Week 15 Voices Comfort, Comfort,



Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." Isaiah 40: 1-8

There was a Sunday Morning when a very interesting man walked into the sanctuary of the church I was serving. He was tattooed from head to toe. He had his hair pulled back into a ponytail. He wore a leather jacket and a black T-shirt with WWJD on the front. I did not know what to expect from him and I didn't know it, but Jesus had just walked into the church.

We went about service as usual. I don't remember what I was preaching on, but I do remember that I mentioned my son who was in a very difficult situation. He was in his early twenties and in prison for selling drugs. Heroin was his drug of choice. These choices led to him be in very desperate and dangerous situations. Safety and prison are not compatible words. I feared for his life in many ways.

Following worship, I went up to talk to this unusual fellow. He told me he does ministry with motorcycle gangs and goes into the prisons all over the state and works with inmates. He looked me in the eye and told me that my son would be okay. There was such a sense of peace that flowed over me when I heard these words. I had never met this man but I know that what he said was true. I felt God's love for me and for my son through this unusual man.

There have been many bends and hills that my son has gone through on his life's journey, but from that morning on I knew that God was with him and with me. Jesus shows up when you least suspect him and when you most need to hear those words of comfort. As I have journeyed through life since then, I do it with the knowledge that I also may be the Jesus that others need to experience. I don't have to look a certain way but I do have to act in the knowledge that Jesus is in me and can work through me. Sharing my story may help other to have comfort in this up and down journey we call life. (LM)

Have you ever heard voices these voices? How often do these voices move us farther away from our creator? We need to listen to the voice that speaks to us and informs us and forms us. A voice that guides wisely, out of love and not fear. Stop allowing the other voices direct your story.

Recipe



Monday - Mac and Cheese

*Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat.
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you, God, for everything.
Amen.*

Diane's Mac and Cheese

**1lb of cooked pasta
1 can of condensed milk
2 cups of cheddar cheese
½ stick of butter
1 tablespoon of flour
3 table spoons of Dijon mustard**

**Cook pasta according to package directions
Melt all other ingredients together on top of the stove
Mix pasta and cheese sauce into a casserole dish
Mix in 1 cup cubed cheese chunks**

**Optional topping
½ stick of butter
¾ cup bread crumbs
Melt butter and mix in bread crumbs
Sprinkle over mac and cheese**

Bake at 350 for ten minutes (DD)



Tuesday Blessing

I was honored to preside over the baptism of a dear friends baby. Little Lyla Doll sent this to me in gratitude for her baptism. It is something I cherish.

God has expressly given a place among the people of God to our little children.
Let us always cherish them. (FN)



Wednesday, Red Bird Mission

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:8

This banner is displayed at Red Bird Mission. Red Bird Mission, guided by Jesus Christ, empowers individuals and advocates justice though spiritual, educational, health and community outreach.



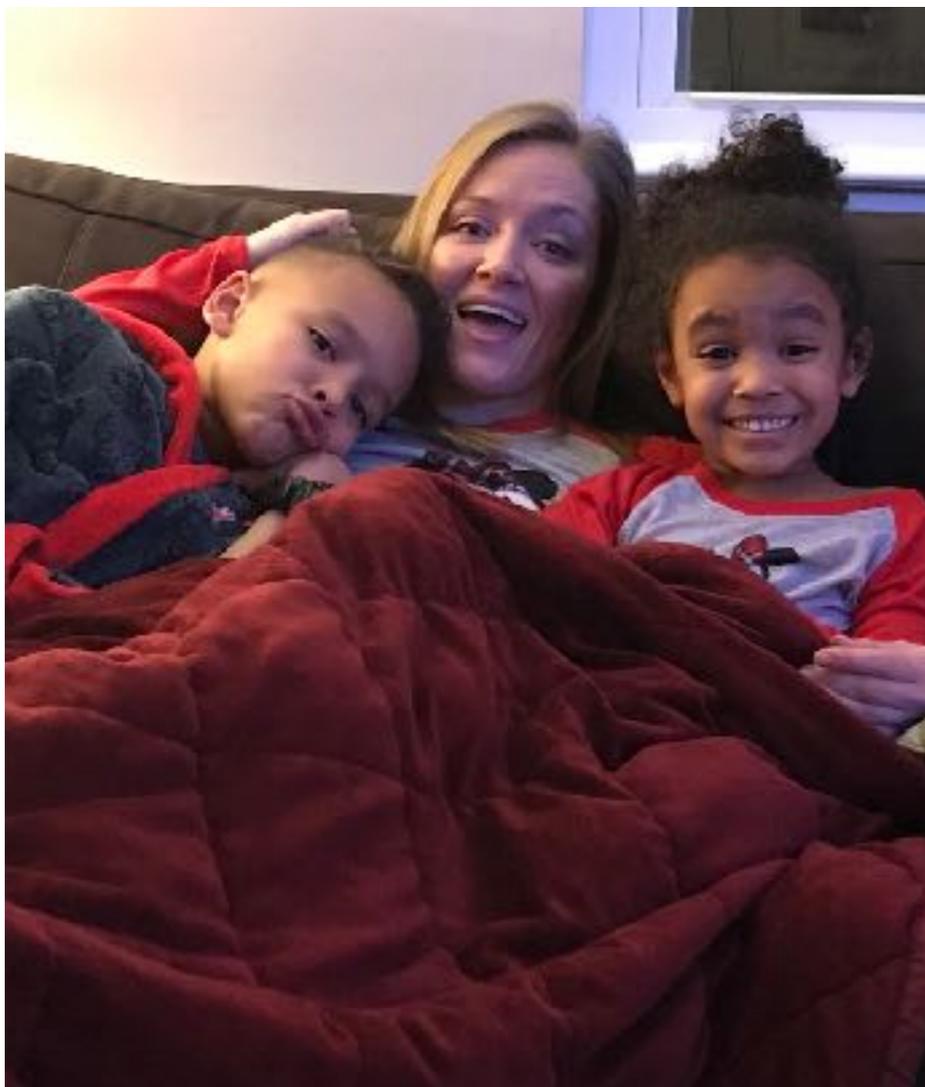
Thursday

Good night sweet Jesus
I thank you for this day
And offer you my tomorrow.

Take care of me tonight
Take care of me forever

God bless my family
God bless my friends
God bless those who have no one praying for them
tonight.

Amen.



Friday, Amazing Grace

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

John Newton 1779, #378 UM Hymnal

Saturday

You're Special Game



This is a fun game to encourage members of the group.

Materials

Paper plates and markers.

How To Play

Sit comfortably in a circle and relax in a room. Each person is given a paper plate and some markers. That person then writes their name on the paper plate.

After everyone has their name written, everyone passes their paper plate one person to the left. Each person writes a note (or one positive adjective) on that person's paper plate that they think describes the owner of the plate. Then pass the plate to the left again and the process continues.

This continues until everyone receives their own paper plate back, filled with encouraging messages and words about the strengths their peers see in them.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1Peter 4:10



Week 16 Ashes and Fire

Sunday, Let Your Light Shine

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

The months that I spent dating the fire chief of one of the small villages I served in my ministry wound up being the months that taught me the most about healing fire- and being reborn from Ash.

Smoke, as I'll call him from now on (to protect the innocent, the guilty and my heart), has been the fire chief of this town for most of his fire career. He is a man that lives and breathes fire. His whole life is centered around fire-he works for a fire extinguisher company, the forestry service and he's a well known hotshot. Smoke understands fire and being a firefighter he understands it more than anything else in life. He literally lives and breathes fire.

Dating a man like that... well it teaches you a lot of things. Smoke taught me to respect fire and to respect those that fight and prevent fires in a way I had not before. I learned that, especially in forest fires, the life that comes back after a fire is life that is stronger, that is resilient, that is (in my opinion) a little more beautiful than the life what was there beforehand. From the ashes comes glorious, amazing, unprecedented, unexpected life.

The resurrection narrative is this-the worst things are not the last things. The fire narrative is this-"the worst things are not the last things". The worst experiences in natural fires (precluding loss of life of those fighting it) are not the last for the created order-some new life will rise from the ashes. Smoke taught me how to love fire, how to understand its power, how to fear it well, and how to stand in awe of it.

I loved Smoke, a whole heck of a lot. He taught me about life, about fire, about being the most vulnerable I had ever been with someone. And then our relationship went up in smoke. At the same time our relationship ended my whole life seemed to burning down. Every single aspect of my life was flaming and I was drowning in it. After a couple of weeks of living in literal fire, all that seemed to left in my life was ashes.

And then I got a phone call-one that offered me new life, in a new place. Taking the offer would mean that I would be walking away from everything that I knew, and walking away from all of the expectations I had held for my life. I was terrified of saying yes-terrified of what it would mean to leave the ashes of the life I had so desperately wanted. Ashes were what I had left of the life I wanted, the life I thought was God's plan for me.

And as that call came through... I was reminded of what Smoke taught me-that life comes out of the ashes. That "the worst thing is not the last thing". I was reminded that God formed us out of the ash and breathed into us new life-that the Resurrection means the worst things of our lives are not the last things. I was reminded that Adam and Eve had no idea what kind of life they would lead when they were formed out of the ash, that the disciples and followers of Jesus watched the ash of their expectations fall all around them on Good Friday. I was reminded that our plans are never

New life came out of the ashes of the life I expected to have. It's terrifying and overwhelming, but it is also exciting a I can rejoice that God breathes into things that seem impossible. When I looked at the burning mess of my life, I was unable to see where there was hope for new life or potential, but in the fire, God worked. When the fire of the world burned my life down, I was convinced that nothing good could come out of this.

But, God created humans out of ash-God formed us in God's own image and breathes into us the Spirit. God calls us, names us and claims us. God's redemption story reminds us again and again and again that the worst things in our lives are not the last things, there are beginnings in the ends of our lives.

There is life after fire-life rises from ashes.

The smoke in our lives clears, and we find the empty tomb, new life pushes out of the seeming destruction of our lives.

The worst things are not the last things. (GM)

God you formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. You take the ash and fire of our lives and bring new life into us. We give you thanks for the grace and forgiveness you offer to us freely. Please give us the strength to not be overcome by the destruction in our lives, help us to remember that the worst things are not the last things. In the name of the Messiah, Amen.



Recipe



Monday - Shrimp and Fire Roasted Vegetables

God, heavenly Father, bless us and these thy gifts, which we receive from thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Shrimp:
2 tbs Butter
1/3 cup olive oil
1lb shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 cloves garlic minced
2 tbs lemon pepper
1/2 cup white wine
1/2 cup lemon juice

Vegetables:
1 bunch asparagus
1 red pepper
16 small red potatoes, steamed
6 tbs olive oil
1 tsp onion powder
1 tsp garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste



Preheat oven to 400. Toss vegetable in oil and seasonings. Place vegetables in oven pan. Cook 6-8 minutes or until lightly charred, turning occasionally. Salt and pepper to taste.

Toss shrimp in lemon juice and lemon pepper. Heat oil add garlic cook 2 minutes, do not over brown. Add butter and shrimp cook 3 minutes. Add wine and cook 2 more minutes.



Tuesday Lord Throughout these Forty Days

Genesis 2:7

...God formed man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The man came alive—a living soul!

On a visit to Yellowstone National Park a few years after a fire devastated its landscape, I witnessed the regeneration of the forest. The seeds of lodgepole pines fall into the soil, and there they wait, sometimes years, for a fire to release growth and life in them. Out of the soil made up of the ashes of the fires, a forest grows tall, providing homes to thousands of species of animals and plants.

It is out of the ground we human creatures get our very being; and from God comes the breath of life. I stand in awe of our God of the fire, God of the ashes, God of the life that surrounds us and fills us. I am grateful for our God, God of regeneration, renewal, restoration, new life offered even when the circumstances of our lives bring fire and ashes and we are buried under destruction and death. After a loved one dies, we lose a job, our health fails, our heart is broken, we see no way out, no hope only despair, our loving recreating God breaths life into us, and we become “alive, a living soul!” (FP)



Prayer:
God of the fire, God of ashes, God of life and renewed life, lift us up and renew us out of the destruction and death that often surrounds us and fills us. Breathe your life-giving breath into us so we may know you and the life abundant you intend for us. Amen

Wednesday Ashes to Go

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2: 8-9

A few years ago, Pastor June Tamburro and I stood in 6 degree frigid weather to distribute ashes at the Bridgewater train station from 6 am-7:30 am. We only served about 5 people that morning; but we had a good chance to chat with a number of people about the church, about Ash Wednesday, and about their lives (in between our shivering). One man that we met that morning was a member of our church who didn't come very often. In fact, he didn't recognize us, and I didn't immediately recognize him. (That could have something to do with the fact that we were all bundled up!) But as we talked, I remembered him and talked with him about his children, etc. Soon the train came, and not too long after than June and I decided that we were too frozen to continue to stand outside any longer. As we debrief on our experience that day, we weren't really sure that we had made any impact on people. In fact, we were a bit discouraged.

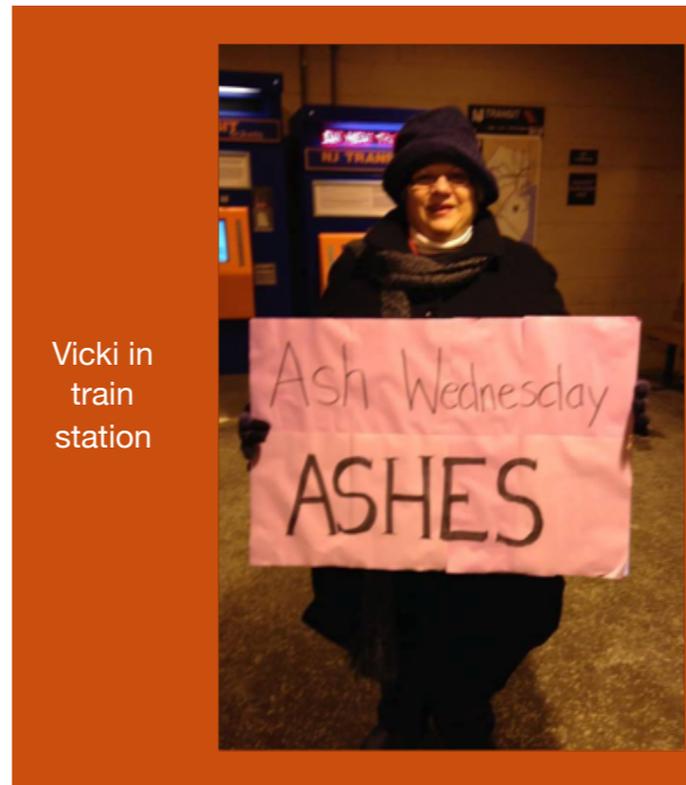
A number of months later, the man from the train station began to attend worship again. At first he came alone. Then some family members joined him. It turned out that right around the time Pastor June and I were at the train station, this man was diagnosed with a serious disease. Our being there that freezing cold morning reminded him that he was not alone; that God was seeking him out; that God was already working in his life to offer grace and relationship, love and strength for the journey on which this illness would take him.

God seeks us all because God is a seeking God. Our Lenten study book writer Tom Berlin puts it this way, "Christ is called Savior because he comes to us when we least expect him and most need him. This is why many people, when describing their faith journey, will say that a conversation with someone happened at just the right time. Or they were driving past a church on a Sunday, felt moved to go inside, and heard just the sermon they needed to hear. People routinely experience the good timing of God's grace."

That's because God's grace goes before us. As Wesleyan Christians, we understand that to be God's prevenient, or preventing grace that is there before we even know it. It reminds us again of Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam where God is depicted as reaching toward Adam, even though Adam is only reaching half-heartedly back toward God. And yet, God keeps reaching, keeps seeking us out because God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us all. (VMB)

Prayer:

God of Grace and Glory, help us focus on you more so that we might know you and see the unfolding of your grace. Keep us from the distractions that so often prevent us from noticing your work in the world. Keep us mindful of the prodding of your Holy Spirit, that you might use us to be a word of strength for someone else. In Christ we pray, Amen.



Thursday

Sunday's Palms are Wednesday's Ashes. My husband has a tradition of making the ashes for the Ash Wednesday service. He collects and saves the abandoned palms from the Palm Sunday procession.

Over the years the burning of palms has been perfected, we use the same stainless steel bowl, break up the dried palms and set them on fire. Then the burnt palms are pressed through a kitchen sieve to produce a fine powder. We then add a drop or two of olive oil to create a dark ash. (Do not add water, this can irritate the skin when applied) A handful of palms makes about a 1/3 cup of ashes. (GY)



Saturday: Re-generation

A year or so after the volcano Mount Saint Helens erupted, pouring tons of ash on the mountainside, my brother hiked there and collected a cup of ash to give my mother, who was a potter. She made and gave to me 2 beautiful pots, glazed with the collected ash. In the pot are many memories and meanings for me, including the life and beauty that creation surprises us with after tragedy. (FP)



Week 17 Sacrifice



"The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become." Charles du Bos

Today we find ourselves in the garden. In this garden there is not flowers or vegetables like we would expect but this is a grove of olive trees. In ancient Jerusalem one could not have a garden so the wealthy would plant on the mount outside the city. Gethsemane sits at the bottom of the Mount of Olives. The word Gethsemane's literally mean olive press, the crushing of the olives. This is a place where Jesus was crushed.

We all have our "Gethsemane."
It may be a "Gethsemane" of trouble.
It may be a "Gethsemane" of illness.
Or it may be a "Gethsemane" of loss: a job, friend, spouse...
What is your "Gethsemane"?

Jesus was at a point of tremendous pain, realizing how close he was to the agony that lay ahead. He did not turn back. He did not run away. Instead, he stayed with his closest friends and committed himself to prayer.

Just as the olives are crushed they bring forth beautiful oil, when there are situations that crush us there can be fruit from that pressure and pain. We will never be the same.

In the garden of Gethsemane, we see the struggle of Jesus. But we also see The Surrender of Jesus. The entire life of Jesus was a life of surrender and submission to the heavenly Father. But in this text His words, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

There will be times of suffering and pain, there will be times of pain and sacrifice but we are not alone.

As you to stand in the hush of Gethsemane - listen. Do you hear the sob of our Savior's soul? Do you hear the falling drops of blood? I believe that His surrender to the will of God in that garden ought to inspire our surrender to the will of God in this place today. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Fish of the Day

*Bless us, O Lord,
and these your gifts,
which we are about to receive
from your bounty.*

4 fish portions 3/4-1" thick
salt
freshly ground black pepper
2 large potatoes
1 stick butter, melted
2 tablespoons olive oil
1tsp garlic powder
1 tsp parsley
Lemon slices for serving

Place fish on baking sheet lined with parchment. Lightly coat with oil season with salt and pepper.

Cut potato into thin rounds. Thinly sliced potatoes are essential; if they're too thick the dish won't bake quickly or evenly enough. Add to cold water to avoid turning brown.

Dry potatoes. Dip potato rounds, one at a time, in butter and lay slices on top of one piece of fish in an overlapping pattern (to resemble fish scales), covering surface completely. Lightly brush any remaining butter over scales, season and chill until butter is firm.

Heat the oven to 400 degrees
Bake for about 15 minutes, until the potatoes are roasted and the fish is cooked through.



Tuesday Fasting

I hate fasting. I would love to enjoy the goodness of life it its fullest at every moment. It took me a really long time to come to the place where I would even try it.

Oh, I fasted from one thing or another during Lent, meat, wine, TV, but for me food is so integral to family, love, and relationship that I had a hard time thinking about what it would mean for me to fast from food.

Finally, I decided to try the Wesley fast: from noon on Thursday until noon on Friday—a 24 hour fast rather than going without food from dinner one day until breakfast two days later (really almost 36 hours).

It was not easy for me. I needed to do it when I was alone on retreat rather than in community with family and friends. So, I intentionally withdrew not only from food, but from other distractions that might keep me from tuning in to listen for God's still small voice—and might distract me from fulfilling this spiritual goal by tempting me to join in at the table.

In that space, alone on retreat with God, it offered me a new appreciation of Christ's sacrifice for me on the cross. I gained a new realization that much of the world's population feels weak and undernourished every day. And it helped me better understand my dependency on food and how it is so connected to community for me; and reminded me to give God thanks and praise in every circumstance of life.

Now, most of the time when I fast, it is from things that are not good for me or things that are superfluous to healthy living—like dessert! But I am thankful for taking the time to feel the hunger that so many others feel daily, it has helped me work more diligently to help stop hunger and its root causes. And I give thanks with a fervent heart to God who has provided me with so many blessings. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you God, for giving us food, for giving us love, for giving us joy, for giving us peace—right where we are. Amen.

*Even now declares the
Lord return to me with
all your heart.
Joel 2:12*

Wednesday

Could I have been a disciple in those days? Would I have had what it took? Could I have loved and acknowledged Jesus publicly when so many of the people in authority hated the very mention of his name?



I wonder. I mean, look how enthusiastically the crowd greeted Jesus the day he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. And then four days later, many of them shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

I wonder what makes people just follow along with the rest, with the majority. Is it fear, some frustrated desire, jealousy, selfishness?

I wonder how many of those who changed their words still wished and hoped that Jesus would do something incredible. Maybe he would wave his hand and make the Romans disappear. Maybe he would make them all rich. They wanted their own Jesus – what they thought he should be. Not the Jesus that God had given.

How often do we do that? More importantly, how often do I do that? Do I ever despise Jesus when I should praise him? When he is scourged by the multitude, do I stand fast, or do I pretend that I am in agreement with the crowd of public opinion? Too often, I think I am like that fickle crowd.

I pray that someday I will be able to stand fast and be the person he wants me to be. (Judy Hoffman)

Thursday 911 Memorial

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

These words from the Bible were found fused to a metal girder in the 911 wreckage. Let us never forget that even in the face of great evil love will always win.



Friday Lord Throughout these Forty Days

*Lord, who throughout these forty days
for us did fast and pray,
teach us with you to mourn our sins
and close by you to stay.*

*As you with Satan did contend,
and did the victory win,
O give us strength in you to fight,
in you to conquer sin.*

*As you did hunger and did thirst,
so teach us, gracious Lord,
to die to self, and so to live
by your most holy Word.*

*And through these days of penitence,
and through your Passiontide,
forevermore, in life and death,
O Lord, with us abide.*

*Abide with us, that through this life
of doubts and hope and pain,
an Easter of unending joy
we may at last attain!*

Claudia F. Hernaman (1873), #269 UM Hymnal

Saturday

*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
1 John 4:12*

I'm a 1.5 college generation graduate.

I come from 2 worlds.

My mom went to college, and her step-mother went to college and her dad went to college.

My dad did not finish college, though his sister did but his parents did not.

Without fail though, my father has sacrificed everything so that I could go to college, so my sister could go to college.

When I decided that I wanted to go to Smith, and sat down and talked about it with my parents they both looked at me and said, "We will do whatever it takes."

Smith was my dream. Smith gave me more than I can ever imagine, but it was not until I was graduated and living on my own and starting seminary that I realized that my parents had made countless sacrifices in order for me to have my dream. My parents gave of themselves again and again and again so I could have the opportunities I wanted so bad.

We do not get anywhere in our lives on our own. There are people who have made countless sacrifices to get us to where we are today-whether we are aware of their sacrifices or not. We need to be careful that we do not take anything for granted in our lives, we must be sure that we learn to practice gratitude as a spiritual practice, and we must remember those that go after us. We are all in this journey of life together. Let us help one another, let us remember to sacrifice for one another, and let us walk together hand in hand.

Week 18 Lost Things



Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

To be lost is not much fun. From a vivid childhood memory, I can assure you being lost is bewildering, frightening and awfully lonely. I must have been about 6 at the time, shopping with my parents in Menlo Park Mall in New Jersey at the Bamberger's Store (a New Jersey precursor of Macys) when I suddenly looked around and realized that I was alone. To this day I'm not sure if I wandered off bedazzled by some distraction, or if they did, but I know that I was terrified on that day as the crowds of unfamiliar faces swirled around me. I felt the tears welling up, and then there were outright sobs. "I'm lost!" I cried out in a loud voice. A kind store employee took me to the office where an announcement was made and my frantic parents showed up to claim me.

O to have the same clarity of lostness in adulthood; lostness from others, from myself, and from God. Many are the times when I have wandered off into places of unhealthiness, mistrust, pain, and brokenness...lostness; but as an adult I have not had the same clarity of lostness that I had as that 6-year old in Bamberger's. There have been times when I haven't had realization about being lost for a long time because I got caught up in the distractions and the stuff of life. Most of have been lost at some time or another.

It seems that lost people are more likely to knock gracelessly into each other, hurting each other; and lost people tend to make bad choices convinced that they are 100% right. The boldest person is no more exempt than the most modest. What is more, we find it extremely difficult to admit we were wrong, even to those who are most dear to us. We've all been there. It is in those moments I am so thankful for a God who seeks us; like the good shepherd to goes out to search for the one lost sheep or the woman who pulls her whole household apart in search of a lost coin.

One of the most wonderful gadgets on my iPad is the Find-My-Phone app. All I have to do is turn it on and it will let me know where I left it! It is no longer lost, because I know where it is and how to find it. It's almost like God has a "find my phone" app for each and every one of us. God seeks us and finds us so that we are no longer lost, but found. To be found is an incredible joy; the gift of belonging again. The fear and confusion and loneliness are banished and security, community, and joy are restored. "I'm found!" No wonder the woman who finds the coin rejoices with her neighbors! Just like God who rejoices over me and you. (GM)

Faith Challenge:

Think of a time when you were lost. Who helped find you? Take time to give thanks to God for that person and, if possible, send them some sort of a "thank you."

Prayer:

God of lost things and lost people, thank you for being a God who searches for us. Thank you for persisting until we are found and helping us recapture our joy. Help us to be a people who seek others who are lost and help them to find you too. In Jesus we pray. Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Corned Beef

This is my mom's special corned beef recipe. The sweet glaze adds a wonderful dimension to this recipe. She always served it with green beans and mashed potatoes.

One of the churches I served began an Irish Supper and this was the featured dish. People really came to love it, I think you will too. They served this meal with cabbage, creamy cole slaw and Irish soda bread. (GY)



1 (3-4 lb) corned beef brisket

½ cup light brown sugar, packed

2 Tbs cup brown mustard

½ cup grape jelly

1tbs Soy Sauce

Preheat oven 350 degrees. Rinse off the brisket under running water.

Place in large baking pan, add water to cover meat ½ way. You may use the seasoning packet that came with the corned beef. Cover with foil.

Cook about 3 hours in until very tender

In a bowl, mix remaining ingredients. Spread glaze on beef. Return to oven and bake for 30 minutes, reglazing every 10 minutes. Remove from oven and let rest at least 15 minutes.

Slice thin to serve.

*Bless us, O Lord,
and these thy gifts
which we are about to receive
from thy bounty through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*



My little Irish granddaughter was baptized on St Patrick's Day!

Tuesday, St Patrick's Day Thoughts

As you sip green beverages and dine on corned beef take a moment to consider the man for whom this celebration has been named. Patrick was born in England, in 387 AD shortly after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the son of a Roman imperial official. As a youth he was captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland where he worked as a shepherd.

It was a dream that lead Patrick out of his captivity to France where he studied to become a priest, while another dream directed him back to Ireland to share the message of the gospel. Patrick lovingly shepherded the people of Ireland. His style of evangelism could offer us insight to us today.

Patrick would move into a community, engage in the life of the people. He used familiar culture to introduce Jesus to a people who were spiritual but not Christians. Those who came to faith in Ireland had a unique spiritual perspective. The people of Ireland came to accept Christian faith for themselves not because the law imposed it. The church was an extension of local society, for both the members as well as the community. Patrick met people where they were and as they were; not forcing his beliefs but instead trusting the love of God would lead them to faith.

How are you actively engaged with your neighbors? Do people in your community know your church? What would happen in your community if your church closed? Patrick carefully observed his context for ministry and engaged with the people based on their values and interests. How is your church reaching the people in your neighborhood in the same way?

I would offer you a first step, prayer. Gather a team (or teams) of people and begin to canvas your community with prayer. Walk the streets when able, drive if need be – be observant and pray everywhere. Do this regularly. Patrick was known for his persistence. Don't give up, pray for schools, businesses, at bus stops and dog parks, in alleys and on highways. Don't worry about sharing information, instead bring a smile and a handshake; get to know the names of your neighbors. Listen to their stories.

Eventually they will want to know where you're from and why you're out there, and like Patrick you can then point them to Christ. The first step is leaving the church to head out to the world.(GY)

Wednesday

Older Child

In the parable of the prodigal son, the older brother often comes off as a jerk.

Everyone else is celebrating that the lost son has come home! He was lost and now he's home again! He was dead and now he is alive! And the older brother refuses to go into the party. When his father asks why he won't come into the party, the old brother gets a little snarky-he refuses to come in because he does not believe this celebration is necessary. After all, who is this kid to get the fatted calf when the old brother has been there the whole time, working his tail off, and he doesn't get any recognition from his father? And this one just walks back in and the whole world stops and falls at his feet?

It's understandable why he's often portrayed as a jerk. And I was one of those people who thought he was pretty terrible until I became the older brother.

My little sister went through a really dark time in her life and it caused a whole lot of pain and suffering in my family. And I took on that older brother role really well. I stayed. I saw my parents cry, I watched my family get torn apart. And when she finally came around again, and my parents celebrated with her I couldn't go into the party.

I remember looking at my mother and saying how do you expect me to celebrate this? I watched you cry. I picked up the pieces. I stayed. I stayed and it was hard. It was hard and I held this family together while she destroyed it. It hurts. It hurts too much to celebrate. And my mom put her hand on my cheek and said she came home. Everything I have is yours, but she came home. It hurts. But it is good.

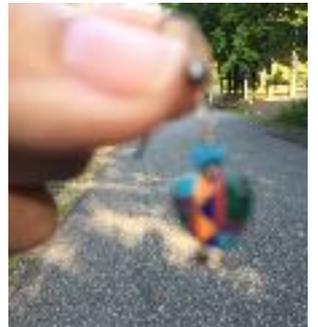
When lost things are found it is good. Especially when we realize we are the lost ones. Trying to hold everything together makes us stop focusing on forgiveness and mercy. We get so caught up in our own stuff, we forget to celebrate the goodness around us. It doesn't make us jerks, it just makes us a little lost too. And we, in turn, can be found again. (GM)

Thursday

My husband Bill and I were walking on the streets of our neighborhood one day when I felt something hit my chest. I thought at first it was a bug but then I reached up and touched my ear and realized it one of my earrings. We looked and looked on the ground where we stood and could not find the earring.

A few weeks later we were walking in that same spot and I said to Bill, "Let's look for my earring." But we saw nothing. One month later when I was alone I was there again at the same spot but this time I prayed to God, "Lord, please reveal my earring to me if it is here." A few feet away there it was on the ground on top of the dirt in front of me in perfect condition. I was stunned beyond belief! This truly was a miracle!

God is so good to us each and every day, we just have to believe that God will take care of us. It is not always in the way that we want but always in the way that we need. We are a blessed people! (FN)



Friday

In my ministry, I have done a number of funerals. I have done funerals for people in my congregations, I have done funerals for people I have never met before, and here's what I have learned about funerals. Everyone has lost something. Losing someone you love, or someone who in some way was a part of your life-it can often feel like you have lost a part of yourself. Things seem overwhelming and out of control. It is all you can do to keep your head above the sea of loss.

But... remember that the lost things of life are the things that change us, that remind us that we should tell people how much we love them now, to celebrate each moment, to tell people how much they mean to us. The lost things in life hurt, but they also teach us depths of God. Love a little harder, forgive a little more, lean on God the most. (GM)

May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; may the love of God go with us this day (night) and forever. Amen.

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Luke 15:20

Saturday

Prodigal Daughter

Our daughter Rachel made some mistakes when she was younger (as so many of our young people do!) She was working as a bartender in Hoboken, NJ (a swinging place for 20-somethings) after graduating from college. We knew that she didn't particularly like living at home again after the freedom of college living but were surprised one day when we came home to find that she and a couple of her friends had moved her furniture, clothes, and even her TV (which was in our living room at the time) into a rental truck and were heading out the door as the rest of the family arrived home. She was off to explore this new phase of life.

After a few months, we knew she was in trouble—we offered for her to come home, but she wasn't happy with the conditions; so she stayed away. Repeatedly over the next few months we offered until finally she hit rock bottom, losing her driving privileges due to too many overdue parking tickets. This time when we offered help, she was willing to come home, to be accepted and loved as a daughter again, turning her life around and beginning again. Thanks be to God!

She left Hoboken, began working on her Master's Degree in Counseling, and now helps others avoid the mistakes that almost derailed her life. God works in mysterious ways, indeed. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for encouraging us to love unconditionally even when others may not seem to care for us. Help us to offer grace to others at every moment. Amen.

Week 19 Last Things



With any kind of change there are last things. If we know of the change such as job changes, school changes, moving changes, then last things can be planned. If change happens and takes us by surprise such as the loss of a loved one or sudden change in health, then we just remember last things. Last things are things that can sustain us or keep us stuck. God is with us, around us, before us and behind us in change. God is always working for our good and the good of the world in change. This thought helps me as I experience change and I treasure but move beyond the last things of my life to the first things of my life.

Jesus did many first and last things in his ministry that were there to help the disciples prepare to receive the resurrection and life with the Spirit. These were things that were to sustain people in change as well as giving and sharing love. Dinners often mark times of planned change with families. There have been many graduations as I write this. One of the things we do is enjoy dinner after a graduation to mark this change in time. If people are moving we often have dinners to share our last times together. We remember dinners that we have had in the past and this activity of sharing food sustains us. Jesus used table fellowship to teach and share with people God's love. Finally, he left us with a meal by which to remember and experience his presence for all times.

Jesus gave love and comfort to so many people. One of the last things done for him was the washing and anointing of his feet with tears and perfumed ointment. One of the things that gave me pleasure in the last year before my mother went into a nursing home due to her Alzheimer disease, was to help her in her shower, especially washing her hair for her. I remember her rolling my hair up in rags so it would curl when I was a little girl and now to be able to help her was a gift. I know that Jesus was with us as we struggled through the difficulties of my mother's disease and helping us to connect through these simple acts of care.

My parents have taught me so many things. My Mother taught me her love of cooking, quilting and music. My Father has taught me to love history, to love the Bible and to love nature. Both taught me to love family and people. I know I will continue to realize much of what they have continued to teach me long after they have passed from this world. Jesus had so much to teach the disciples that they also did not understand or realize until after his resurrection. Times of change are stressful and we often miss the teachings we are given during these times. Fortunately, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit to continue to help us to learn, love and connect as God would have us. Jesus worked hard in his days on this earth to help us understand and the disciples struggled as we do. As Jesus often said; "Do not be afraid". Trust, love, serve and the learning will happen even in the last days of any change you go through so you can move forward to amazing first days. (LM)

Recipe



Tuesday

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'" 1 Kings 17:7-14

The prophet asks this woman to give up everything. To put his need above her own. Note that the woman is not one of God's chosen people, is a widow, a woman and has a son. Both she and the boy are marginalized.

I know it can be so easy for me to worry about not having enough, feeling like I am struggling. Then I am reminded that there are so many people who truly have nothing. They are oppressed and powerless. While I cannot meet all the world's needs I can be an advocate, I can pray, I can put my want above another's need.

Think and pray:

Who are the marginalized people in our lives?

Who are the people we assume may be outside God's love because of their lifestyle, occupation, beliefs or ethnicity?

How can we make a difference and reflect God's love?

Light a candle and place it on a part of the world that needs God's transforming love and life?

Monday

Chocolate Peanut-Butter Tandy Cake

Take this to your next pot-luck, it is always a crowd pleaser!

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest
May this food by you be blessed.
Amen.

2 cups Sugar
2 cups Flour
½tsp.Salt
2 Tbs Butter
1 cup Milk
4 Eggs
2 tsp Vanilla
1 tsp Baking Powder
6 Tbs Peanut Butter
1 8-oz Hershey Bar

Preheat oven to 350°. Beat together ingredients except PB & Chocolate and pour into greased & floured jelly roll pan. Bake 15 - 20 mins. While the cake is still hot, spread the PB over the top evenly and then refrigerate for ½ hour. Melt the chocolate and spread over the PB layer evenly. Refrigerate until chocolate hardens. Cut into squares and serve.



Wednesday

Prayer: Last Days

You Lord, are the God of our beginnings and our endings.

You are the one who makes all things new.

Help me to make the last days glorious to you God, and look forward to the new beginnings we have in you.

Hold me close in these last days, wipe away my tears and make me strong to stand in the face of the unknown.

Amen.



My last morning at Princeton Seminary. (GM)

Thursday *Do This is Remembrance of Me.*



Friday, Hymn

Take My Life and Let It Be

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1874), #399 UMH





Week 20 Prepare the Table

Saturday

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."



"So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things, I will give instructions when I come. 1 Corinthians 11:133-34 (NRSV)

The season of Lent is a good time to reflect on how we prepare ourselves to come to the Lord's table. Is it just something that happens in worship on the first Sunday of the month? Has it become as rote as saying the Lord's Prayer? Is it just between us and God, with little regard for the community of faith? Where is your heart and mind when you come to the Lord's table?

In this chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul takes the Corinthian community to task for their behavior in worship. Congregational conflict was rampant! These verses are set in a context which is bookended by words about abuses of the Lord's Supper and by participating in it in ways that are unworthy.

These verses are meant as a corrective for the celebration of the meal. Paul begins by noting that he is not simply telling them from his own perspective how he thinks they should participate in the meal. Instead he is sharing with them directives he has "received from the Lord."

Paul notes that the context of the meal Jesus instituted occurred "on the night he was betrayed." This meal did not originate among human beings who were of one mind or heart regarding Jesus and his gospel. To the contrary, Jesus fed his disciples knowing that he was doing so in the company of a betrayer. The word "betrayed" rings poignantly, it is a verbal acknowledgment that we are not there yet, we have work to do to become who God is calling us to be. This meal sustains us on the journey.

Paul suggests that every time human beings participate in the Lord's Supper, two things occur. First, participation in the meal is a public proclamation to oneself and others of the Gospel and secondly the meal marks the time until the final coming of Jesus. In this passage, we see the word "remembrance" twice and Paul joins that to hope in the final verse.

Finally, this meal is one offered to all of humanity and connects bread and wine with the life and death of Jesus. It comes to individuals and it comes to communities alike in all times and places. As the word "betrayed" signals so clearly, the meal is offered to sinful creatures who are invited to both memory and hope for the human condition because of this supper invitation. The Lord's supper is an affirmation of Christian community. It is a declaration that we are a people bound under a new agreement with the living Lord, an agreement which sets us apart as an eternal community - a people bound in love to one another and to the Lord.

In this season of Lent may you find participation in the Lord's Supper a time that calls you into connection with God and with the faith community. Soak in the closeness of Christ, find new meaning in receiving the bread and cup and know that Christ offers this gift for our spiritual nourishment and renewal as individuals and as community. (JPB)

Recipe



Monday - Chili

This chili was always a welcomed treat at Young Adult gatherings. It can be made ahead and doubles and quadruples well.

*For food that stays our hunger,
For rest that brings us ease,
For homes where memories linger,
We give our thanks for these. Amen.*



1 lb. Ground Beef
3 cans Goya Pink Beans in Sauce
¾ Onion, chopped
¾ Green Pepper, chopped
1 can Chopped Green Chilies
1 pkg. Chili Seasoning, mild or medium depending on your taste
1 clove Garlic, chopped finely
½ cup Picante Sauce
1 Tbs Oil

In a large pot add Tbs. oil and sauté onion, garlic and green pepper until they begin to soften. Add ground beef, and brown. Drain excess fat if necessary. Add beans in sauce, green chilies, chili seasoning, and picante sauce. Stir to combine. Simmer for at least 30 mins, stirring occasionally.

Frito Pie

This youth group favorite has become our family tradition.

1 recipe chili
1 bag Fritos
Sour Cream
Grated Cheddar Cheese
Salsa
Onion
Sliced black olives

Lightly crush Fritos in a bowl top with a generous serving of chili. Add your favorite toppings.



Tuesday

Cup of Blessing

Shortly after Stephen and I opened our catering business, corporate clients began to gift us with their monogrammed coffee mugs. Quickly, we had far too many to be practical for daily use, so we installed a few shelves in an empty alcove and began to display our client mug collection.

For us these mugs were not just marketing handouts; but instead represented a job well done. Each cup reminded us of people and places and events. They frequently spurred on conversations with customers, and often pleased patrons returned to the store to place their own mug on display. The mugs were given as a sign of appreciation, a cup of thanks.

During the Passover Feast, there are 4 different cups of wine that are shared during the course of the celebration. The third cup, a thanksgiving for the meal was shared this cup is known as the "cup of blessing."

Not too long ago, I found that beloved mug collection in a box. As I looked through them I could remember the different people and events. However, they were not serving their purpose. The purpose of a cup is to be filled then used.

As the church, it is our desire to be used by God. We discovered the gift of fellowship, as Christians we are called to be the vessels to pour out God's love. In the past year, we have worked to be a "Cup of blessing", and pray that God continues to use us often. (GY)



Wednesday Sharing the Last Supper with Children

I want to tell you about a night a teacher named Jesus did the work of a servant. It was Passover and my father told me this was a very special night. First some men came to get things ready. My father and I had been to many Passover dinners. In every house in Jerusalem people are eating the very same meal. It is called a Passover meal. There was fresh bread baking and a lamb roasting. Just before the sun set the guests came in, talking and laughing. They kicked off their sandals and stretched out on low couches and began to eat dinner.

After dinner Jesus called for a bowl of water and a towel. You see, it is customary for a servant to wash the feet of the guests. But on this night Jesus took off his own robe and wrapped the towel around himself. Then he knelt down at the feet of one of the disciples. He dipped his hands into the bowl and rubbed the cool water all over the disciple's feet. All the talking and laughing stopped. After washing the man's feet he wiped them dry with the towel. Then he moved to the next disciple and did the same. No one had ever seen anything like this before!!

When Jesus had finished washing all of the disciple's feet he said, "Do you know what I have done? I've done something you have never seen before. I am your teacher, but I did a servant's job because I love you. Now I want you to serve others. I want you to be a helper like me."

This Passover meal was unlike any other we had ever seen. On this night, Jesus, a teacher, did the job of a servant because he loved his friends.
(Marleen Rush)



Thursday

Each meal with our family begins with a blessing... here is my family gathered around the table. "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. And let these gifts to us be blessed. Blessed be God who is our bread. May all the world be clothed and fed. Amen"



Friday

I am constantly lost in this gift you have given me Lord.

I am in awe that this is what you have called me to.

Lord I stand at the altar, I am aware of the great responsibility you have called me to in this. As I bless this bread, as I bless this cup as I offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice in union with the sacrifice Christ made for us; God I pray I never forget the magnitude of this moment, no matter how many times I stand in this same spot.

Lord, I am grateful. I am grateful for what this meal means, I am grateful for your grace, I am grateful for what you have called me to do. I am humbled Lord. I am humbled.

God, as I prepare this table, fill me with your Spirit.

As I prepare this table, help me to remember.

Lord, help me never take for granted this great gift you have given us.

Lord, your grace is sufficient. This day and every day. Amen.(GM)



Week 21 When You Think It's Over

Be Present at Our Table, Lord

United Methodist Hymnal no. 621

G D Em Bm Em D G D Em

Be pre-sent at our ta-ble, Lord; be here and ev-ery-

C G D Em D G D G

where a-dored; thy crea-tures bless, and

C D⁷ G Em D Am G/D D⁷ G

grant that we may feast in par-a-dise with thee.

WORDS: John Cennick, 1741, alt.
MUSIC: Attr. to Louis Bourgeois, 1551

OLD 100th
LM



"Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:23-26)

I was a junior in college the first time I thought it was over.

My college boyfriend, Trent, the man I thought I was going to marry, had broken up with me... via text message.... After getting someone else pregnant. All of a sudden, in the span of 20 minutes, I thought it was all over. We had plans to move to Atlanta the next year where I would attend Chandler School of Theology for Seminary, and he would complete his physical therapy degree. From there I would enter the Red Bird Missionary Conference as a missionary pastor and float through Appalachia while raising four boys...

All of sudden, it was over.

I figured that at this point in my life, if I couldn't be enough for Trent to marry me and everything else seemed to be falling apart around me, I wasn't going to be enough to be the minister I thought I was going to be. My deep desire for control and planning fell out from underneath me.

I ran away that summer, ran away to Kentucky where I knew I was at least going to be doing something productive with my life (I was interning at Red Bird Mission for a second summer) and vowed to hide from God in the mountains. It was over-this was obviously God telling me that the calling I had thought I had from the age of four was actually false and I would need to figure out what else I was going to do. In my book, this whole ministry thing was over.

Until it wasn't.

When Lazarus died, Martha and Mary were convinced that it was over. They could only process the temporal notion of life and death, and even Martha, who believed that Lazarus would be raised on the last day, was convinced that this was the end for Lazarus.

Until it wasn't.

Jesus comes to Martha and to Mary and to Lazarus and tells them "It's not over. I am the resurrection and the life." Lazarus, dead for several days, is raised from the dead.

On that Thursday night when Jesus was betrayed, Judas thought it was over.

On that Friday morning when Jesus was condemned by Pilate, the chief priests and the Romans thought it was over.

On that Friday Afternoon when Jesus breathed his last, the disciples and those around him thought it was over.

Until it wasn't.

Until that Sunday morning when the world knew it was not over.

Here's the promise that Christ makes to us in His resurrection-When you think it's over, take one more chance, one more risk, one more step of faith and you will discover it's nowhere near over.

In November of my senior year of college, I found out I had been accepted to Chandler, Duke, Princeton and Drew for Seminary.

In April of my senior year of College, I got a call from my District Superintendent offering me an appointment as a solo pastor.

Seven Days before I graduated from college, I was officially accepted as the senior pastor of Frankford Plains UMC.

On July 1, 2014, I began my ministry officially. Three years later, I am living in New Jersey, I have earned my Master's Divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary, I am a provisional elder in the GNJAC and I have entered my fourth year of ministry.

I, like Mary, Martha, the disciples, the Romans and so many others thought it was over.

Until it wasn't.

Jesus is the resurrection of our souls, the resurrection of our brokenness and the life that springs eternal. (GM)

Recipe



Monday - Mussels and Pasta (GY)

*Father, we give our thanks
For food that stays our hunger
For rest that brings us ease
For homes where memories linger
We give our thanks for these
Amen.*

Many Italian American families have adopted the tradition of not eating meat on both Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It's hard to consider this delicious dish "fasting" but it was often a prelude to Easter in our home.

1 lb ounces uncooked angel hair pasta
4 Tbs olive oil
3 Tbs butter
1/3 cup diced onion
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 teaspoon salt
Dash of ground red pepper
1/2 cup white wine
36 mussels (about 3 pounds), scrubbed
or 1½ cups shelled frozen mussels
½ lemon, juiced
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic; sauté 5 minutes or until tender but not brown. Add mussels, butter, salt, and ground red pepper; sauté 2 minutes. Add wine and lemon; bring to a boil. Cover and simmer for 7 minutes or until shells open.
Cook pasta according to package directions, drain
Discard any unopened shells. Serve mussels over pasta; sprinkle with parsley.



Tuesday

Chance Phelps was killed on Good Friday, he was a marine killed in Iraq in April 2004. Lt Col Strobl escorted his body to his final resting place. Last night we watched a movie, "Taking Chance", towards the end a veteran is thanking the marine for escorting the body of a fallen young soldier home. The colonel retorts he didn't really do anything to which the veteran replied "Without a witness they just disappear." Those who escort our fallen heroes home give witness, they honor the sacrifices made. This story was a witness to what freedom costs.

Instantly my thoughts went to Holy Week. We need to be the witnesses of what grace cost. If we don't give witness to the gifts God sends, to His miracles, to the sacrifice, they disappear.

Walk with Jesus. Today. This is his last week. Place your coats on the road before him. Make a way for him in your life. Shout "Hosanna," "God saves." Stay with Jesus. Enter into his triumph as well as his death.

This is a time to revel in the majesty of God, to let go of our fears and our status and our insecurities. But when simply rejoicing in Jesus as king – we fall short. Alongside the singing and the dancing we like Jesus are called to serve others. Wash their feet. Break bread together. Share the cup of sacrifice. Face the betrayal. Know that there will be false witness, and finally there will be a cross to bear.

As you journey through the rest of Holy Week, I commend you to bear witness to the life and death of Jesus. Die to whatever robs you or others of the life God has planned for you. Follow knowing that death in Christ always leads to resurrection and new life, new hope. May we wave palms, light candles, and experience Holy Week traditions in a way that provides a witness to the world that death will never have the last word again. (GY)

Wednesday

"Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; 21 glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen."
Ephesians 3: 20-21 (CEB)

As we move through Holy Week this is a particularly powerful vision, think about it, a God who "is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine"

If you had stood before Jesus' cross on the day we Good Friday would you ever have imagined that this man beaten and bleeding, breathing his last would rise from the dead in three days? And yet he did, because God is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine.

How does this statement strike you? Does it puzzle you? Does it encourage you? I respond in two different ways. My first response is to feel bad about my lack of faith. Though I have seen God do great things, and I sometimes ask God for great things, I never imagine that God will do more than I ask for. Second, as I read this passage, I want to repent of my lack of faith and ask for both forgiveness and the gift of greater faith.

Hold this verse as you move through Holy Week and as you continue to grow in faith, "God is able to do far more than anything you can ask or imagine." Let this truth change your life.

How do you respond to the fact that God is able to do far more than all you can ask or imagine? If you really believed this, how would it change your prayers? How would it change your life today?

PRAYER: Gracious God, open us up to claim the vision that you are able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine, for you are a God of resurrection. We ask you to enter those dead places in our lives to bring resurrection. We pray this in the name of the living Christ. Amen.

Holy Thursday: Jesus sent Peter and John ahead and said, "Go and prepare the Passover meal, so we can eat it together."



Friday Good Friday

"When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:33-34)

Reflect

Jesus' talked a lot about loving enemies and forgiving others. But here at the cross he goes beyond words and ideals and teaches us with an example

With the nail digging into his flesh and the hammer hovering... He offers forgiveness

So in your life, who are the soldiers with nails and hammers that you could extend forgiveness to?





Week 22 Christ The Lord is Risen

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

[After Jesus had been crucified and placed in the tomb and] the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a bright robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Suppose you had buried a loved one, possibly in a mausoleum-type structure, had seen the grave slab sealed into place, and returned a couple days later only to find the entrance wide open, the slab moved away, and the coffin empty. What do you think your reaction would have been? And what if there were a white-robed stranger standing there? You can't blame the women for being amazed and afraid when they had that most unusual experience on that first Easter morning at the tomb! Wouldn't you likely have done the same thing? They simply got out of there as fast as they could and didn't tell anyone about the encounter with the angel (at least, not right away). Why? Because they were afraid. And this is where the original gospel of Mark ends. With the women fleeing and afraid to speak a word to anyone. But if they had stayed locked up by their fears, we wouldn't have a Christian faith today...

Mark's gospel is the earliest gospel; and it was written about 30-40 years following Jesus' earthly life.

So it's curious that he still ended it with fear. Or maybe he knew that many of the early followers were constantly dealing with their fears, and knew that it would be important for them to be able to conquer them if the legacy of the Christian faith were to live on.

The ending of Mark's gospel was so uncomfortable for the early church that they felt the need to finish the story with an addendum...Mark 16: 9-20 was added later. It includes a resurrection appearance of Jesus, instructions for the disciples including the promise of the Holy Spirit, and his ascension into heaven. The early church recognized that we can't stay mired in our fears and fulfill the call of Christ to go out into the world to make disciples.

Today, the Christian church in North America is dwindling. Maybe that is somehow connected with our own fear of witnessing to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. What are we afraid of when it comes time to share our own faith? (VMB)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the message of Easter is such good news that it sometimes catches us by surprise and overwhelms us! We get so caught up in what we expect to experience that we forget to see you; fail to remember what you have told us; and are afraid to tell anyone about the good news that you have given us in your resurrection power over death in whatever form it comes. Help us, Lord Jesus! May we serve you faithfully, remember your teachings and way to live, and be bold in our faith so that we can share the good news of the Gospel. Amen.

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night.

Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.

(John 19:38-41)

Saturday, Holy Saturday

We end our Lenten journey as Jesus arrives at the tomb where he was buried.

Because we know the story we leave with expectant hope of his resurrection.

However take some time in quiet contemplation of your lenten journey.

“Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.”

— Anonymous

Recipe



Monday - Lemon Sponge Pie (GY)

This light, slightly sweet, slight tart desserts always a big hit a local church suppers. I have had a few versions of this treat, including my mother-in-law's, however, this recipe by Maddie Smith is the best by far.

Pie crust, unbaked
2 Tbs Butter
1 C sugar
4 eggs separated
2 Tbs Flour
1 Cup Milk
½ cup lemon juice
¼ tsp salt

Preheat oven 425°, line pie plate with crust. Cream together butter and sugar, beat until creamy. Add egg yolks, flour milk and lemon juice. Beat egg whites until stiff, fold into yolk mixture. Pour mix into crust. Bake pie a t 425° for 15 minutes, lower heat to 350°. Bake 30-40 minutes or until firm.

*God, we thank you for this food,
For rest and home and all things good;
For wind and rain and sun above,
But most of all for those we love.*



Tuesday

Coffee Filter Butterflies

Using coffee filters, magic markers and water, you can make beautiful butterflies.

What You Need:

pipe cleaners (assorted colors)
coffee filters (large size)
water-base markers (or watercolor paints and brushes)
small spray bottle filled with water

What You Do:

Give each child a coffee filter and have them color on it with markers. Encourage them to make designs. Have them hold up the coffee filter, and spray with water. Let them watch the colors spread and run together. Once the filter is dry, bunch it in the middle and wrap a pipe cleaner around it. Make sure you leave a little extra pipe cleaner to make two antennas.



Wednesday
Story of Dogwood

There is an ancient legend that the Dogwood tree was once a might and strong tree that was used to make the cross of Jesus. The tree was so distressed by its fate that it asked to never grow big enough again to be used for a cross. Instead it was covered in blossoms each spring that formed a little cross.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Phil 2:8



Thursday - Christ Is risen. Rejoice and be glad, for the promise of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. Christ is risen indeed. Amen.



Friday Christ The Lord Is Risen Today

1. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high,
Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply,
Alleluia!

2. Love's redeeming work is done,
Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

3. Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave?
Alleluia!

4. King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, thy power to prove,
Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

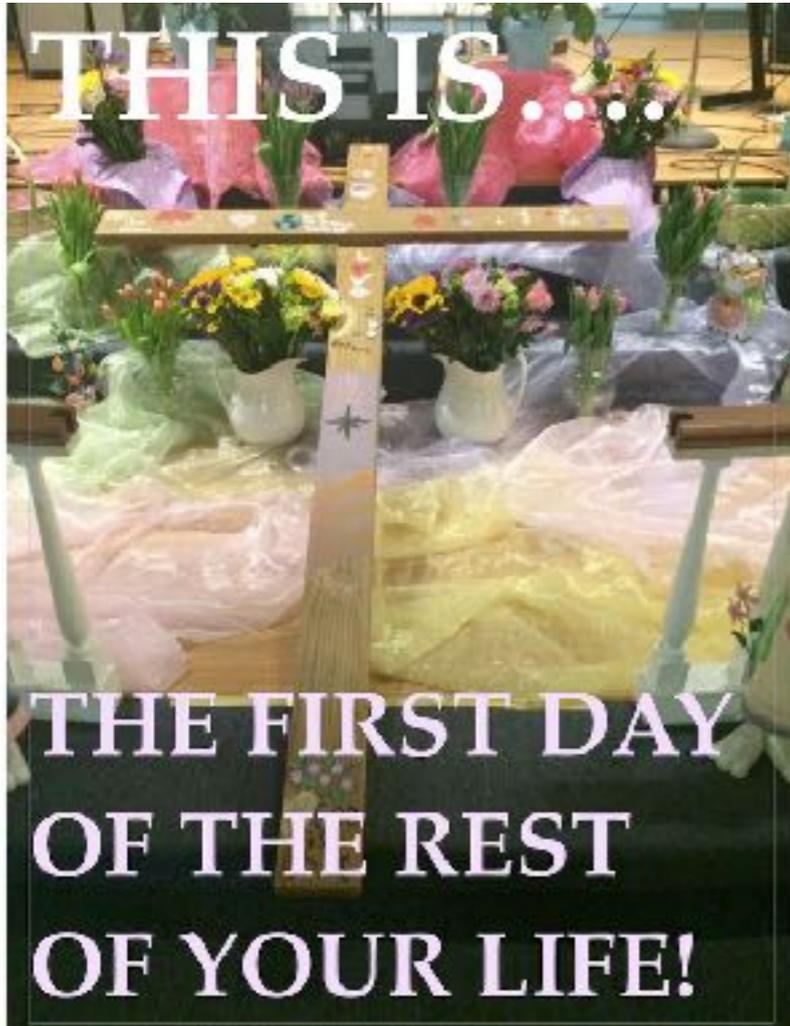
Charles Wesley, 1739 #302 UM Hymnal



As I read over the familiar passages of Easter this year the phrase that struck me was that each gospel began the resurrection message with the same phrase, it was the first day of the week.

Now this might seem like merely a marker for the time Jesus was in the tomb. Or is it ?

The first day... the most momentous of all events that ever occurred is historically situated on the first day of the week, the first day of all eternity, a new beginning. Whatever your life situation – our amazing God offers us new starts, fresh beginnings. The day of resurrection is the first day of the new kingdom of God, the one that Jesus promised , a day of restoration , an act of grace, that continues for us ... this is the first day of the rest of our lives... how will we use it? (GY)



Week 23 Unbelievable



When I was a little girl I loved to try on my mom’s engagement and wedding rings. My mom wore her band during the week when she cleaned and had her ring and my grandmother’s ring in her jewelry box. I loved to go in and put them on. Even to the point that one time when I was in about 6th grade I got the ring so stuck on my finger we needed to go to the hospital to have it removed.

Dreams of having a beautiful ring someday faded away with a skepticism of how could I ever be worthy of the love that is behind a diamond. By the time I was engaged I had convinced myself that I really did not like diamonds at all they were way to gaudy and showy.

In a quest to make me happy my husband designed a beautiful engagement ring that showcased his love and met my standards of being demure. This fit my sensible standard that there is no way our new love was worthy of a diamond. A few years ago Stephen gifted me with a beautiful diamond ring. I was taken back, we had never talked about a ring and I was incredibly uncomfortable about this token of his love. After what was more than 25 years of marriage I should have seen our love as surviving the test of time, yet I was anxious. It just seemed too much. I would need to let go of the comfortable to accept the extraordinary.

Jesus is risen, he has appeared to his disciples and performed signs and miracles. So what’s next? This was the quandary for the disciples. So these disciples, those who were among the closest to Jesus all go back to their regular lives. They have seen the risen Lord. They have seen his scars. Yet, in the face of the incredible truth that the rabbi they followed was and is the messiah, they cannot see how they fit in this picture. So, they had been fishermen, and now they are fishing again.

This problem of missing the truth in front of our faces is not just a 1st century phenomena, We have heard the Easter story, for many we have heard it countless times. We heard it read from the Bible, spoken from the pulpit, and sung by the choir. And yet what was Monday like for us, or they next week , etc. How has our belief changed us? Have we gone back to our old familiar, comfortable, yet distorted truths, or have we been changed. There are plenty of reasons we stick with the familiar, but for too many it’s because we can’t see that we were created for more. We fail to conceive that God wired us not to settle for what was just familiar but invites us into a resurrected life.

For Peter, he once knew extraordinary love, yet today he was stuck in the ordinary because he could not stop thinking about how he had failed that love. Peter had no concept of a future as a disciple. He could not see beyond his betrayal. Jesus had offered him the gift of grace and yet he allowed his sense of unworthiness send him back to fishing.

Where have we climbed back into the ordinary when God has offered and planned the extraordinary? Where have we shortchanged ourselves because I don't look forward to the future with the hope that comes with faith in Jesus? Have we seen ourselves bargaining with God asking for less out of desperation---desperately believing that if I try hard enough on my own that everything will work out right?

None of us is worthy, but blessedly we are all offered redemption, a new life. I am redeemed ...you set me free Lord... Today I will love you and love your sheep... I will take on the call that is greater than I can imagine, not because of who I am but because of who you are...

A diamond is a promise, not just of the love that is present in the time of the engagement and marriage, but a symbol that in the future the love will grow and grow. We do not accept the gift because we are worthy, but it is a promise of giving ourselves completely.

Love is not to be measured, or given equally, instead it is given to the unworthy ... you and me. (GY)

Recipe



Tuesday

Rejoice in the Lord Always, I say it again rejoice!

Although this is my favorite verse in all the bible, I so struggle with rejoicing always. I would say I tend towards being more anxious. That was what lead me to this verse to begin with... the “do not be anxious about anything part.”

I am in a season of asking God to help me to rejoice in all circumstances, how about you could you use some encouragement in rejoicing?

Can you rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances?

Musician and writer Matt Redman begins his book, Unquenchable Worshipper with this story:

“The year is 1744. Hymn writer Charles Wesley is in Leeds, England holding a prayer meeting in an upstairs room. Suddenly there is a creak in the floorboards, followed by a massive crack, and the whole floor collapses.

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures Here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost
~ Amen*

All 100 people crash right through the ceiling into the room below. The place is in chaos—some are screaming, some are crying, some just sit in shock. But as the dust settles, Wesley, wounded and lying in a heap, cries out, “Fear not! The Lord is with us; our lives are all safe.” and then he breaks out into the doxology: “praise god, from whom all blessings flow”—perhaps a bizarre choice of song, considering what has just happened!

But here’s the point: while everyone else was still licking their wounds, the heart of this unstoppable worshipper was responding with unshakable praise (Unstoppable Worshipper, 74).”

Unbelievable!

Are we responding to our life situations with rejoicing and praise? (GY)

Monday - Mexican Dip

Gracious God

Thank you for the food between us

The friends around us

The love between us

And your presence among us

1 8oz pkg cream cheese

½ Cup Salsa

16 oz Sour Cream

¼ Cup black olives

½ Cup shredded Cheddar Cheese

2 tbs chopped scallions

Preheat oven 350. In a glass pie dish spread cream cheese. Top with salsa, olives and scallions. Layer sour cream and top with shredded cheese. Bake 15-20 minutes till cheese is bubbly. Serve with tortilla chips.



Wednesday

Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news,
who proclaims peace! Nahum 1:15
Where has God called you to share God's peace?



Thursday

Lord you are amazing. You are good beyond my imagination, you are unbelievable to me. Each time I think I know more about you Lord, you continue to surprise me again. Help me live into the beauty of the unbelievable, help me to breathe you even deeply, help me to find the awe, the grace and life you provide, especially when it seems to be unbelievable Lord. For all things are possible with you. Amen.



Friday



*Let us break bread together on our knees;
let us break bread together on our knees;*

Refrain:

*When I fall on my knees
with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.*

*Let us drink wine together on our knees;
let us drink wine together on our knees.*

*Let us praise God together on our knees;
let us praise God together on our knees.*

UH Hymnal #618

Saturday

Can you picture the scene. Sunrise. On the first Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene - one of Jesus' closest friends - went to his tomb in the garden, early in the morning, and saw that the stone which sealed it had been rolled away. Peter and another disciple also saw that the tomb was empty and ran off. Mary, though, stood outside weeping.

When she looked into the tomb, she saw two angels. They asked her why she was crying. "They have taken my Lord away", she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

The idea of Jesus coming back to life again was beyond Mary's expectations. Three days before he had been brutally killed. So it's not surprising that Mary couldn't recognize Jesus even when he was standing in front of her. Who did Mary think he was? The gardener!

Perhaps the fact that in John's gospel Mary mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener is not as accidental as it at first seems. You see our God is the creator of perfect order, and there is nothing that is done by chance. Gardens have been the backdrop of many significant moments. In a garden... God first made humanity to live in peace. In a garden the peace was broken and hatred, discord, disappointment, suffering and death spoiled paradise. In a garden the world was lost; and in a garden the world was made new.

Jesus spoke her name, declaring to her that He was alive. She recognized Him in an instant. And with that recognition, she also came to realize that this garden was no longer a place of death, it was a place of life!

In the Easter garden, joy overcame sorrow. In a garden, elated exuberance replaces extreme disappointment. The tears in that garden were temporary.

How is it in your garden? Life has the twist and turns that we often do not expect. Many times in our own "garden times" in life, good gives way to bad, love gives way to hate, health gives way to sickness, life gives way to death.

No matter what might be your garden experiences, hold on to your faith in a savior who rose from death to life. Joy will win out over sorrow. Life will win out over death. This shall be our confidence!
Amen (GY)

Week 24 Fully Present



There is no city more beautiful in springtime than London. Some of my favorite memories from the time I lived there include strolling through lush parks and gardens in full bloom this time of year. Most spectacular were the Horse Chestnut trees that filled Regent's park near my former home, some which blossomed in white and others in regal pink. The Chestnut trees grew to enormous heights and often made a canopy of shade at the base of the tree where one could enjoy a picnic lunch or nap on a sunny afternoon.

When I returned to NJ, I was determined to find some of the pink flowering Chestnut trees to plant at my new home. Little did I know that these are extremely rare in the United States, unlike the white flowering trees that seem to grow everywhere. It took several years, but with the help of an expert landscaper I found three saplings and had them shipped from the West coast to adorn my backyard. Year after year, I have watched my beautiful trees grow and each May, I delight in the lovely pink flowers. My trees have taught me much about patience; nearly twenty years have passed and yet they are still relatively young and small. I wait all year for that 7-10 day period when the trees are in bloom. My Chestnut trees will probably not reach their full grandeur until long after I have left this house, yet I enjoy watching them grow and cherish the memories they hold of my time in London.

Patience is not usually my strongest quality, but the Bible instructs us frequently to wait on the Lord. The Psalms are brimming with prayers of waiting: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope" (Psalm 130:5-6). Likewise, the prophet Isaiah spoke to Israel and said, "But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Ah, yes, patience and waiting are difficult activities, but God is faithful and active even when it seems as though life is dormant.

What are you waiting for in this season of your life? Does it seem as though some of your prayers go unanswered? In our world of instantaneous gratification it takes deep trust to believe that God works on a different clock than the one set by human standards. Often the fruit of our prayers and ministries take years to blossom, and some of the seeds we plant will not fully grow in our lifetime. Nonetheless, we trust that all the waiting will be worthwhile and in the right season we will delight in what God has done through us.

Gotta hurry off now, going to enjoy some time in the shade of my Chestnut tree! (JT)

Recipe



Monday - Carrot Flummery Gina

*Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored.
These mercies bless, and grant that we
May feast in fellowship with thee.*

Wesleyan Blessing

2 Cups of carrots cooked and mashed
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1 Cup Ritz cracker crumbs
1 Cup shredded Cheddar Cheese
1 ½ Cups Milk
4 Tbs Butter
½ tsp Salt
4 slices Bacon, cooked and crumbled

Combine all ingredients except bacon.
Pour into baking dish
Bake 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Garish
with bacon.



This is my little chef Hadley.

Tuesday



God, the word is constantly spinning spinning spinning around me, and it often feels as though I am running through my to-do list all the time.

I find myself thinking about the next thing I have to do instead of living fully in this moment. God! I am missing out on so much of your love, your blessing, and your light by focusing on the next thing.

God help me to be present in each moment, remembering it is in the moment where I find you, not in the next thing.

Help me to be fully present in the moments you have called me to that I might be able to experience the fullness of your love in each moment. In the name of your Son I pray, Amen.



Wednesday

As I spend time with young children, I notice the world slows down. Not that they aren't busy, or active, or even rambunctious. But whatever we are doing together, they are focused on that one thing.

“Focused on that one thing” is not always easy for me as an over-committed adult. Walking along a stream, my 6-year old grandson, who had difficulty focusing on anything, stepped out onto a stone. And sat down on it.

For almost an hour he watched the water go by. He asked me where does the water come from? And where does it go?

He kept me in the present, noticing what was in front of us at that time, not concerned or distracted by other activities or what might have been going on in our own minds.

Fully present, not anxious for tomorrow, but living in the moment, where the divine has been, is and always will be. (FP)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:6-7

Thursday

The winter is over; the rains have stopped; in the countryside the flowers are in bloom. This is the time for singing; the song of doves is heard in the fields. SS 2:11-12

Here are a couple of pictures of my beloved Chestnut tree. Each spring I look forward to its's blooming. When was the last time you took a look outside? Take some time to see what God has planted to inspire you today.



Friday

“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Pray slowly over the verses.

What words or images move you?

Consider: Who is God for me? How does God see me?

How have you experienced God's presence in your life?

What words come to mind as you reflect on who/what/how God is for you?

Prayer: Amazing God, today I am reminded of who you are in my life as well as your everlasting presence in this world. Help me to hold on to the goodness and light that you have place in my life. Amen.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
Isaiah 60:1

Week 25 New Life



Have you ever noticed that Jesus' followers had difficulty recognizing Him when He appeared to them after His resurrection? He appeared to Mary and she thought He was a gardener. He yelled to the disciples from the shore and they did not recognize Him. He appeared, walked, and talked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they did not realize it was Him.

Why don't they recognize Him? Was it grief, disbelief or was it as Luke says that they were kept from recognizing Him?

There are the two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Early in the morning they set out, hearts heavy. It seems that their expectations had been dashed; they had really hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, the one to free Israel, but then He was captured and was killed."

They had recognized that Jesus was prophetic; they saw that his miracles, they even repeated that there were angels proclaiming that he was alive! But for some reason they were not sticking around to see if anything else would happen.

Are we sometimes like these disciples, our words do not match our actions, we have great words to share about Jesus, but we are walking away from him. He's right there in front of us and we don't recognize him. Do we allow ourselves to be changed by the risen Christ or do we return to business as usual?

We don't have to travel too many miles down the Easter road before we're caught in the hard realities of life. The storms of life sweep in and consume our attention. Dreams, ideas and expectations for life are here today and gone tomorrow. "We had hoped that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel...to redeem us."

Jesus responds, "Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? We know the story, but do we really understand? And so we hear the story once again, we listen as Jesus tells these travelers that all this was meant to happen, it was all laid out since the beginning of time.

In our personal faith journey as well as church life the promises of resurrected life can quickly be dashed. Snowstorms in April confound the promises of spring; life struggles can be at odds with our glad refrains of Jesus Christ Is Risen Today.

The amazing gift of Easter is that nothing can take Jesus away from us ever again. Not fear, or denial or disappointment. Not even death. Jesus will always hold that place beside us; so let us open our eyes to his presence.

How might we continually recognize the presence of Christ?

Consider what is distracting you from recognizing Jesus: If it is worry turn your worries to prayer, if it is busyness slowly reclaim time for building your relationship with Jesus through worship, study, contemplation.

Hospitality to strangers: It was because the travelers were open and engaged with a stranger that they encountered Jesus. Consider who are the invisibles that are journeying beside you in life. Have you been kept recognizing Jesus in them? Remember and return: The travelers recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, then without hesitating they headed back to share this good news. Don't wait." how will you begin today to share the Good News with a weary world?

It is true! The Lord has risen. May you recognize this truth and live fully all the promises of resurrection. (GY)

Saturday

Rejecting Stress on the Journey

My busy schedule, my stress, my distractions, my exhaustion—it all makes me less patient, less compassionate, less willing to forgive and laugh at myself.

My, my, my, me, me, me.

Where is God in all of that?

"He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

For the next few moments let go of self and make God greater.

Allow your body to relax. Contemplate how many stresses undermine your sense of peace.

Write words describing your existing stress. Pray for the hold of each stress to be broken.

Invite God to carry you the length of your journey on this day.

Breathe and relax into God's presence.

Recipe



Monday - Lemon Chicken

*For all we eat, and all we wear,
For daily bread, and nightly care,
we thank thee heavenly Father. Amen.*



4 boneless skinless chicken breasts

3 tbs flour

2 lemons, juiced (1/2 cup)

4 tbs extra virgin olive oil

2 tsp lemon pepper

1 teaspoon dried parsley

1/2 cup chicken broth

1/2 cup white wine

Lightly pound chicken. Place chicken breasts in a gallon-size resealable plastic bag. Add flour and lemon pepper and parsley. Shake to coat.

Sauté chicken in oil, till lightly browned on each side. Add lemon juice, chicken broth and wine and let sauce reduce as chicken finishes cooking about 12 minutes.



Tuesday

“I say this because I know the plans that I have for you.” This message is from the Lord. “I have good plans for you. I don’t plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future. Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will search for me, and when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will let you find me.” Jer 29:11

This scripture is a familiar one, I have plans for you ... in seasons of life changes – graduations, weddings, people moving, appointment changes within the church we might have considered this verse.

When life sets you up with a challenge, take a chance on something new. You can decide that negative experiences from your past will not predict your future. Ultimately, the only thing you can ever really do is to keep moving forward.

Are you willing to have God’s voice speak hope into your life. Even if it doesn’t keep with your timetable.

If we are to live the creative and full life that God desires then we need to be opened to the leadings of God.

Then prepare yourself for a God breathed future.



Wednesday Baptism as New Life

“ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting on him. Then a voice said from heaven, “This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased.” Mat 3:16-17

Jesus’ baptism was a very special day. Jesus had come from the town of Nazareth, he was a carpenter, he built things. Jesus went to the town where his cousin John was baptizing people. Jesus asked John to baptize him too. Jesus was baptized in a river, John dipped him in the water. Sometimes we baptize people in rivers, or pools – but mostly we baptize in the church.

During Jesus’ baptism – something amazing happened, a voice came from the sky “This is my Son and I love him.” And a beautiful, white dove came down from the clouds too. This was a really good day.

When we baptize someone here in church – there is not a voice from the clouds or a dove but it is a really special day too. People ask to be baptized, parents ask for their babies and children to be baptized, just like Jesus asked John. They gather around the baptism font, just like Jesus went to the river. Then the pastor uses these words as they take water and sprinkle it on the head of the person being baptized. “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Pour 1/3 of the water into the baptismal font.

Baptism is in the name of the Father, God.

God’s voice came from the clouds at the baptism of Jesus.

God is the creator of all things – even you and me. God loves us and wants to be close to us. In baptism God says you are my child.

Point to the children and emphasize “You are a child of God”.

Pour ½ of the water into the baptismal font.

Baptism is in the name of the Son, Jesus.

Jesus came to live on earth a long time ago, he came to show us how to love one another. When you are baptized as a baby or child your parents promised that your family will follow Jesus. One of the ways we follow Jesus is sharing love.

Pour remaining water into the baptismal font.

Baptism is in the name of the Holy Spirit.

At Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit came down like a dove.

In baptism, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and stays with us to help us through hard times. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to do the things God wants. (GY)

After Jesus baptism, he did not go back to be an ordinary carpenter. Instead he went around and shared the message of God’s love and God’s power through the Spirit to preach, teach and help lots of people. Baptism helps us to do the same. (GY)

Thursday Lilacs Gina



Friday

All my devices have undergone updates recently, I am always wary that the new thing might mess up what I already know. I also know historically the updates will likely encounter a bug or two that need to be worked out. I am however a “tech-junkie” so I always take the leap and do the update.

This made me think, maybe you are in a season of updates of a sort on your faith journey. It’s exciting you have taken the risk to update your faith journey. Many of you are involved in bible studies and small groups where you are growing in your faith.

Today I am going to challenge you to consider, what “update” is God asking of you? Is there a new area where you are being challenged to serve?

Does your daily prayer or devotional time need to be refreshed?

If you are challenged to make it to church weekly – start out with once a month.

Our journey of faith won’t be perfect, there will be some glitches we will need to work out along the way, but the God we follow knows the plan – so I have pushed the update button – how about you? (GY)

Saturday

Hymn of Promise

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity,
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Natalie Sleeth, #707 UM Hymnal



Week 26 Living Into Love



This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”1 John 4:7-16

My husband is the youngest of five children and I am the older sister to one sibling Laurie. When we first got married we talked about how we wanted to have a large family with at least three or four kids. We had our first son and then 18 months later our daughter came along. I am sure you are all shocked, but we had a change of heart. Two sounded like a really nice number. Two kids were more than enough to keep us busy. Then about six years ago we were suddenly presented with the opportunity to make two brothers a part of our family. We did not have a lot of time to think about it.

We spoke to our son and daughter who were young teenagers at the time to see what they thought.

Could we handle four teenagers? Would everyone get along? So many questions were running through our minds. We talk the talk but can we walk the walk? God never gives you more than you can handle, but really, four teenagers? Where would they all sleep and who is cooking for all of these kids.

We trusted God and said yes. Six years later we are the proud parents of four amazing young people who love God and are finding their way in the world. There were good times and a few difficult times, but we would not trade them for the world. Today with school and jobs we do not get to see each other as often as we used too.

The times that we are all together are even more special. The food, the card games, the laughing, the food! We are family and we love each other because Jesus first loved us and modeled for us what true love is. (DD)

Prayer: Thank you Lord for expanding our love to expand our lives. Amen

Recipe



Monday Special Coffee Drinks

Blessed art Thou, LORD our God,
King of the universe,
Who by His Word brings about all things.



Snickerdoodle Latte

1 1/2 cup milk
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup espresso or strong brewed coffee (hot)
Cinnamon Sugar to sprinkle on top (optional)

Pour the milk into a small jar that has a lid, add the light brown sugar and cinnamon. Tighten the lid onto the jar and shake for about 1 min.

Remove the lid and heat the milk in the microwave for about 30 seconds. Pour coffee or espresso into mug, pour the warm milk into the mug with the coffee. Spoon out any remaining foamy milk if left. Sprinkle cinnamon sugar on top.

Salted Caramel

1 1/2 cup milk
2 tablespoons caramel sauce
pinch of salt
1/2 cup espresso or strong brewed coffee (hot)

Pour the milk into a small jar that has a lid, add caramel and salt.

Tighten the lid onto the jar and shake for about 1 min.

Remove the lid and heat the milk in the microwave for about 30 seconds.

Pour coffee or espresso into mug, pour the warm milk into the mug with the coffee. Spoon out any remaining foamy milk if left.



Tuesday

“You have declared your consent and vows before God and this congregation. May God confirm your covenant and fill you both with grace.”

This is me and the newly minted Mr. and Mrs. Vance. This couple has lived through so much together, and took a whole lot of broken roads to finally find the joy of this moment where they committed the rest of their lives to each other.

These two have taught me more about what it means to live fully into love-for loving someone for all of who they are more than any other couple. It was a joy to share in their relationship, their marriage and their wedded bliss even now. (GM)



My daughter Carolyn recently married Ron.

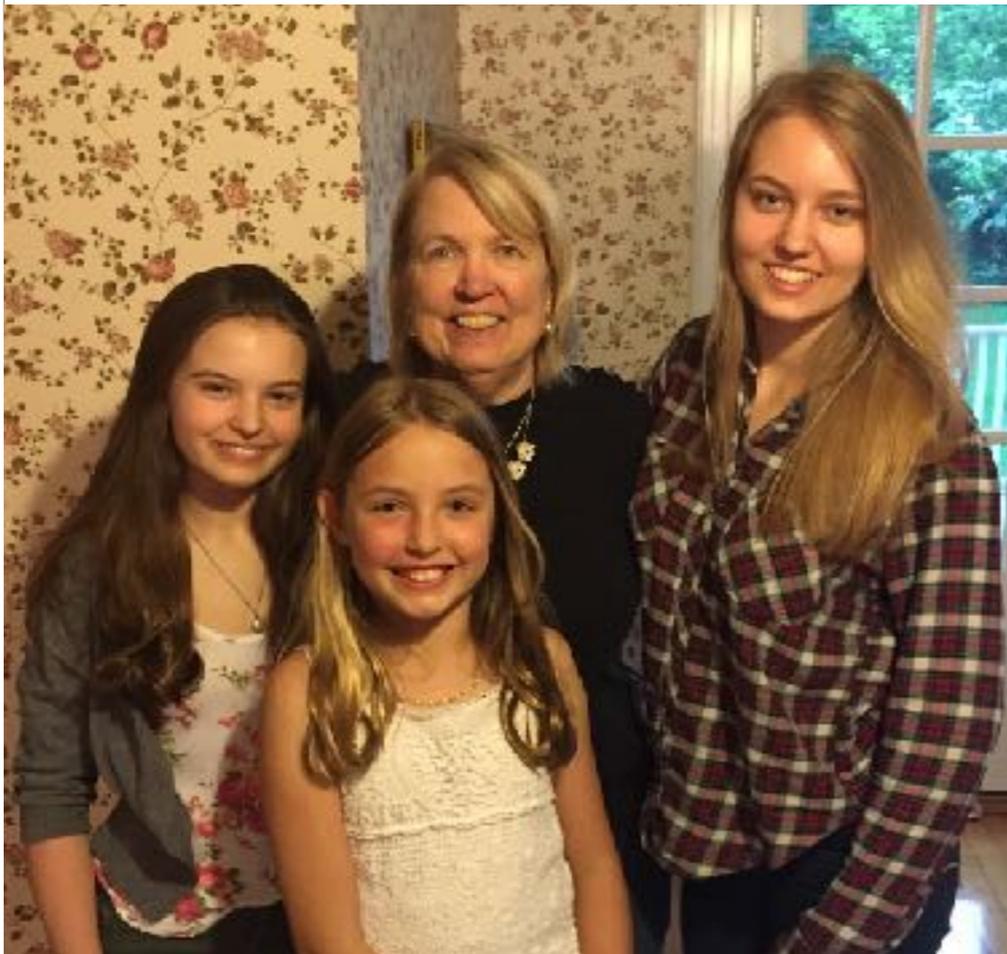
Carolyn is a true coffee connoisseur!



Wednesday

Prayer For Our Family

Lord, I want to thank you for this precious family of mine.
Each one of them is so unique and such a gift from you.
I am so grateful that you have sent these precious souls into
my life.
Bless and protect us. Surround us with your light and your
love
And when there is conflict Lord, be in the midst of us and
guide us through
.Help us to remember how precious each person is and how
each day we should give thanks to you for all that you have
given us. Help us to serve others and give back to those in
need in gratitude for all that you have given to us. Protect
each one of us so that we will not be in harms way. Bind us
together in love and keep us safe. This we pray though your
son Jesus Christ. Amen. (FN)



Thursday

Take a deep breath. Soften your focus. Become aware of the entire space around you. Imagine that the space you are sitting and everything in it, including you, is filled with God's unconditional love. You are a beloved child of God. My friends, know right now deep in your heart, that nothing can change that. Know that nothing in heaven or on earth can ever take that away. Amen



Friday - Love Will Not Let Us Go

Then David said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished. 1 Chronicles 28:20

My grandson Kiran exasperated that a girl is hugging him.

He loves her but can't let himself admit it.

He is not letting go! (FN)

Where is God telling you not to let go?



Saturday

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1Cor 13:7-8

Why does true love persevere? Because it is based on something more valuable and substantial than emotions. The God-kind of love is founded on commitment.

Commitment keeps you in place when your feelings want you to run. By persevering you're given the opportunity to grow, change and mature. Persevering grows you - the inside you - and makes you a better person. Real love perseveres!



Week 27 Body of Christ



"The Ascension: Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel. He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1: 6-11

What are we going to do now? How many times in our lives do we look at each other and ask that same question- what in the world are we going to do now?

Right before Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples still have not quite understood what in the world Jesus had been talking about or why Jesus truly came to the world. They were still focused on the earthly expectations they had for Jesus and their understanding of his ministry.

What are we going to do now Jesus? You're going to come back NOW and restore Israel NOW right?

But Jesus says to them- don't worry about the time, don't worry about the when- only worry about being my witnesses, go spread the good news. Then Jesus is taken up, and the disciples still stand there and say... what are we going to do now?

We cannot allow ourselves to stand around and ask ourselves... what are we going to do now? We must go out, we must witness, we must not worry about the day or the time. We must not worry about what might happen or what could happen or when we want it to happen- we must do what we are called to do in the here and now.

We cannot keep waiting for Jesus to come back- we have to live like Jesus is coming back now! We know nothing of the timing in our lives. We must just follow what Christ calls us to do- to be the witnesses of God's redeeming love in the world.

So let's not stand there looking into the sky and asking "What do we do now?" Let us instead go out into all the world and preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Let us not be concerned about the when or the how, but instead let us be concerned about the love and light and redeeming work of Christ. (GM)

Recipe



Monday - Vegetarian Chili

Father, thank you for nourishment.

For the warmth of the sun and the refreshment of water. For the miracle of the seed and the reaping of harvest. For the wonder of taste and the blessing of food with loved ones.

Thank you, Lord. Amen.

My mother was a working mother, and I remember her telling me one of her secrets when I started a family and juggling everyday activities. When I would wonder – not with a little panic – as it got ever closer to supper time, “what are we going to have for supper?” I remembered her secret: “start sautéing onions, and everyone will come by and say, ‘smells great!’” Somehow we always ended up with supper, and no one the wiser.

And here’s a recipe that starts with onions:

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 T olive oil
- 2 stalks celery, chopped small
- 2 green peppers, chopped small
- 2 – 15 oz cans kidney beans
- 1 – 15 oz can black beans (or all kidney beans)
- 1 - 15 oz can yellow corn
- 2 – 14 oz cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 2 T oregano
- ¼ C chili powder, to your taste
- 3 cloves garlic, minced

Sauté onions in 1 T olive oil until transparent , add celery and peppers and heat through. Add beans, crushed tomatoes, spices, corn, and heat through. Add garlic. Serve with tortilla chips. (FP)

Tuesday

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Eph 4:11-13

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement believed that disciples of Jesus Christ could change the world.

Wesley’s plan for disciple building was to bring people together beyond their local church to pursue holy living through scripture study and prayer.

This intentional spiritual discipline grew their faith and prepared them to spread the gospel.

How are you growing in your faith?

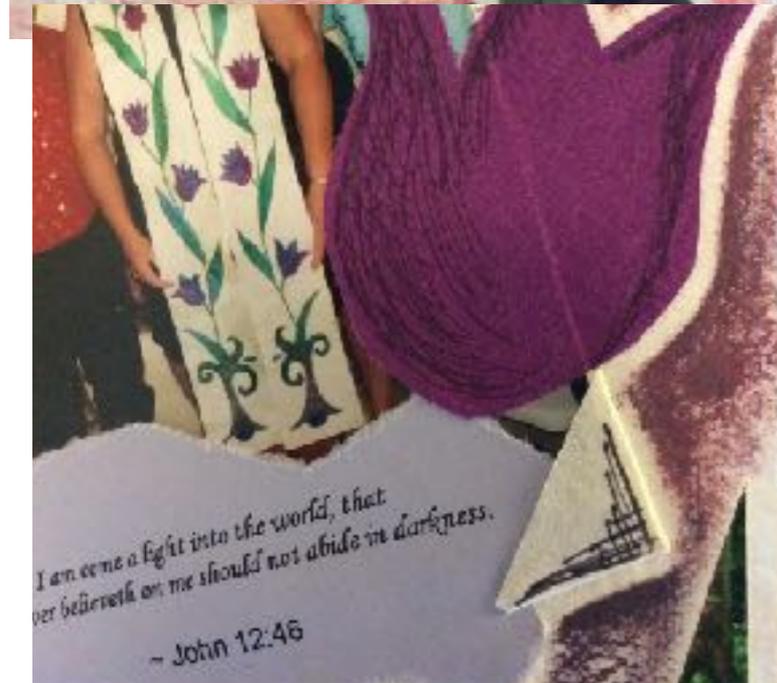
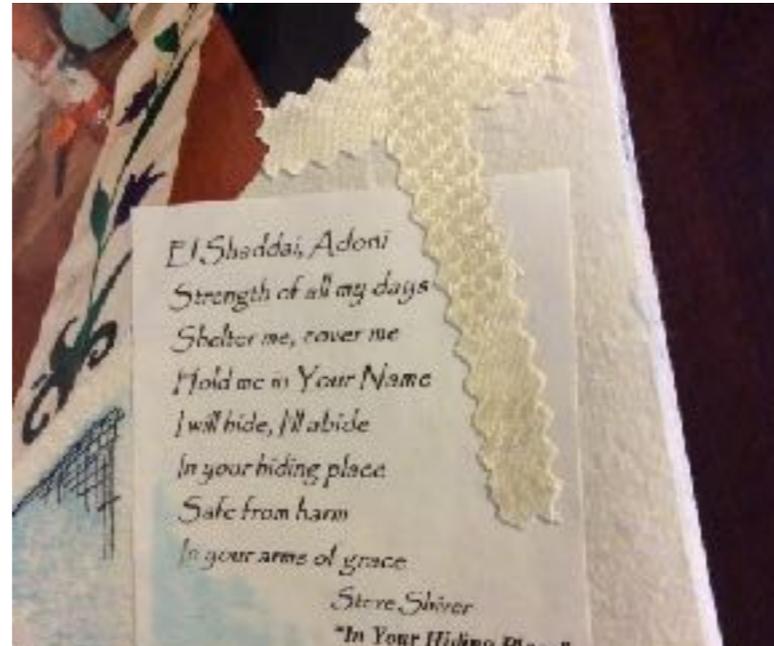
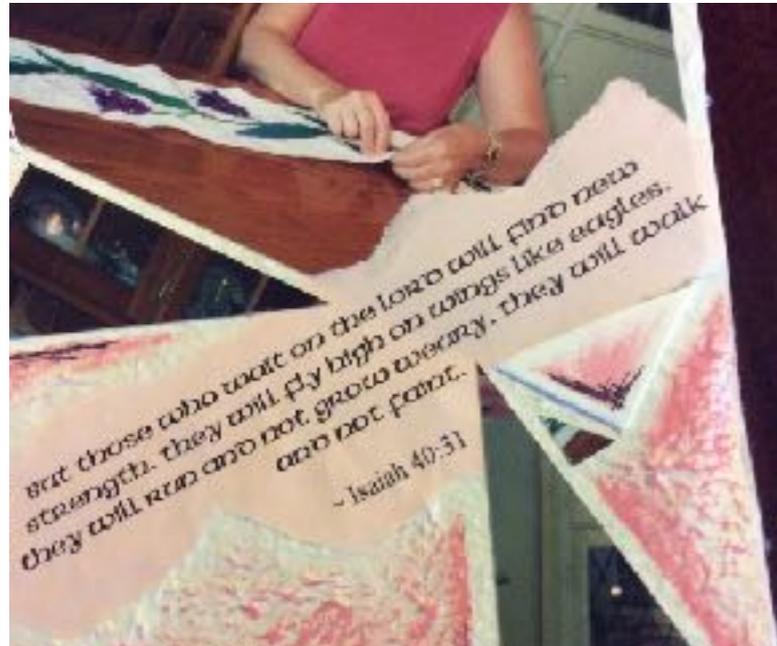
What practice will better prepare you to share the gospel?



Wednesday

Tulips were a favorite flower of mine before I moved to Holland, so what a blessing to be surrounded by them on a daily basis! In spring, I rode my bicycle around multi-colored fields that stretched for miles on end, and never got tired of them. The rest of the year they were readily available in the flower shops; Holland grows flowers year-round in greenhouses for world-wide distribution of bulbs and flowers. The bulb contains just about everything the flower needs to grow: inside is a seed, leaves and roots, stem and food supply. Planted in the ground and given plenty of water: a tulip!

Before I left Holland, the women's Bible Study group lovingly made me a tulip stole, complete with bulb at the bottom and the growth of the tulip climbing upward. They also put together a lovely book with scraps of fabric from the stole, Bible verses and reflections on our time together. I prize the stole, a sign of birth and life I wear on Easter and at family weddings, and I treasure the book as I treasure that time, all reminders that the Christ's body grows from a bulb of life-giving love, and thrives on relationship. (FP)



Thursday

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5

This is the tattoo I got after I completed my M Div. It is John 1:5 in the original Greek. This verse has transformed my life, and in celebration of making it through a transformation 3 years, I chose to transform my body with the words that spoke deepest to my soul. (GM)



Thursday - Life-giving God, the beauty of your creation is ever awe-inspiring and wonder-filled! Thank you for the beauty of the tulip, a thing of beauty in itself and a symbol of life and growth in your love in Christ. Help us to grow into the likeness of you in which we are created, so that the world may know you and your love. Amen.

Saturday

Teresa of Avila said, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out on the world."

While those words sound beautiful, many of us in the body of Christ struggle with how to care for broken people.

Motivating Christians and congregations not only to give but also to be fiscally responsible in their giving is a difficult enterprise even in the best of circumstances. The needs are seemingly endless, and there are so many competing voices that the average Christian is overwhelmed. Countless organizations put forth their pleas for money constantly, sometimes relentlessly.

Some Sunday's I cannot imagine how I can say something about the poor, or needy or lost one more time... and then I do.

I have been thinking about this and I realize that there are a few familiar friends who had the same issue. What was their counsel?

John the Baptist: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Jesus: I tell you this: whenever you saw a brother or sister hungry or cold, whatever you did to the least of these, so you did to Me.

King: For when I was hungry, you fed Me. And when I was thirsty, you gave Me something to drink. I was alone as a stranger, and you welcomed Me into your homes and into your lives. I was naked, and you gave Me clothes to wear; I was sick, and you tended to My needs; I was in prison, and you comforted Me.

Paul faced many of these same challenges in his own day. Although he did not request personal support, he spent close to ten years soliciting funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection. This was a collection he took up among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine.

Bishop Schol has challenged us that by going deeper in our faith, we can go further in our witness. "Somewhere out there is a person God plans to use you to reach. Somewhere out there is a person God will use to change your life as you reach them. Somewhere out there is a person for whom Christ died, and for whom your church was built, and for whom God has uniquely prepared you to reach." (GY)

Week 28 Dreams and Vision



*Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path ...
I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Psalm 27:11; 13-14*

For sometime I have struggled along with many of you, about the fate of our denomination, and even the consequences to our local church. In the midst of attending General Conference 2016 it was essential that I was able to remember why I am a pastor.

Not to sit in meetings and argue law and Robert's rule, but to help those I encounter see the sacred in the ordinary and especially in the deep moments of life. To connect God into our lives from birth, to baptism, to weddings and then saying our goodbyes at funerals and everything in-between. It is in these mostly joy-filled and most bitter moments that I most actively seek out God, but most importantly when God meets me.

Be still. Feel the air around you. We are in a thin place.

In thin places have been described as "boundaries of time and space fade away. The past bleeds into the present. The future is so close you can make it out.

Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. All one.

The ancient Celts were known to describe mesmerizing spaces as "thin places". Celtic saying goes, "Heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter. It's a place where we can sense the divine more readily."

"Thin places" are places along one's spiritual path where God's Spirit feels especially near. Perhaps you have a particular place that is holy to you – maybe the beach, or a mountain summit, or your porch swing.

A place where God seems always close by, Possibly it is a dark night when the stars seems so close, and at the same moment you too seem closer to God, Possibly it is the church sanctuary and for many it is the family cemetery

Although we often envision "thin places" as lovely and tranquil. They can be institutional and even scary. I have been closest to God at the bedside of one dying and or the car ride to an emergency. A thin place is any place moves you into the presence of God

Do you have a place where you can go and feel especially close to God? Is there a moment - an experience in which you relive to draw closer to God? A wedding, cradling a newborn, a experience in creation? How about that most difficult moment of life when you felt that strange peace? You have discovered a thin place.

Be still. Feel it. We are on holy ground (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Fantasy Sandwich (GY)

*For food in a world where many walk in hunger;
For faith in a world where many walk in fear;
For friends in a world where many walk alone;
We give you thanks, O Lord. Amen.*



- 1/4 Deli Roast Beef
- 2 slices American Cheese
- 1 slice Pepper Jack
- 1 small tomato, seeded and sliced
- 5-6 slices of bell peppers
- 2-3 slices red onion
- 1 tsp oil
- 1 flour tortilla
- salt and pepper to taste

Heat a sauté pan, add oil, peppers, onions till soft. Roll beef into log and slice into thin strips. Add beef and heat through. Add tomatoes. Season. Top with cheese and melt. Lay tortilla on plate and fill. Roll. This is a sandwich but it is pretty messy a fork and knife might be in order.

*... your young will see
visions, and your old
will have dreams.*

Acts 2:17

Tuesday

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. Rom 12:1-2

The ability to create beauty is one of the most wonderful gifts God has given humanity. Today let's find the beauty in the everyday. The theologian Thomas Merton "Let us come alive to the splendor that is all around us and see the beauty in ordinary things."

In our Pinterest world – and for those who do not know about Pinterest - it is a image/idea sharing site that in most cases would make Michelangelo feel incompetent.

Chasing after the Pinterest perfect, or selfie worthy images often has us missing the beauty right in front of our eyes.

Sometimes we dismiss the ordinary as just that – too ordinary! That the ordinary doesn't live up to our change the world, make a difference dream big kind of world.

As children, it's so easy to see beauty in the ordinary, isn't it? We chase fireflies and entertainment is as simple as rolling around on the grass. We marvel at bugs and have endless conversations with ourselves.

When do we stop seeing the beauty? When do we stop standing in awe?

Is it lost in the weariness of endless responsibilities? Is it when we discover the reality of suffering and cruelty in the world?

However today I would like to challenge that perception. Pray through your day. Ask the Lord to establish a new sense of purpose in everything that you are doing. I want you to be reminded every day that there is something really special about ordinary people in ordinary neighborhoods with ordinary jobs who attend an ordinary church who love Jesus. (GY)

Wednesday

The first time I truly understood dreams and visions was the day my goddaughter, Madeline Grace was born. As I held her tiny newborn body in my hands I could feel and see the amazing things that she would do with her life- the way that she would change and grow the world, the way that she already had changed me. Her life was before me and I held in my hands the wondrous moments of life, I held visions and dreams for her. Every time I hold her now, I get that same feeling of holding the whole world in my hands, and I am overcome with the grace and awesomeness of God. (GM)



Thursday

“The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations.” Rev 22:2

My secretary re-purposed a book for me, the art of book-folding. This is tree of life in Celtic style combining two interests of mine, trees and Celtic spirituality. (FP)



Friday

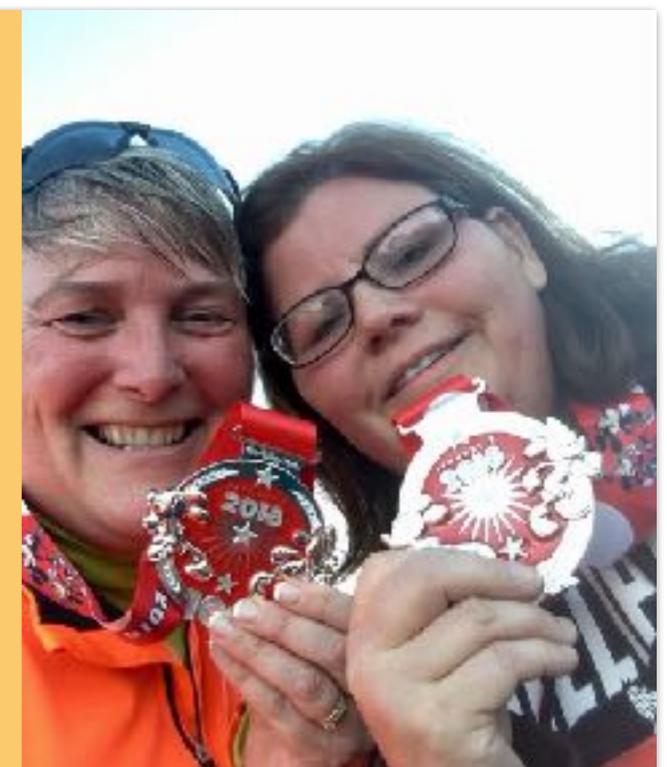
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Tim 4:7

This year I ran a 10k at Disney!

I am honestly very proud of this accomplishment.

Never give up on your goals!

What amazing unexpected thing has God called you to do? (DD)



Saturday

One of the nuns in grade school favorite questions went like this: “Do you have your listening ears on?” This question was reserved for those times when she really wanted to me to pay attention to what she was about to say, knowing in her gentle and wise way that little girls are easily distracted and often fail to give their full attention to the matter at hand – LISTEN!

"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; Listen to him." The voice from heaven says in essence, "This is the Messiah, the Promised One through whom my salvation will be accomplished. You'd better pay attention to what he says!"

God had another idea, one that was as timely at that mountaintop experience as it is today—LISTEN. Listen to Jesus. Listen to the beloved Son. Even the verb tense of this word is important. “Listen” in this verse is a present imperative, a tense that implies continuing action. We aren’t to listen once, or when we want to, or even when it’s convenient; no, we are to keep on listening to Jesus.

When we listen to the Son, we hear a clear call to build a safe place for those in danger. When we listen to Jesus, we hear him whisper in our ears. Listening is hard work. To really listen we must be actively engaged in the actions of the one or ones with whom we are in conversation. We must avoid rushing ahead and contriving answers before we finish hearing what the speaker is saying. Listening is a skill that is cultivated carefully and respectfully.

Think about it for a minute. We don’t like dead air. We are used to noise and action. We are used to rushing here and there, to and fro, filling all available space and air with movement and sound. The frantic rush of activity provides an illusion of action and accomplishment.

It’s time we reclaim the art of active listening, of seeking out the “still, small voice of God” in our discipleship walk. We are invited into deeper relationship with Jesus. We are invited to actively listen to him and hear a message that leads to abundant life both for us and for this broken world.

It’s time, I believe, to “put our listening ears on” and hear what Jesus continues to say to our generation.

This is my beloved Son, also offers us the same challenge: listen to him.

Learn to discern his voice, and the true content of his mission and preaching. God's people face those clamoring voices shouting for our spiritual attention every day of our lives. They seek to deafen us to God's voice. (GY)

Week 29 Red Stoles



Matthew 3:11 “I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama— compared to him I’m a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

All stoles, whatever color, are deeply meaningful to me, as they are a sign of the great privilege to serve as an ordained United Methodist Elder, a priest in the long line of priests in the apostolic church. Two red stoles hold great significance to me. I remember the Bishop laying that red stole on me at my ordination; it felt heavy, and frightening, like I was changing from the inside out, and it felt wonderful; a long journey was over, or rather I was taking a major step in that long journey following God’s call on my life. My long-time mentor, pastor, friend, now colleague walked with me, carrying the stole he and his wife bought for me, a gift to me on this holy occasion, as we approached the kneeler where I was surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. I love wearing it, and people in churches love to see it; we wear red to signify the Holy Spirit power given all of us for ministry to the world.

We don’t wear red often enough though; we wear it on Pentecost as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first apostles as Jesus promised, and at ordinations. When I wear mine, I am reminded that the Holy Spirit falls on me as well, giving me encouragement and power, and strength for ministry, for surely without the Holy Spirit I wouldn’t be able to do any of what I do in my sacred role as priest and pastor.

I had the great privilege, pleasure and honor to serve as Associate Pastor at an International English-speaking church in Europe for a few years. During one Christmas break, the senior pastor and his family vacationed in Rome, visiting the Vatican. When they returned, he gifted me with a red stole bought at the Vatican; what a joy! A stole from the Vatican, to be worn by not just a Protestant pastor, but a woman, me! I celebrate the irony and I celebrate the joy and privilege of being in that long line of priests called to ordained ministry that now includes women, a role that only in my life-time became possible. What a joy and privilege to be in ministry at this exciting, ever-more inclusive time. Praise God! (FP)

Prayer: Holy and eternal God, you have called people from the beginning of humanity to worship you and serve our neighbors. We thank you for the privilege and honor to be your people, your children, men and women serving and leading in ministry. Help us always to strive to be the people and servant-leaders you call us to be, equipping and empowering us to share your love in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Zucchini Pie (Crustless Quiche)

*Loving God,
may we all celebrate together
around your table in heaven.
We praise you and give you glory
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

3 cups Grated Zucchini (skin on)
1 Onion (diced)
1 cup Bisquick
4 Eggs
½ cup Oil
¼ cup Parmesan Cheese
½ tsp Italian Seasoning
1 tsp Parsley flakes
¼ tsp Salt
½ tsp Pepper

Mix all ingredients together and pour into buttered 12 inch pie dish or 9 X 13 baking pan. Bake at 350 for 30 minutes. Serve warm.



*Go in peace
to serve God and your
neighbor in all that you
do.*

Called to Serve



As a teenager, I decided to strike out into the world. The further I went the easier it was to forget who I was and allow the world to vision my future. Before long I had left behind my call to serve the Lord, and tried to fill that void with other passions.

Finally, one day like the Prodigal Child I realized how far I was from home, prepared my speech asking for forgiveness, and slumped home. Upon returning God wanted to restore me completely I refused to go completely into the house, instead, I stood outside the door, unwilling to be completely forgiven.

As time went on I tried harder and harder to be the best but nothing could replace the emptiness I felt in not serving Lord. Slowly, as I studied God's word, and was surrounded by faithful Christians I began to hear more clearly that I was forgiven, I learned that I was forgiven not because I worked hard enough, but because I was loved enough.

The call of sanctifying grace—is sometimes described as going on to perfection. Perfection doesn't mean that we always do what is right and do not make any mistakes. Perfection is about becoming more like Christ in what we do and say and be. The perfecting grace of God convinces us that we are pardoned. In the knowledge of being forgiven gives us an attitude of gratitude.

Out of my gratitude I began to serve the church in the only way I thought possible, as the church sexton, as I cleaned the church classrooms and sanctuary my love for the Lord and the church grew.

By living a grace filled life I was showing how grateful I was for God love, no longer was I doing works to earn salvation but to show God my gratitude for his graciousness and in this way I grew.

How has God called you to serve?

Wednesday Call as a Pastor

While all of us has a call on our life to serve God. Some of you in some way you experienced a call from God to serve the kingdom in the role of pastoral ministry. Throughout the process towards licensing, commissioning or ordination you told your call story.

What was that moment – was it like the burning bush for Moses or that unfolding plan like Peter?

Now when you consider you call – how does it look different? Is it deeper and richer? Is there a sense of accomplishment and joy. Do you still feel that deep connection to God that you discerned when you said “yes”?

Sometimes the everyday pressures of ministry life can strip us of some of that fervor and passion we had when we were initially called. It is our hope that during our time together you can once again get plugged into the movement of the Holy Spirit that first launched your ministry.

Life in ministry can be draining. Parish life can be overwhelming – there is always so much to do.

During this time we want to consider for a few minutes what was it that first lead you into a passion for serving God and the church?

What exactly has the Lord called you to do?

What specifically does that mean in your current ministry context? What is limiting your success?

Dear God help us to be the servants you have called us to be to bring you glory. Amen

Thursday

We thank you, Living God, that in your great love you sent Jesus Christ to take the form of a servant, becoming obedient even to death on the cross, and now resurrected and exalted in the heavens. You have taught us, by his word and example, that whoever would be great among us must be servant of all. Give this servant grace to be faithful to their promises, constant in their discipleship, and always ready for works of loving service. Make her modest and humble, gentle and strong, rooted and grounded in love. Give her a share in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. Amen.



Tied together - family and ordination. Vicki and her dad on her ordination, then she stands with her daughter, Jessica.

Friday, Prayer

Gracious God, you have claimed me, you have named me, you have called me.

God, everywhere I look I see the work of your hands.

I have seen the journey of the folks who have gone before me who have helped me to hear your voice.

I love you Lord. I am eternally grateful for this life you have called me to.

Thank you Lord. May your Spirit fall upon me, may I breathe in the Spirit and breathe out your love.

Thank you Jesus. Amen. (GM)

Saturday

Every year for the last 4 years, I have sat at Annual Conference and watched the ordination class receive their red stoles.

I have wept for love of the act of ordination- for the tears and the triumphs and the hoops each one has been through in order to kneel before the Bishop and have their call affirmed and confirmed. As the Bishop and those gathered around those being ordained and pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and the Bishop whispers "take thou authority,"

I am constantly overcome with emotion. As someone who has known that they were called to ordained ministry since they were 4 years old, watching this sacred act is a gift.

It reminds me time and time again what sacred, holy work I am called to. I wait each year in those seats for my time to be confirmed for this work.

I pray that I never forget that awe I feel every year. I pray that none of those who have gone before me ever forget what God has called them to do in this life.

As you wear your red stoles, your green stoles, your blue, purple, and white stoles, think about those who are coming after you to do this sacred work. Never forget the awe, the calling or who it is that you serve. (GM)

Week 30 Breath of God



Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Gen 2:7

Ever feel like you can't catch your breath? Maybe it was being sick, maybe it was being scared or possibly over exerted. But suddenly something that we rarely think about consumes you ... Breathing mostly happens unconsciously – 26,000 times a day – 16 times a minute. This physiological function is something we do not think about until we are in crisis. Then we need to slow down and take time to breathe.

So let us take a deep breath together. Take a deep breath through your nose, hold it in for a few seconds, then slowly and with control let it out.

We breathe to live because we have a God who has breathed life into all of creation. In the beginning we see "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath or spirit of life, and man became a living being." Just as our beginnings start with God, we must continue to have His breath.

In Ezekiel, God breathes breath into the dry bones, so that they may live again. In the midst of his troubles Job pronounces: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

When God leaves his throne in heaven, it is that first breath of a child who is born in Bethlehem that forever changes the course of the world. Again, "Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." So it is true that Jesus, the resurrected one, is alive in our hearts. So let us take a deep breath together and remember that it is breath of heaven that came to save us. The breath of Jesus sends us out as he sent out his disciples.

Imagine what you might change if you made God as prevalent to your life as your own breathing?

Just as we take for granted breathing, we also take for granted Jesus. His amazing love and sacrifice. Although our physical lives might be sustained by the air we breathe into our lungs. Our spiritual selves are sustained by the hope we have because of Jesus.

How is God at work as you take a moment to breathe? (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Healthy Honey Bread

God is great, and God is good,
And we thank him for our food;
By his hand we all are fed;
Give us, Lord, our daily bread.

5 cups Warm water
1 heaping Tbs Yeast
2 Tbs Kosher salt
½ cup Honey
½ cup Olive oil
1 cup Raw wheat germ
6 cups Stone ground whole wheat four
6 cups Flour



Mix ingredients in order of what you normally do when making any bread recipe. Knead the dough, and allow to rise until double. After rising, cut dough into four equal quarters. Take each quarter and roll flat with rolling pin to remove all air bubbles. (lightly spray bread loaf pans) Roll back into shape of loaf pan (you may have to tuck ends under to fit your pan) Punch dough down in loaf pan and allow to rise a second time before baking. Bake 35 minutes in a preheated 350° oven.
Yield: 4 loaves
Cool for 5 minutes, then remove from pans & place on cooling racks. When cooled completely, put in plastic bags & refrigerate or freeze. NOTE: Recipe can be halved for just 2 loaves. Can be halved again and made in bread machine for a one loaf.
Notes: Great for potlucks!



Tuesday

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle
in them the fire of Thy love.

Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.

And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the
light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be
truly wise, and ever to rejoice in His consolation.

Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Wednesday

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
for all eternity.

Edwin Hatch, #420 UM Hymnal



Thursday

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them
Acts 2:1-4



Friday

Today I invite you to into a time of guided meditation. In our time we will intentionally set our thoughts on connecting with God in a quiet, introspective way. For some this will be natural and easy, for others uncomfortable and out of character. But for all I ask that you give your trust over to this process for this time.

Make yourself comfortable. Sit straight, your feet on the floor, your hands relaxed in your lap, and breath normally.

Breathe in through your nose to the count of 4, then breathe out through you mouth to the count of 6.

As we enter into this time I invite you to pray a simple prayer, either silently or quietly. Just a word or a phrase to invite God into your thoughts - for me it is simply saying, "Jesus" or "Come Holy Spirit". If thoughts enter, hold them for a moment then let them go, repeat this phrase. Don't worry about silencing your mind, but instead just let disruptive thoughts go, rather than following them.

Now we will enter into a time of quietness and breathe. (GY)



Saturday
My Creed

I believe in God, who made all in the image and reflection of what was true and pure
 The chaos divided between light and dark, the cosmos the light of the world
 I believe in the loving, inclusive nature of Jesus Christ
 Who was envisioned by the Holy Spirit
 Born to the unwed teen mother Mary
 Suffered under the reign of Roman oppression and the tribulations of the Pharisees
 Was denied and exiled by his own community
 Was forced to carry his own instrument of death, stripped of his clothes, and then slowly suffocated by the weight of his own body.
 He died, but not before uttering his cold and broken hallelujahs
 I hold onto these words because of the pain, not the lack of faith, but the undeniable need for connection of the incarnate when he felt so alone
 He was buried in a borrowed tomb and dressed with linens by the women who loved him
 He descended in loving care to release the forsaken, the incarcerated that had not yet known his unconditional love
 On the third day he transcended the temporality of what was known as death and was finally seen by all who could as the embodiment of love, acceptance, care, and compassion
 I believe that the ascension was neither up nor down, but all around
 I believe in the Holy Spirit as the messenger of grace.
 The grace that is offered to all of us over and over again.
 No matter what we do or who we are we are offered this grace
 I believe in the church as an extension of Christ's ministry on earth.
 I believe the church is beyond four walls and geographical locations.
 The church is our bodies working in tandem to ensure the hungry are fed, the broken are held, the oppressed are released, the violence is extinguished, and the lost, lonely, and the least have a place at the table.
 I believe in the communion of saints as an extension of the sanctifying grace in which, when we can truly see the image of God in others we can begin to embody what it means to be sanctified
 I believe that we are all sinners in constant need of forgiveness but also reflection and action in the ways that we not only sin individually, but communally through systemic acts of oppression.
 Our forgiveness lies in not just emptying ourselves to God and asking for forgiveness, but rectifying and redeeming the people and communities we have sinned against.
 I believe in the hope of the resurrection, that light which is true and pure will never be extinguished
 This is what I believe Amen
 Guest writer: Marissa van der Valk

Week 31 Breaking Down Divisions



There was a time where I was encountering many walls in my life and it was during that time that God broke down equally as many walls as I had experienced. When my son was a young adult and making many mistakes, he was literally separated from me by the walls of a prison. Prisons in our country are not places where we think that God would be breaking down walls but God was breaking down walls of fear that I had built against those I thought did not speak my language, live in my neighborhood, nor look like me. The Spirit of God doesn't care what language we speak, where we live or what we look like. The Spirit of God allows love to break down walls and connect us to each other. I don't believe that God caused my son to use drugs or do any of the things he did due to his addiction that led him to state prison. I do believe that God used every minute of this experience to teach my son and myself about walls that we had built to protect ourselves from those we thought were different.

I went to see my son in prison by myself. My husband did not wish to go, but I missed him and wanted to see him so I drove to a town I didn't know to a prison. I had never been to a prison, but the people in line with me had been to prison many times. They knew the ropes. Their speech was tough and rough. They complained loudly about a variety of mistreatments by a variety of people they encountered in life. I wondered how much of the mistreatments they had complained about were deserved. I did not talk to anyone in line with me. I stood there trying to be perfect and good.

Several people in line were turned away by the guards for inappropriate dress. The guards took no nonsense. I made it up to the officer who took my id and questioned who I was to visit. I had no belongings with me other than my keys and my license but I was told I could not take those in to the visiting area. I could put them in a locker but I needed 50cents to rent the locker. My money was locked in my car and to go back to the car would mean I would miss my visit. I didn't know what to do. There was a very tired looking Hispanic woman who came up to me and handed me two quarters. She said simply-"the same thing happened to me on my first visit. I always carry extra quarters for others." I also saw in that instance that there was no difference in her and me. We were both people waiting in the difficult situation of visiting our loved one in prison.

God continued to break down the wall of division that I had put up as I visited my son. I got to know mothers who prayed for their son's life just as I did-even though we came from different backgrounds and neighborhoods. I carried extra quarters in my pockets from that time on so I could reach out to someone else in a difficult time. Prison is a dehumanizing situation for both the inmates and their families, but God found opportunities for us to reach out to teach other in human love and consideration and remind us of our mutual human needs. (LM)

Recipe



Monday -Buffalo Chicken Dip

*Bless O Lord, this food to our use,
And us to thy loving service;
And make us ever mindful of the needs of others,
For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

2 packages (8 ounces each) cream
cheese, softened
1/2 cup ranch salad dressing
1/2 cup sour cream
5 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese
2 cups shredded cooked chicken
1/2 cup Buffalo wing sauce
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese,
divided
1 green onion, sliced
French bread slices

In a small bowl, combine the cream
cheese, dressing, sour cream and
blue cheese.

Warm in a saucepan. Mix in chicken,
buffalo sauce, and 1 cup shredded
cheese. Heat through, allow to
simmer for 5 minutes. Pour into a
casserole dish or pie plate. Top with
remaining cheese and scallions.
Serve with toasted bread or crackers.

Tuesday Soul Sisters

Last summer I went to California to study with one of my favorite artists, Kelly Rae Roberts. Each day we did what I called “inner work”. We looked deep inside of ourselves to the depths of our souls. The more we did this the better our art work was! It was there that I met Tammy and Dawn.

We loved doing art together as we chatted away. Then on the last night of the retreat Tammy decided she wanted to get a tattoo to mark this transformative week.

So Dawn and I went as her support team and we accomplished her goal. It bonded us for life! We now call ourselves “The tattoo souls sisters”.

Even though we live in different parts of the country we get together to do art and catch up with one another. So far we have seen each other three times in the last year and we are planning our next adventure. God puts us together and bonds our love, all we have to do is recognize it! (FN)



Wednesday

I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

We put labels on life all the time. We do it about attitudes like vs. wrong and success vs. failure, but we also do it labeling people – we have even refined our labels to name how others or even ourselves fit in society.

How many times have you been labeled? How has it felt? How has it held you back, kept you down? Think about it. Why do we do this?

We label others so that there is a group we fit into. If we add labels, we eventually become just like everyone else – it gives us a place to be the same.

God created us to be wonderfully unique, and diverse. We all bring our own set of skills, talents and gifts to this world. Each of us brings something into our world that is needed. There is a quote: "Let none be like another; yet each be like the Highest, How can that be? Let each be perfectly himself.

Consider how God has wired you to contribute to the work of the Christ. How do we begin this process of knowing ourselves and how our unique gifts fit?

It is essential to respect, honor and care deeply that you are a one of a kind creation. Ask yourself the question: Who am I? What makes you, you?

Let's us also celebrate the talents, skills and differences of others. Take time and intentionally encourage others to be unique and to be themselves. When we do this, we will know a much richer life and so will those around us – for that is the way God planned it to be. (GY)



Thursday

Jesus, spent much of his ministry bringing people who did not “fit in” society into community.

He didn't get them to fit into the present system, but into something new. Why?

Knowing they belong to God will you allow them to belong in your world? In your church?

What does your love look like today? In a world that is so openly broken and divided and hostile – can you look at one who is different and simply accept them as a child of God. (GY)

Friday

The Book of Acts tells us how the Christian movement came into being. It tells us how these new Jesus followers came together in the midst of a society that was very different from them. They were a living example of Jesus' ministry through their actions. Their devout faith in God and their unprecedented love for one another. It was said of the early Christians, "Behold, how they love one another."

Now 2000 years later we too are called to be living witnesses to the love of God made visible by our love for one another. God designed the church that through our relationships, by the way we live that people will know – the love of God

God's master plan was not organized religion, it is not a denomination, instead it was people. People loving one another. The relationships that are a reflection of God's love are the way the world will know God.

If we as the church are gracious, sincere, warm, and respectful – then they will know a God who is the same. But we show hate, apathy, judgment and greed – then that will be the world's vision of God. It means humbly counting others more significant than yourself. It means blessing, not cursing.

This call to unity is not the same as politicians calling for “bipartisanship”; or is it the same as universities or businesses calling for “tolerance.” Those words simply overlook differences that will inevitably lead to division. Our call to unity is a call to warmly love one another, a respect that is evident despite our differences. Will it be said about “Behold how they love all people.” (GY)

Saturday

Many of us were raised to feel that it is impolite to show awareness of racial difference, and we wished in many ways that no one would notice race. Therefore speaking of race is a challenge.

However, failing to admit that racial differences does not make the situations go away.

In the 1850s, a white preacher's daughter and wife wrote a novel to convince her northern audience that slavery was evil and could no longer be tolerated.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's best known novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), changed forever how Americans viewed slavery. It demanded that the United States deliver on the promise of freedom and equality, galvanized the abolition movement that eventually led to the outbreak of the Civil War.

For Stowe the realization of the grave travesty of slavery was not based on a political position, but instead it was born out her own tragedy.

Stowe experienced for the first time the sorrow many 19th-century parents knew when her 18-month old son, Samuel Charles Stowe, died of cholera. Stowe stated that Charlie's death helped her understand the pain enslaved mothers felt when their children were taken from them to be sold.

Shortly after Charlie's death and in spite of the Fugitive Slave Law, which made it illegal for anyone to help a fugitive slave, the Stowe's took in and protected slaves from being taken by their owners as well as writing for an anti-slavery magazine, for a story that would "paint a word picture of slavery,"

These writings were the inspirations for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I know I am not in anyway as eloquent as Ms Stowe, but I will try my best.

To really get to know someone—love your neighbor as our self often takes getting to know their pain and suffering through our own despair.

Let us join together to rededicating ourselves to actively work towards peace and justice in our community, region and world. (GM)

Week 32 Forgiveness



At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

On the rare occasion that I am asked to preach at something that is not a traditional Sunday Morning service, and I get to pick my Scripture and theme, I almost always choose this passage. This is one of my absolute favorite stories about Jesus.

In this story, Jesus is the only one who can condemn the woman, for he is the only one among them who is without sin. And yet, Jesus does not condemn her. Instead he raises her to new life. Forgiveness is a process—it does not happen overnight, and it is a continual process. We must forgive the other and we must forgive ourselves.

I find that sometimes the hardest part is forgiving myself for the ways I have fallen short of who I imagined I would be. In this same way I imagine the adulterous woman in this story had a hard time forgiving herself for the ways she had fallen short for what she had expected for herself. A crowd of people stood before her, holding her life in their hands—a life they did not lead and life they did not understand and yet who wanted to kill her for her supposed sins.

What if the table had been flipped? What if it were you and I standing in that woman's shoes? Would we want to be stoned for our mistakes? Would we stone ourselves for our own mistakes? This, this is what church is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be about raising each other to new life—not condemning or stoning folks.

We are called to be people who reach out and help lead people to wholeness—because we are all broken. Our brokenness does not make us any better or any worse than anyone else. Our brokenness does not give us the authority to condemn others.

The brokenness within us should recognize the brokenness in our brothers and our sisters, and instead of throwing stones, we should all be finding our ways to wholeness in Christ Jesus.

Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world. He came to redeem us—so that we might not be defined by our sins, but forgiven into new life. (GM)

Recipe



Monday-Burning Bushes

*Our Heavenly Father, kind and good,
we thank Thee for our daily food.
We thank Thee for Thy love and care.
Be with us Lord, and hear our prayer.
Amen.*

- 3 oz. pkg cream cheese
- 1 tsp minced onion
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1/8 tsp salt
- Dash of pepper
- 8 oz lunchmeat, roast beef, Lebanon baloney are good choices



Blend all ingredients, except the lunch meat, until smooth and spreadable. Arrange meat on waxed paper, overlapping edges to form a continuous piece. Spread mixture evenly. Roll up like a jelly roll. Will be 1 inch diameter. Wrap in waxed paper and chill several hours. Slice in 3/4 inch slices. Serve on toothpicks.



Tuesday

I pray that our faith together will help you know all the good things you have through Christ Jesus. Philemon 6:6

Choose your favorite story from the bible, why it so significant to you.

Why (or in what ways) is your personal story so important to your faith and the faith of others?



Wednesday

A monk joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first 10 years his superior called him in and asked, "Do you have anything to say?"

The monk replied, "Food bad." After another 10 years the monk again had opportunity to voice his thoughts. He said, "Bed hard." Another 10 years went by and again he was called in before his superior. When asked if he had anything to say, he responded, "I quit." "It doesn't surprise me a bit. You've done nothing but complain ever since you got here."

Grumble, Gripe, Bellyache, Whine, Harp, Protest, Moan, Object, Nitpick all these words are used to describe complaining.

The opposite of complaining is thankfulness,
Thankfulness is a perspective.
The cup half full sort of thing.

Have you ever been guilty of grumbling and complaining?

How can you praise God in your current circumstances?

What are some ways to break the habit of complaining when life gets tough?

How can you encourage others to praise God during unfair or tough situations?

Thursday

There are mornings when forgiving ourselves is the most difficult thing we will ever do, but it is necessary. Forgiveness is like the rising sun, it drives out the darkness in our lives and allows us to live in the light of God.



Friday

I pray for the following grace: a healthy sense of uneasiness and confusion before God as I consider the effects of sin in my life, my community, and my world.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 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. Psalm 51:1-2; 7-12





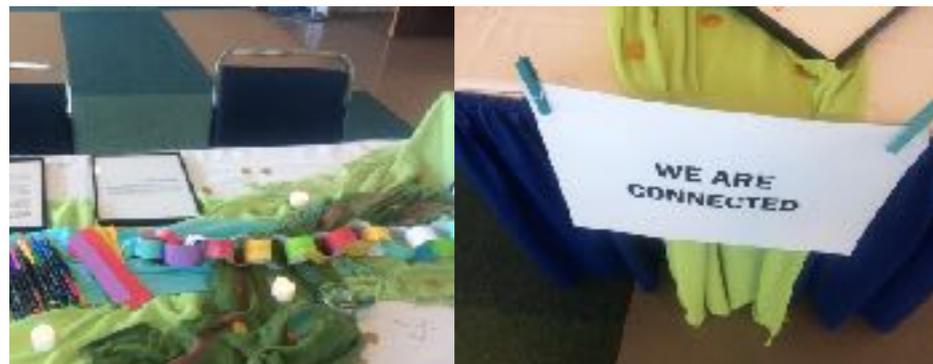
Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Corinthians 12.12-14)

Saturday, Prayer Station

As brothers and sisters in Christ and as United Methodists, we value being connectional. Every United Methodists is interconnected throughout the denomination via a unique, interlocking chain. We value discernment and living out Christ’s call in community and not in solitude.

Reflect on your own connection with Christ, your community, your inner circle, and the world around you. Write one word on a chain link that symbolizes what connects you with others. Peel off the paper and link it to the chain.

Prayer: Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love, Charles Wesley
 Blest be the dear uniting love
 that will not let us part;
 our bodies may far off remove,
 we still are one in heart.
 Joined in one spirit to our Head,
 where he appoints we go,
 and still in Jesus' footsteps tread,
 and do his work below.
 We all are one who him receive,
 and each with each agree,
 in him the One, the Truth, we live;
 blest point of unity!



Week 33 Called to Mission



Exodus 3:1-22

The burning bush always gets me.

God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Through fire on a living thing, God spoke to Moses. Through something that should be all consuming and all destroying God spoke to Moses. God spoke to Moses through what seemed to be impossible. God called out to Moses and showed Moses just how awesome God is.

It wasn’t just about telling Moses that he needed to do something, it wasn’t just about God showing God’s great power to Moses. No, this burning bush was about calling Moses out.

“Moses! Hey, Moses! Look I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescues them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey-So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

God literally calls Moses out-YOU, you are the one I am sending. Not your brother, not your sister, but you. Even when Moses responds, but who am I? God says, I will be with you.

Moses and God go back and forth about all the terrible what if’s and what could be’s and God keeps saying-Moses, I will be with you. Do not worry. I have called you. I have seen the suffering of the people I love, and I want you, yes you, to do something about it.

God sees the suffering of God’s people. God knows what we are saying when we cry out to God. God hears us. And so God sends Moses.

Sometimes we are the Israelites-sometimes we are the ones who need to hear that God loves us, that God hears us, that God is saving us. Other days we are Moses. We are being told to Go. GO GO GO GO. Go and don’t look back. Go, for God is sending you to Pharaoh.

The mission that we are called to-to proclaim the Good News that God is with us, to proclaim that the time has come when God would save his people-to name that the Creator of the Universe, the one who Redeems and Sustains us, loves us to our very core-this is not an easy one. We do not follow God easily.

But we are called. For God has heard the cry of his people suffering. God has always been saving his people. God has always been loving his people. God has always been and will always be. God is. This God has a mission. To save the people whom God loves (which means all things ever created), to show the world just how much they are love. To restore us to right relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole world. (GM)

We are all called together in the mission of God-the mission to go out and tell the Good News-to proclaim release to the captives, to sing of God’s great glory and to teach unconditional love to our neighbor. We love the Lord will all that we are, and we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We go out and with the power of the Holy Spirit we make disciples, we transform the world. We attempt live in the kingdom of heaven in this broken, bleeding world.

The burning bush is speaking-will you answer? (GM)

Recipe



Monday -Broccoli Chicken Pinwheels

*Lord Jesus be our holy guest,
our morning joy, our evening rest,
and with our daily bread impart,
your love and peace to every heart. Amen.*



4 boneless skinless chicken breast halves
(6 ounces each)
½ cup broccoli chopped fine
½ cup shredded cedar cheese
¼ cup butter, melted
1 cup seasoned panko breadcrumbs
½ tsp salt
½ tsp onion powder
1 egg
1 tbs cold water
1 tbs oil

Lightly pound chicken till flattened. Mix broccoli, cheese, seasonings and butter. Top chicken breast with broccoli mixture then roll. Chill chicken about ½ hour till to make it easier to bread. Mix egg, water and oil. Dip chicken in egg mix then bread crumbs. Place on parchment covered baking sheet, seam side down. Bake 350 for 35 minutes. Let set 5 minutes to firm up cheese.

Tuesday

At my second appointment, I had two older congregations who were really seeking ways to be involved in mission but didn't know what they could do because none of them thought that they could get out of work/they were too old to participate in a week long mission trip.

Part of my ministry among these congregations was helping them to participate in hands on mission that looked different than they had assumed. We began serving at a soup kitchen once a month in Easton PA. It became something that spoke to the souls of the folks who showed up to help. They quickly realized that it was not just about feeding people, it was about building up relationships and helping people to understand how deeply they are loved by the Creator of the universe.

The obvious need of food in our area lead my congregations to recognize that there is much more food insecurity in our communities than anyone wanted to admit. As we brainstormed about what we could do to help folks in our area experience a little less struggle, we came up with wanting to run a food pantry that would focus on providing fruits, vegetables and meats to people in our community. Thus, the Mission House was born.

Twice a month our churches come together with local farmers, grocery stores, and community members to offer Free Food Fridays which focus on fresh foods for our guests. Mission doesn't have to look like going away to Kentucky or Haiti or somewhere else in the world.

Sometimes (most of the time) it just looks like Matthew 25- feed, clothe, visit the lost and least. Preach the Good News, love people and love God. (GM)



Wednesday

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:8

"Here I Am, Lord"

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry,
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Dan Schutte UMHymnal, #593



Thursday

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

The Christ at "El Picot" is a monument which stands on the hill in Tegucigalpa, capital of Honduras.

The statue overlooks the whole city, government buildings, the homes of the wealthy, as well as the barrios of the poor. The arms of the resurrected Jesus embraced everyone.

I was richly blessed by the presence of God in Honduras. I could feel the arms of Jesus around me through the hugs of children, the prayers of the church and the partners I traveled with. A call to mission was a gift. (GY)



Friday

Do Actions Speak Louder Than Words?

"And your labor 'of love." Why? What labor is it to love? Merely to love is no labor at all. But to love genuinely is great labor. For tell me, when a thousand things are stirred up that would draw us from love, and we hold out against them all, is it not labor?" St John Chrysostom

Thought for the day: How do your love, actions and faith come together?

Prayer

Amazing God, open our eyes today to the possibilities for offering your love to another. Remind us that it is a great privilege to love freely without expectations of anything in return. Press us to move out of our comfort zones into the world. Give us the faith to trust that you will guide us in a way that leads to changed hearts and minds, especially our own. In Jesus Name, Amen (GY)



Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Rom 10:13-14

Saturday

Where are you called to serve?

Take a moment to consider some ways you can help Jesus by caring for the "least of these".



Week 34 Hearts and Hands



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

An Indelible Imprint

When Lauren was a baby in Hong Kong, I joked that she loved her amah more than me. My work sometimes took me to other countries, and I'd be gone for days at a time. But our Filipino nanny, Lilia, was a consistent presence.

Lilia loved Lauren as her own. She talked to her, sang to her, and prayed for her. As Lilia cleaned our apartment, she held Lauren in a baby carrier, singing, "Oh let the Son of God enfold you." If Lauren cried in the middle of the night, Lilia would get up and walk her around (despite our entreaties to let her cry it out).

But that was not the only gift she gave us. Besides being like a mother to Lauren, she modeled motherhood for me. Even though she was younger than me, she taught me about patience, perseverance, unconditional love, and grace. Her life was not easy, yet she radiated peace and joy.

It was hard to say goodbye when we moved back to the US. Lauren was only a year old, and I knew she wouldn't really remember this special person in her life. But I realized she had been indelibly shaped by the love and grace that was showered on her that formative first year.

Today, Lilia lives in England and has a family of her own. We're Facebook friends, and the same love and grace that I experienced two decades ago continue to shine through in her photos.

What about you? Who has modeled love and grace for you? Take a moment to honor them. Guest Writer Beth Crawford

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the gift of love. Thank you for the people in my life who have taught me so much about how to love unconditionally. Help me to be a force for love in the lives of others, too. Amen.

Recipe



Monday- Teriyaki Salmon

*We thank Thee, Heavenly Provider,
For every earthly good:
for life and health and family,
And for our daily food. Amen.*



4 tablespoon oil
4 salmon filets, skinless
1 clove garlic, minced
½ teaspoon ginger, minced
¼ cup teriyaki sauce
2 tbs water
2-3 tablespoons brown sugar
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
½ sweet onion chopped fine
½ sweet red pepper, diced

Sauté onion, garlic and pepper in 2 tbs oil 2-3 minutes. Add brown sugar and ginger stir till dissolved. Add vinegar and soy sauce cook 3 more minutes. Set aside for later.

Add garlic, ginger, soy sauce, ⅛ cup water, brown sugar, rice wine vinegar and sesame oil to a medium bowl. Heat 2 tbs oil in a large skillet. Add salmon filets. Cook 3-4 minutes flip fish add water, cover and cook for 4 more minutes. Add teriyaki/ vegetables to pan cook for 2 more minutes. Serve with lo mien or jasmine rice.



Tuesday

Spirit Song

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.

Oh, let him have the things that hold you,
and his Spirit, like a dove,
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Oh, come and sing the song with gladness
as your hearts are filled with joy.
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name.

Oh, give him all your tears and sadness,
give him all your years of pain,
And you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.

Oh, let him have the things that hold you,
and his Spirit, like a dove,
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

John Wimber
UMH #347

Wednesday

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ. Co 2: 2

How have you encouraged someone in their faith recently?



Thursday

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Genesis 1:31

This heart is in a rock formation on Lake Powell in Utah. Where do you see the goodness and love of God in creation today?



Friday

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. Mat 18: 20

At best the church is a place where no one ever alone. We have journeyed together as sisters in Christ through annual conferences, retreats, local church ministry and mission trips. It is our prayer that you never do church alone.



Saturday

Because I received a call to ministry at a young age, everyone assumed I wanted to be a youth pastor which I so did not want to do.

When I was in college, I wanted to do some sort of ministry- which led me to this crazy group. I took an unpaid internship as a youth pastor at a UCC church two towns over from Smith.

These kids became my whole world. I walked with them through family deaths, through mental illness diagnosis, through the craziness of being a young person in today's world.

It was a gift, and I love these kids more than anything-I'm still close with them even after my tenure with them ended. These are the kids that ignited a passion for young people's ministries-how to be hands on, how to have a heart for more than you ever imagined. (GM)



Week 35 Holy Speak



"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-4)

I started studying Ancient Languages when I was in the sixth grade. We had a half a year class called World Languages and we were taught the basics of each of the three languages my district offered-French, Spanish and Latin. Latin, even at eleven years old, spoke to me in a way that I didn't know that languages could. A need to learn Latin boiled up in my blood, and I pounced on it at the end of our World Languages class, I signed up to study Latin.

And study Latin I did ; for six years.

I was never the best Latin student, as my 2 Latin teachers in those six years can attest to, but I loved it-even when I hated it. There was, and still is, something absolutely magical about the Latin language. It appears to be simple, but is gorgeously complex. We learned to decline, to conjugate, to speak, to write, to recite. I translated from Ecce Romani! The basic primer, and translate The Aeneid my senior year in AP Latin.

Latin taught me of the beauty of words. It taught me how to think deeper, how to feel deeper (translate any Catullus and tell me that you don't feel something!). It exposed me to classics in their original tongue (looking at you Ovid), and taught me how to appreciate context, culture, and history when working with Ancient texts.

But you know, when I graduated high school and went off to college, I had no idea just how valuable my Latin education had be, or would become for me. Instead I swore off learning anymore Ancient Languages. I knew that for United Methodist Ordination I was not going to be required to learn Ancient Hebrew or Ancient Greek and since I already knew what I needed to from Latin; I was going to leave Ancient languages behind.

So my first year at Smith College, I took Modern Hebrew. And it was terrible.

I mean, absolutely, horrifyingly, terrible. The worst experience. I am not built for modern languages. My brain does not understand them, and I did not know how to teach myself to re-wire my brain. It seemed to me that everyone in my class came into Elementary Hebrew with more Hebrew under their belt than I was ever going to understand, and in the third week of class when my professor told us that because we were doing so well (everyone except for ME!) that she was taking away the vowels early.

IM SORRY WHAT?

(continued)

IM SORRY WHAT?

And the vowels were gone. I just barely passed that year of Hebrew, swearing up and down that I was never ever going to take another language ever again. My sophomore year in college, I decided to enroll in "The Trojan War". Since I have always been a huge fan of the Iliad, along with Greek and Roman culture, I decided this course would most likely fill the itch I was feeling inside of me. The Trojan War did so much more than scratch an itch. It revealed a festering wound within me. At the end of the course, I signed up to take Attic Greek.

From that moment on, my life has been different. My scholarship has been different, my whole person has been different. You see, when you study Ancient Languages, you are studying something that never knew English, that never knew the customs and the practices we have now. You immerse yourself in context and beauty that is untouched by the modern world.

In order to understand what Homer is talking about in the Iliad, you have to place yourself in Homer's time, you have to be willing to pay attention to not only what he is saying in line 1, but what he's saying in line 12 and 40 and 678. You have to be willing to suspend your need for easy answers and things that make sense all the time. Greek makes you breathe. Deeply. It makes you pull your hair out and second guess yourself, it makes you cry-both tears of frustration and tears of utter beauty.

Ancient languages are demanding. They demand the best from you at every single moment. You slack off and you miss the whole point of what the author is trying to tell you. Sometimes, you are searching through 15 lines in order to find the verb in a sentence. But when you put it together, the beauty is everything. Greek and Latin both taught me that sometimes the best way to understand something is to hear it, they taught me that music is made through words, that history is changed through words, and that memorization and recitation unlocks a whole new dimension of communication.

I graduated Smith College with a minor in Ancient Greek, and on my desk today in my office, I have 4 copies of the Greek New Testament, two copies of the Vulgate and my grandfather's copy of the Iliad and his copy of the New Oxford Annotated Bible. These are my most prized books. These are the sources I turn to again and again and again, searching for wisdom, for truth and for the Spirit.

At Pentecost, the Spirit descended in order that the disciples might be able to communicate with every person they encounter. The Spirit descended so that people could hear the word of God in their own beautiful, nuanced, amazing languages. In order that the hearer might not understand God in translation, but understand God incarnate through their own tongue.

Spending eight years formally studying Latin and Greek has taught me more about the incarnation of God in Pentecost than N.T. Wright or any other religious scholar could have. God shows up in mysterious, complex, beautiful ways that do not always make sense at first. In order to understand God at work in our lives and our communities, we must be willing to look at the context and history of our surroundings, we must be willing to search for the thing that God is doing.

Studying Greek and Latin has taught me about who I am as a person-what I am passionate about, how I understand who God is and how God is, and where my place in all of this is. It has taught me that we are not all alike, and when you attempt to force something to be something it is is not (like trying to force Latin to be English!) we do irreparable harm, we miss the beauty, we miss the point.

Notice that God did not send the Spirit so that everyone could understand the language that the disciples spoke.

Notice that God did not send the Spirit so that we might all be alike.

*Notice that the beauty lies in the different, in the unknown, in the incarnation of God.
This is Holy Speak. (GM)*

Monday

On that day - The believers were all gathered in a house -- and all of a sudden there was an intense rushing wind that filled the room. It was alarming and exhilarating at the same time.

After the wind came, things would never be the same.

Some were excited by the change. Others were disturbed and just wanted things to get back to normal.

For those who were opened to this movement of the Holy Spirit – they couldn't help but share. These folks talked about the experience. They told people what they had felt, seen, tasted, and heard. They engaged each other in conversation. Those conversations birthed the church.

When something new, uncomfortable, challenging, intense, and moving happens, when you are on the threshold of something amazing – how do you respond?

Sometimes we resist and try not to pay attention. But, sometimes we are courageous and are drawn in and ask, "What does this mean?"

The Christian faith is one of telling and re-telling stories. Just as the early followers of Christ needed reminding, we too need God's help in remembering who we are. In a culture whose memory is often short, moving always to the next thing, the still, small voice of the Spirit whispers an invitation to remember and share.

Come, Holy Spirit. Set our hearts on fire! Let us experience the excitement. Let us be unconformable, challenged, thrilled, moved, and troubled. Let us be open to the rush of your mighty wind. Let us seek greater understanding as we continue to listen. Let us show God's unconditional love for one another. Let us wonder and imagine. Let us continue to ask for God's guidance. Let us continue to ask, "What does this mean?" (GY)

Recipe



Tuesday -Berry Cream Creation

We thank thee Lord, For this our food,

For life and health and all things good.

May manna to our souls be given:

The bread of life sent down from heaven.

These favors we ask in Christ's name. Amen.



2 pints berries, blackberries,
strawberries or raspberries
½ cup jam to match berry flavor
1 lemon
2 cups chilled heavy cream
¼ cup sugar
8 oz. vanilla wafers, divided

Take 2 cups of berries and slice if needed. Reserve remaining berries for decorating. Mix with jam. Mix with lemon juice. Let sit 10 minutes.

Whip cream in chilled bowl till soft peaks form. Stir in sugar. Set aside 1 Cup whipped cream for later in fridge. Line a springform pan with plastic wrap.

Line bottom of pan with cookies, spoon layer berry mixture and whipped cream over cookies. Repeat cookies, berries, cream till finished.

Cover and chill for 24 hours

Remove pan. Top with set aside cream and berries.



Wednesday

After this the Lord ... sent them out two by two, to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go. Luke 10:1-2

Ministry can be lonely, don't do it alone.

Find community where you can be yourself. Find a friend to share life.



Thursday

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.
By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.



Friday

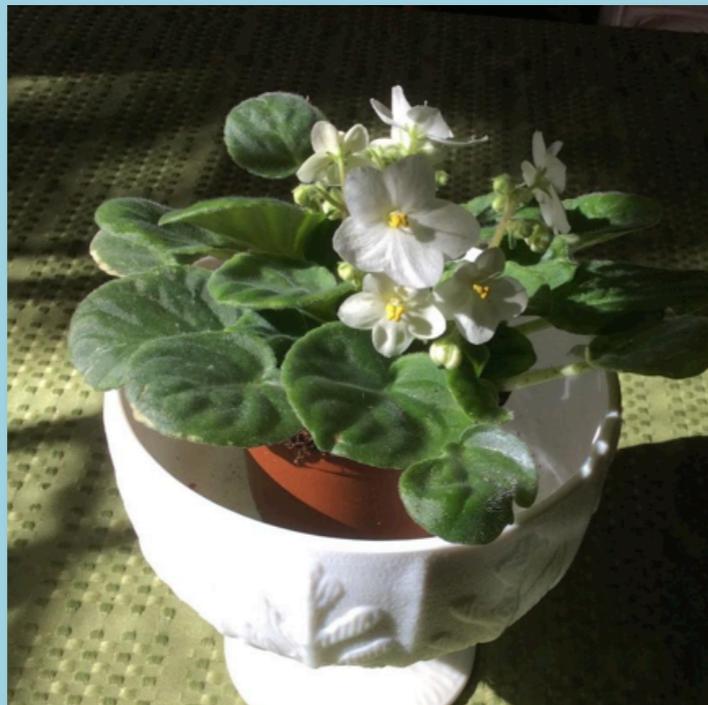
Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

Holy, holy, holy
Lord, God Almighty
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee
Holy, holy, holy
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons blessed Trinity
Holy, holy, holy
Though the darkness hide Thee
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee
Perfect in power, in love, and purity
Holy, holy, holy
Lord, God Almighty
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea
Holy, holy, holy
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons blessed Trinity

Reginald Heber (1826) UM Hymnal #64

Saturday

My Grandmother spoke the language of African Violets. This was a holy language of love. She loved growing African Violets. She developed a presentation which talked about care of the Christian life and aligned it with care of the African violet. She gave away hundreds (maybe thousands) of African Violets in her life. When ever I see and African Violet I think of my Grandmothers love of God and love of neighbor. (LM)



Week 36 Porch Sitting



My husband Bill, and I bought a house in Ocean Grove, NJ eighteen years ago. We knew this would be the place when we would retire where we would live. We thought about what each of us needed. I said that I wanted a second floor porch and he needed a basement. We found this house which has two wrap around porches, one on each floor and it has a basement.

Sitting on a porch for me is both a spiritual and calming experience. I can sit on the second floor and be in nature and not see anyone up there. It's just me and God. I can sit and meditate or read a good book.

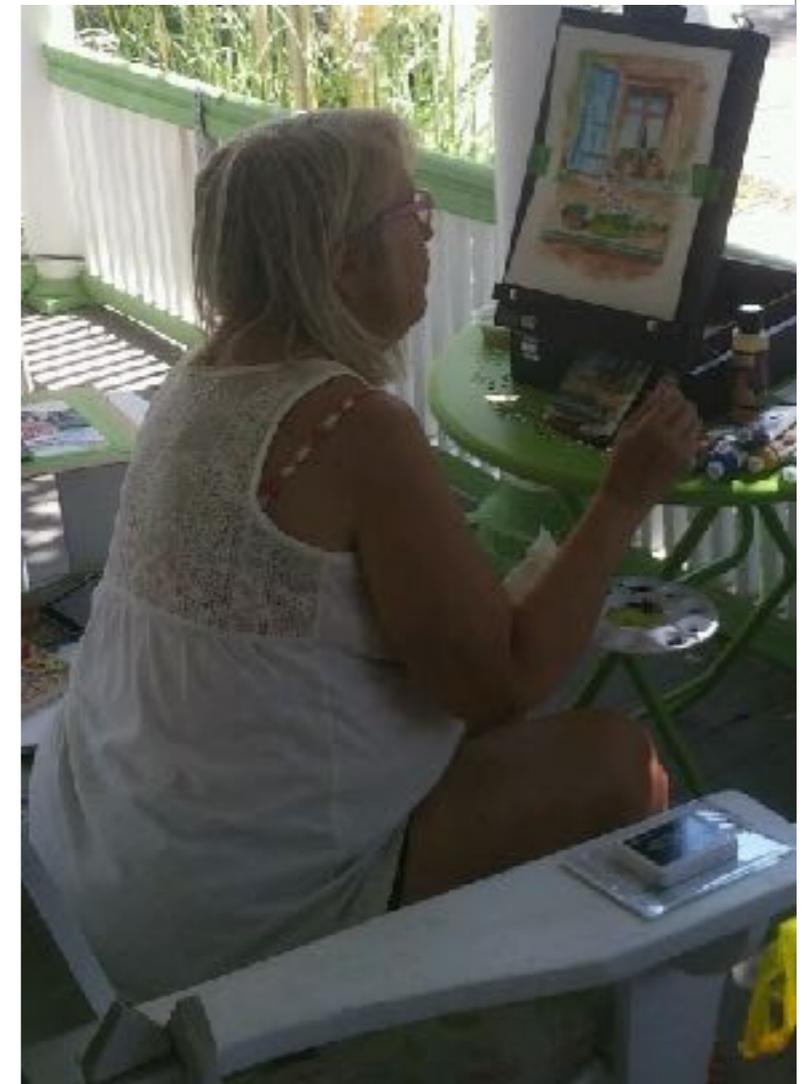
When I am sitting on the first floor porch I can see the neighbors pass by and say hello to strangers as they stroll to the beach. Some days I get out my easel and paint listening to the birds chirping and feeling the soft breeze on my face.

I can get a cup of tea and just take in the glorious beauty of nature just being in gratitude for all the blessings God has bestowed upon me and my family. Other days I watch the squirrels play and the birds sitting on the next door neighbors feeder happily eating their breakfast.

There is just something so special about a porch, sitting in the rocking chair and being outside just makes me happy.

We live in a world that is fast paced and chaotic so it is important for me to slow down and find time to be with God, to quiet myself and let God speak to me. On the quiet of my porch I am able to do just that!

(FN)



Recipe



Monday

*Come Lord Jesus, be our guest,
May this food by thee be blest,
May our souls by thee be fed,
Ever on the living Bread.*



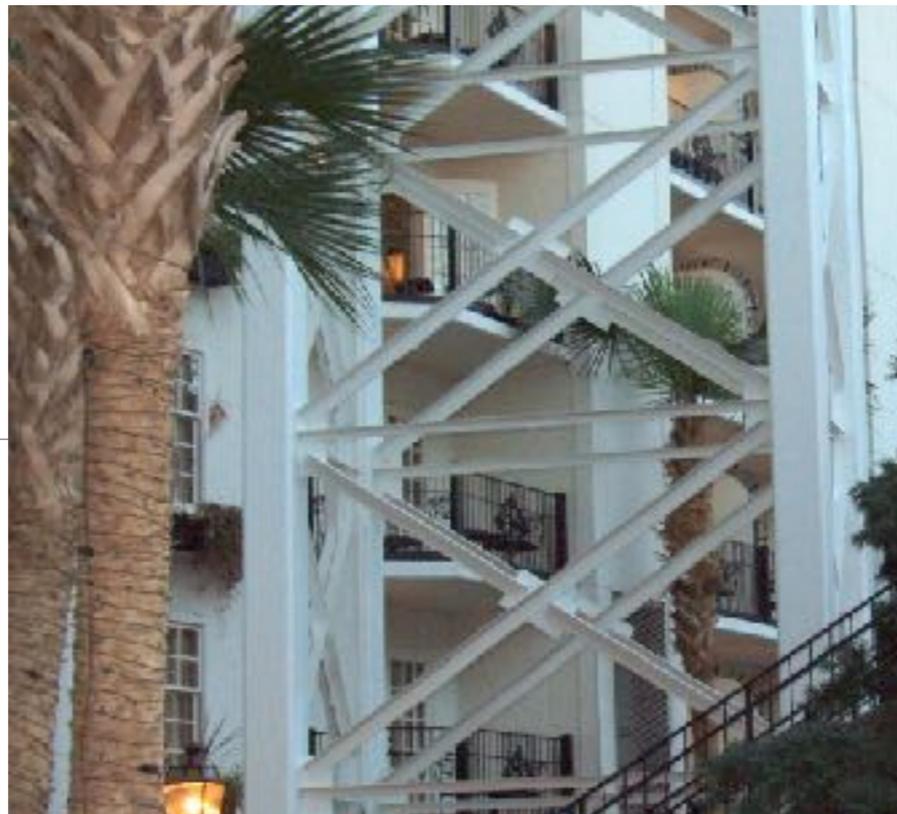
1 large jalapeño pepper, chopped fine
1 small red onion (1/2 cut into large chunks,
1/2 thinly sliced)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 cups shredded rotisserie chicken (skin removed)
Juice of 2 limes, plus wedges for serving
Kosher salt and pepper
2 cups chopped watermelon
1/2 cups fresh cilantro
3/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
12 corn tortillas
1 avocado, chopped

Toss the watermelon, 1/2 cup cilantro, the sliced red onion, the remaining jalapeno, juice of 1 lime, 1 tablespoon olive oil and half of the cheese in a bowl. Season with 1/4 teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper.

Warm the tortillas in a dry skillet.

Divide chicken mixture among the tortillas; top with the watermelon salad, the remaining cheese and the avocado. Serve with lime wedges.

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Add chopped onions and half of the jalapeno. Cook 2 min till tender crisp, add the chicken, the juice of 1 lime and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Simmer until warmed through, about 2 minutes. Keep warm over low heat.



A resort near Opryland offered us a porch side view of Nashville.

Tuesday

This is a view from one of my favorite houses on Chincoteague Island. It is where I go to relax, to breathe, to remember, to find myself at peace once again in the midst of God's amazing creation.



Wednesday

Summer is the best season! I love cookouts, fireworks and the beach. I especially love the more laidback rhythm of life.

One of the joys of summer when I was kid was time at the community pool. I especially loved when my dad would come to the pool with us. My favorite thing was to jump into his arms into the deep end of the pool.

To be honest this activity had a definite learning curve. In the beginning, my dad would stand in the pool and coax me to jump. I was a cautious child and not thrilled about taking a risk. "Come on" he'd call out, "There's nothing to be afraid of – I'll catch you, I promise" But somehow my little legs just didn't seem like they could do it. There were so many things that could go wrong. I was a lot safer standing outside of that pool than taking the risk. Eventually, I got brave, a got a running start and jumped! Sure enough my dad caught me, what seemed so frightening in one moment, soon became a favorite game.

I wish I had the kind of personality that did not hesitate a bit when faced with a risky situation (or at least one I perceive as chancy). But I get myself all in a flustered – only to discover that the new thing I was afraid of was not so bad, and many times actually wonderful.

When I take those a few big leaps of faith, as much as I am excited about the venture, there are still moments of apprehension. But I have asked God to give me the courage to overcome my worries – and the faith to jump.

Faith is not so much an intellectual decision - just about saying you believe—its actually doing something to show how much you believe.

What does it mean to jump and trust God to catch us? Sometimes the uncertainties of life make us want to on the sidelines of life instead of taking that leap of faith. Then God calls us, "Come on, there's nothing to be afraid of – I'll catch you, I promise"

Today I am asking you – where is God asking you to take a leap of faith? God promises to be there for us and to care for us. Are you ready to take the plunge? (GY)

Thursday

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. John 7:38

"Where do you get living water?"

At one time or another, all of us, perhaps, you have felt like the woman at the well...on the outside, marginalized... outcast, unworthy- maybe that's why the story works and translates so well for so many of us.

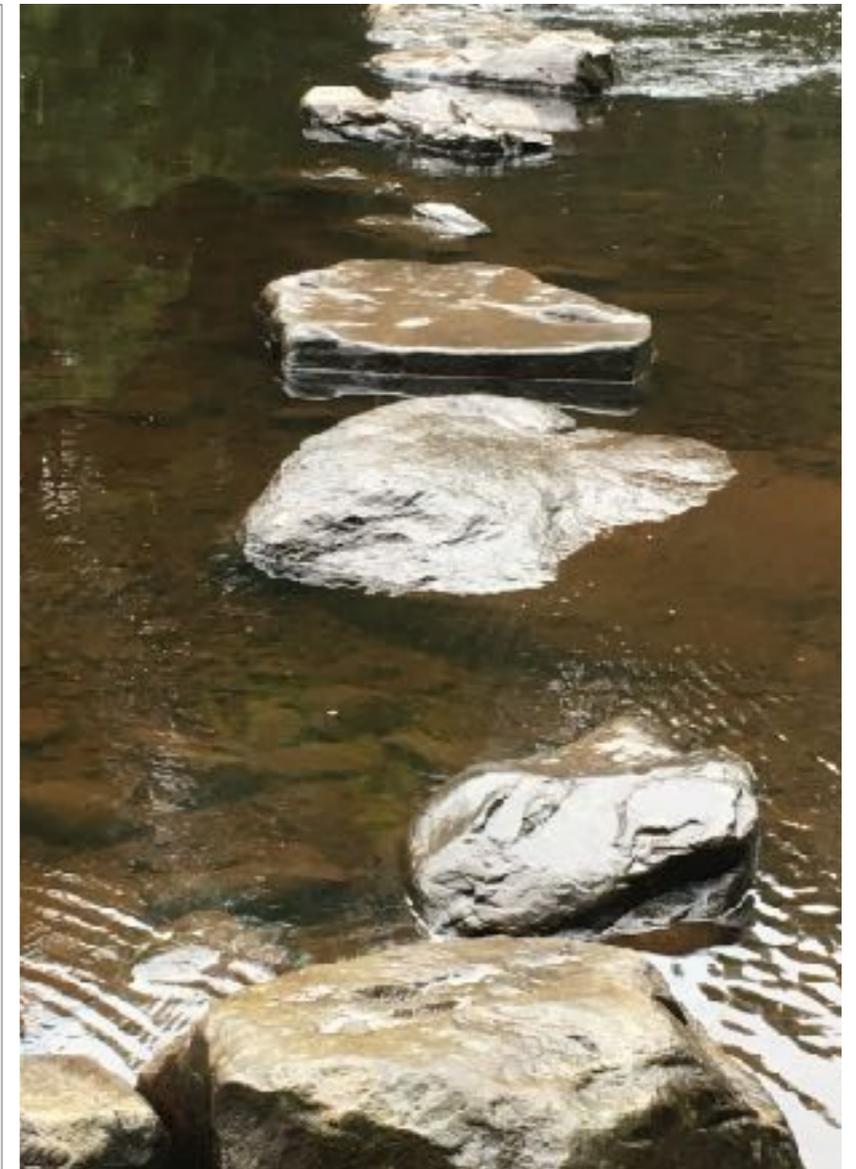
"Sir, give me the living water so that I won't have to keep coming back here... Lord, give me something, so I can be accepted..."

The woman's prayer is our prayer: "Sir, give me this water." It is a prayer that has been answered before it is even uttered.

Jesus himself can offer living water. He alone can quench the thirst of the spirit. Anything or anyone else will only wear out and leave the spirit thirsty again.

But are we any more prepared than this woman for living water Jesus will supply?

Will you offer your thirst to him today?



Friday

God of all of my days, as I sit here in the peace of your greatness, help me to hear your still small voice.

As I enjoy your creation, help me to breathe in the call to care for it.

As I sit and dwell on your God, and all of the blessings you have poured out for me, help me to be grateful- and to live my life for you.

Help me Lord to remember to be grateful.

Help me Lord to remember to care for myself as you care for me. In the name Christ who died so I could live, AMEN. (GM)



Week 37 Blessings



Several days ago, I received a letter from a friend who told me how much she appreciated my friendship and kindness. Denise* and I have known each other for about eight years, we met when I took a seminary class at the women's prison where she was incarcerated. We've kept in touch these many years and now I'm able to occasionally visit her at the transitional facility where she's staying. In her note, she told me that our friendship was a sign of God's grace in her life. My heart swelled with joy! Whatever kindness I may have extended to her came back to me 100 fold through her gratitude and love.

Author and journalist, Dan Harris makes an interesting observation about the boomerang effect of practicing compassion and kindness in his latest book, "10% Happier." In his memoir about the benefits of secular meditation, he notes that the "practice for the development of concern for the well-being of others, actually is immense benefit to oneself." There seems to be an ironic selfish case for being compassionate, as it ultimately benefits both the giver and receiver. He notes interesting research in the field of neuroscience that supports his claim. Pleasure centers in the brain will light up on scans in the same way whether we receive a gift or give to charity. Scientific proof that it is at least as good to give as to receive, if not better!

Perhaps this is what God had in mind when he called Abraham to leave his father's land and told him, "*I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing*" (Genesis 12:3). Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. Jesus echoes a similar sentiment in his exchange with the lawyer who asks him what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus throws the question back at him, the lawyer quotes the commandment from Leviticus to "*love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all you soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.*" Yes, Jesus replies, "*Do this and you will live*" (Luke 10:26-28, Leviticus 19:18). Love God and neighbor and YOU will live. The love you give brings life to you!

There is someone in your life, or someone who may cross your path today, that needs to bless you by allowing you to bless them. Maybe it's a spouse who needs an encouraging word, or the tired cashier at the coffee shop who needs a friendly smile? Perhaps you must simply slow down and hold the door for the elderly gentleman going into the mall behind you, or should you buy some extra groceries to drop off at the food bank? Bless someone today, and heads up because it's coming right back at you! (JT)

Saturday

Hip Hip Hooray

It's summer again!

Take time to read a book.

Play with a friend.

Sparkle the night skies.

Take a break from the ordinary

Life is always a little sweeter in the summer.

Recipe



Monday - Blueberry Jam: A Taste of Summer all Year

Making blueberry jam is so much more than the jam, but the jam is the main thing: a taste of summer that lasts until next blueberry season; forever-memories of my mother, now my grandchildren are part of it. That's a taste of my story, here's the recipe as I continue my mother's tradition!

Blueberry Jam

Yield: 6-½ pint jars

Equipment:

- Canning jars: 6-8 half-pint jars; or you can use 1 cup jars great for gifts
- Food processor
- Matching lids and rings
- Jar grabber
- Ladle
- 2 large cooking pots
- Small saucepan
- Small wet washcloth or paper towels
- Small bowl
- Larger bowl

Ingredients: Measurements need to be exact to be sure it gels.

- 6 cups Blueberries, crushed to 4 c.
- 4 cups sugar
- Package of Sure-Jell Premium Fruit Pectin

What to do:

- Prepare and lay out all your equipment:
- Wash jars in hot water or dishwasher, keep in a large pot of boiling water until use.
- Put flat lids in small saucepan of water, bring to simmer, then keep warm until use.
- Have jar rings, towels, ladle and jar grabber near stove.



Make Jam:

- Measure sugar into small bowl; stir in ½ the pectin
- Pulse berries in food processor until puree, some pieces, about 2 cups at a time
- Put 4 c. of crushed berries & remaining pectin in second large pot
- Stirring constantly, bring to a boil.
- Add 4. Sugar, stirring constantly, bring to a ROLLING BOIL (does not stop when stirring, for exactly 1 minute.
- Remove pot from heat.

Fill jars:

- Remove jars from hot water, set up-right next to stove.
- Using ladle, fill jars up to ¼"™ from top
- Cover with flat lids, rubber side down
- Twist on ring tops
- Using jar grabber, put jars up-right in large pot of boiling water, covering with water.
- Keep in boiling water 5-10 minutes;
- Remove jars and set up-right on counter.
- Check for seal; you may hear popping noise indicating a seal; lid should flatten.
- Cool, store in cool place.

Enjoy

Tuesday: Blueberries

Of the possibilities that ran through my head these weeks, trying not to repeat what I've brought to share in the past, and to the top arose coffee ice cream, actually even higher was mocha ice cream, and the Dunkin Donuts coffee coolatta the high schoolers introduced me to last summer; mmmm ...

But I found that to fill the bill of good and true and beautiful I couldn't resist once again sharing what I made last summer. So at the risk of boring you, here are some thoughts on why blueberry jam is good and true and beautiful ...

Just as I am savoring what appears to be the last of the jars in my cupboard, in May and June I find myself: checking out the blossoms on the bushes Will this be a good year for them? Will this spring be rainy enough and the summer dry enough? A handful of bushes were cultivated two generations ago, but most are wild and live mostly where their feet are wet, along the lake shore and streams and in the swamps, but also along the road and the hiking trails. Their berries, some large and dark, some small but just as tasty, from high or low bushes, are food for birds and black bear that inhabit the forest.

In July, I plan early morning walks with my bucket, evening rides in the canoe, or mid-day trips to Sally's dock. On hikes with Sam, I'll stop and fill pockets, my hat or my water bottle. Sometimes I am alone, sometimes with others. My Mom joins me, enjoying the canoe ride or painting on the dock. My sister and her children play in the water.

Sometimes we talk, sometimes we enjoy the noises of the woods and lake. Once a year, I get together with a childhood friend and we spend an afternoon catching up and filling our buckets....Wonderful memories of babies in backpacks, leaning over my shoulders so they could pick too.

Blueberries can be eaten right off the tree; in a bowl with milk or cream, with cereal or with other berries and fruit, for breakfast or dessert. They can be baked into muffins or bread or cooked as a sauce served with cake; in an abundant year we can be extravagant and bake a pie. The best for me however, is the jam. Cull, wash, mash, cook, stir, boil and bubble, pour into jars that will last the fall and winter months. Jam can be given as gifts, eaten with toast or stirred into yogurt, spread over pancakes ... mmmmm...

a year long memory of summer. (FP)

Wednesday Children's Message on Light

"Let your light so shine that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father in heaven."

Do you ever use candles at your house? In my home we have candles for some different reasons. When we are having a really nice dinner we might put candles on the table to help things look very special. If we lose power and its dark sometimes we light a candle to see (of course it's a lot easier and safer to use a flashlight). The best way we use candles is for someone's birthday.

In a lot of families, if you are a kid we place as many candles as your age on the birthday cake – then we light the candles, turn off the lights and sing to the birthday boy or girl? Is that what you do at your house?

We put the candles on the cake to celebrate all the years someone special has been alive. Every year they have lived holds special memories and birthdays give us a chance to remember. For family and friends, we are thankful for each year. The older you get the brighter your cake is – filled with lots of birthday candles.

In the church we celebrate another special day in your life, the day you were baptized. We celebrate that day when we as a church welcomed you into God's family. Now for some of you – you were baptized right here in this church. For others you might have been baptized in another place, that's just fine.

Later today we as a congregation will all dip our hand in this water – where we baptize people in our congregation and remember each of our baptisms. Remember we are all God's special children.

Prayer: God of light, thank you for all the special days in our lives. Today we especially thank you for our baptism – let us never forget how much you love us.

Give all the children a candle and invite their families to light it on the anniversary of the child's baptism. This will help connect children that you did not baptize in your local church to their baptism stories. (GY)

Thursday *God of all goodness, thank you for the blessing of all good things, including fresh fruits that nourish our bodies, and the opportunity to harvest them, as this activity nourishes our spirits and brings us closer to you and the precious gifts you give us. Amen.*



Friday

The Church has been trying to accommodate mixed emotions during the holidays by programming services such as a Blue Christmas.

But what if we were more attuned to the feelings of others around us and allowed this awareness to deepen our collective experience of anticipation for the coming of Christ for the whole year, not just one service?

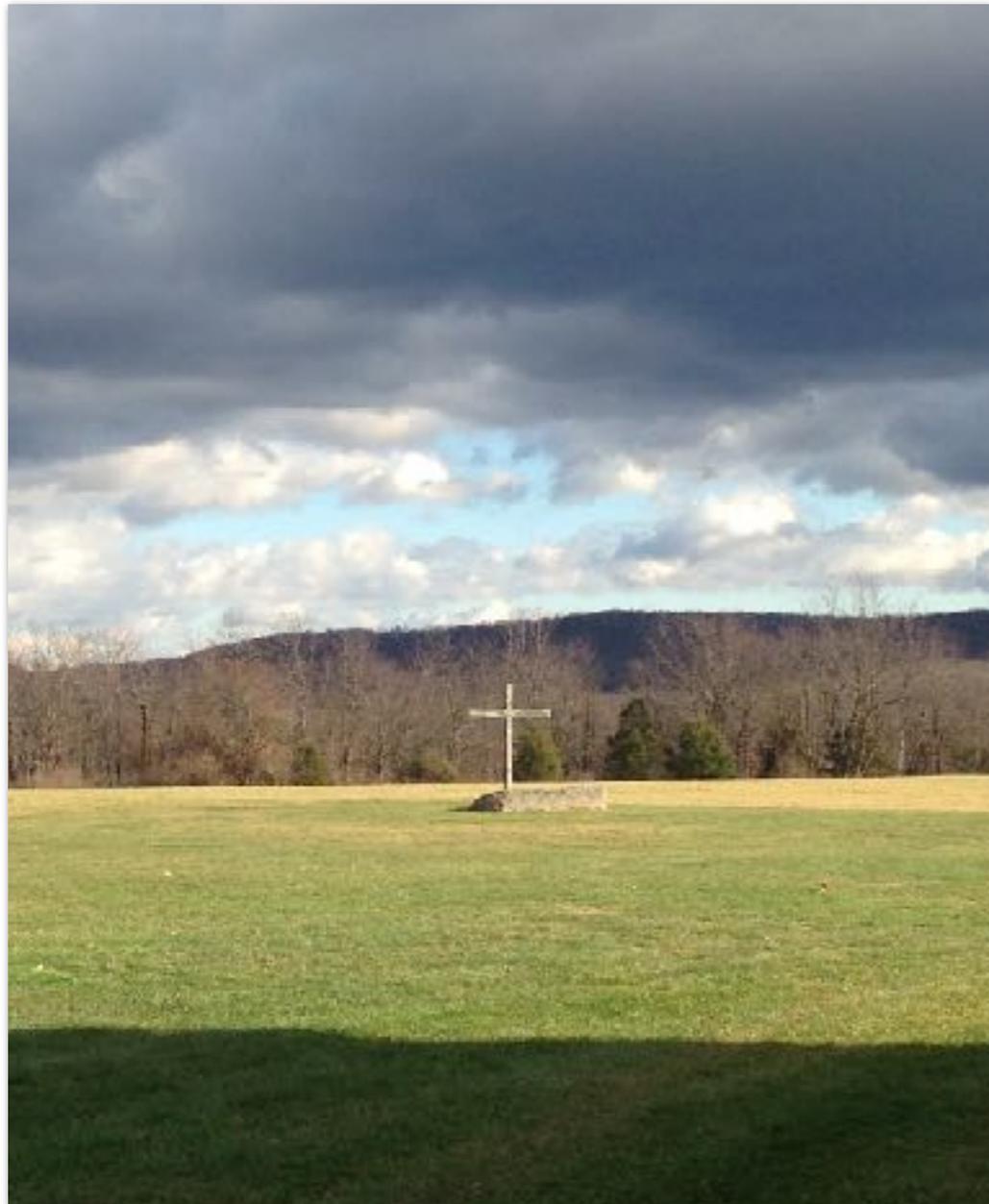


Saturday , Blue Skies

“This Is My Song”

*My country’s skies are bluer than the ocean,
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine:
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.*

Lloyd Stone and Georgia Harkness UM Hymnal, #437



Week 38 Lake Living



Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. Mat 4: 12-23

I have always been struck by Jesus’ ministry in the Galilee. The scriptures are rich with the images of Jesus teaching, preaching, and healing along the shores of the Galilee. In fact, Matthew tells us, that it is no accident that Jesus chooses this very large freshwater lake as the site and center for much of his ministry; rather he is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. Shortly following his time in the wilderness, Jesus in proclaiming the Kingdom of God come in himself, echoes the very words of John, his forbearer, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” And as he proceeds to live into the fulfillment of his earthly ministry, he calls his helpers from the common people, the salt of the earth folks from the towns surrounding this large Galilean lake. The light of God’s love came to earth in a new and remarkable way: not a Messiah of war, but one of redemption and light. Jesus fulfills God’s plan to lift up the lowly, even through the choice of the place of his ministry. He models God’s intentionality toward the poor and forgotten people of the world. Smelly fishermen become the first disciples called; but people came from all over to see the wonder of this man who had relocated from Nazareth to call the lake his home on earth. I can’t help but think that Jesus felt closer to God in the midst of the beauty of the Galilean waters.

There is an attraction that we have to water: it is life-giving both to our own bodies, but also as a home for fish and other creatures, it can be a place of fun and enjoyment, and it offers peace and calm for our restless and weary spirits. There is no other place I would rather live than on a lake. It reminds me daily that Christ is the Living Water for my soul. I pray you have a place with water in your life—it can be as simple as a small fountain or as massive as the ocean...but wherever it is, I pray it reminds you of your connection to the One who is Living Water. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you God, for Life-Giving Water; for your intentionality in our lives, just as you were intentional in Jesus’ earthly walk. Thank you for the many ways you use the common and make it holy. In Jesus; name, Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Nanny's Potato Salad

One of the wonderful parts of being on the lake in the summer, is that cooking is really laid-back. In the morning, while it's still cool, it's time to prepare cold salads for supper, and marinade any meats for grilling later on. Over the years, it is my grandmother's potato salad that has won me many compliments—and so I share its deliciousness with love! (VMB)

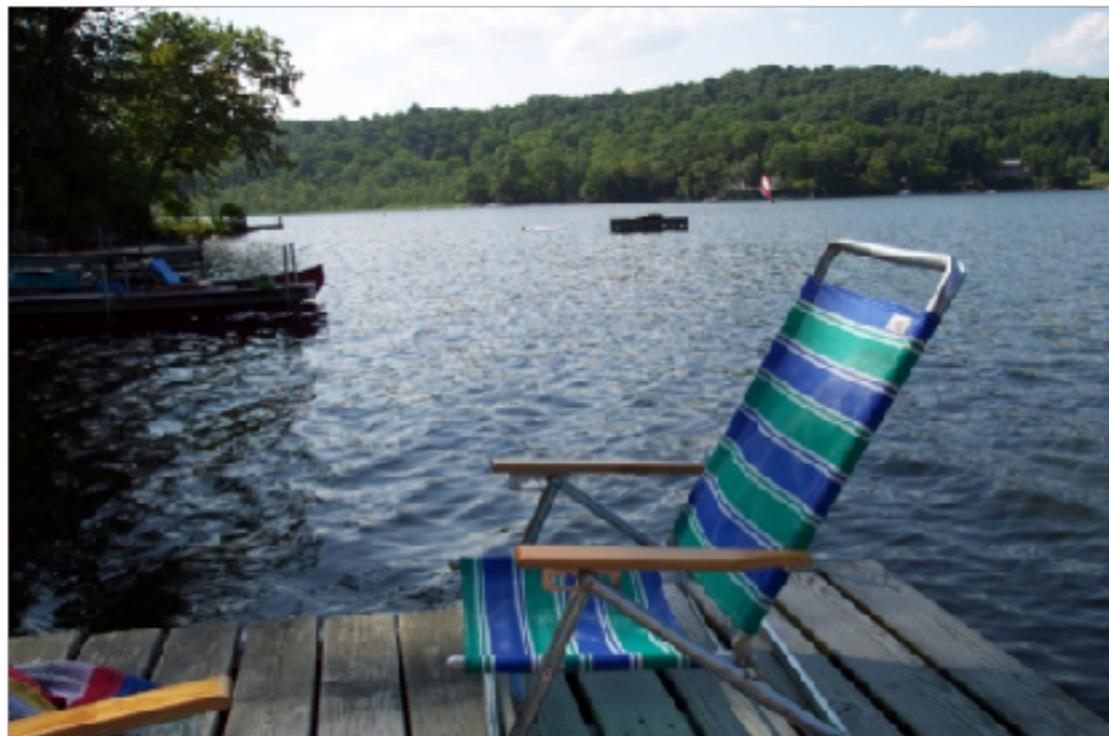
Prayer: Thank you God, for delicious, easy meals for hot, lazy summer days...and for those who blessed us with the recipes! Amen.

5 pounds potatoes
6 hard-boiled eggs
1 LARGE onion
6 large stalks of celery
1 quart Miracle Whip
Salt & Pepper to Taste

cubed potatoes.
Use AT LEAST 2/3 of the jar of Miracle Whip (or to taste). Add salt and pepper with a generous hand.
Cool and serve.

Boil potatoes in skins until tender but not mushy (it will vary with the kind of potato you choose). When they are ready, peel the potatoes and cube them into $\frac{3}{4}$ inch cubes.

Prepare the hard boiled eggs and let cool. Chop the onion and celery and put into a large bowl with the chopped eggs and



Tuesday: An Idea to Share:

I once wrote a whole Vacation Bible School curriculum using the lake theme, and using the various stories of Jesus calling, teaching, preaching, healing, and then even appearing as the Risen One on the lakeshore. It was fun and a great time of learning together—especially because it made a great time to be by the water in the midst of the summer heat. The broad-

brush themes were as follows:

Monday Theme: Calling the Disciples/Jesus calls us too (Story of the Calling of James and John)

Tuesday Theme: Jesus as Teacher/The Blessings (The Beatitudes)

Wednesday Theme: Jesus as Healer and Miracle Worker (Feeding of the 5000)

Thursday Theme: Jesus Comes to Us When We Are Afraid (Jesus Walks on Water)

Friday Theme: Jesus Still Comes to Us (Resurrection Appearance of Jesus to Disciples)

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for choosing such a beautiful setting to fulfill your ministry and for the many ways you used the lake and the water to teach us about God. Help us to teach others, even as you have taught us. Amen.



Wednesday

There's something about the smell of a lake that reminds me of home. Growing up, both sets of grandparents lived in lake communities. I learned to swim in the murky waters of Mountain Lake in White Township, NJ. I fished for Sunnies from my grandparent's dock, and, if they were big enough, we would keep them, clean them, and freeze them for a great Sunfish fish fry feast at some future date. I learned to row, sail, and canoe on that lake. I have vivid memories of my Great



Grandparents and Grandparents sitting on the screened in porch in the late afternoon to avoid the heat. Right after supper, the men would go out in the boat fishing until dark. I would go to sleep with the music of the roller rink on the one side of the lake, and the "casino" (no gambling) on the other. Or if I couldn't sleep, then I would sneak down the stairs to listen to my grandparents, parents, and aunt and uncle play pinochle or to listen to Johnny Carson's monologue on the Tonight Show, being careful to tiptoe down the stairs, and to stay hidden far enough up so that no one could see me. Great childhood memories!!!

When it came time for us to purchase a home for equity and vacation use, we really wrestled whether to buy on Martha's Vineyard or Swartswood Lake (where our local Methodist Camp was located). We chose the lake and have so many happy memories of family fun there over the years. It was a good decision for us (and we still try to visit the Vineyard on vacation sometimes). In the times I was away from the lake, as we would drive in, the family dog would ride peacefully in the back until we got to the end of our lane. Then he would go crazy, because he could smell the lake. Yes, for me, the smell of the lake means that I am home. Home with my family, home with my roots, and home with the stories of Jesus that come alive for me here. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you God for giving us senses that help us to experience your creation not only through sights and sounds, but through touch and smell and taste. Thank you for memories of loved ones that continue to live on, triggered by our senses and treasured places. Amen.

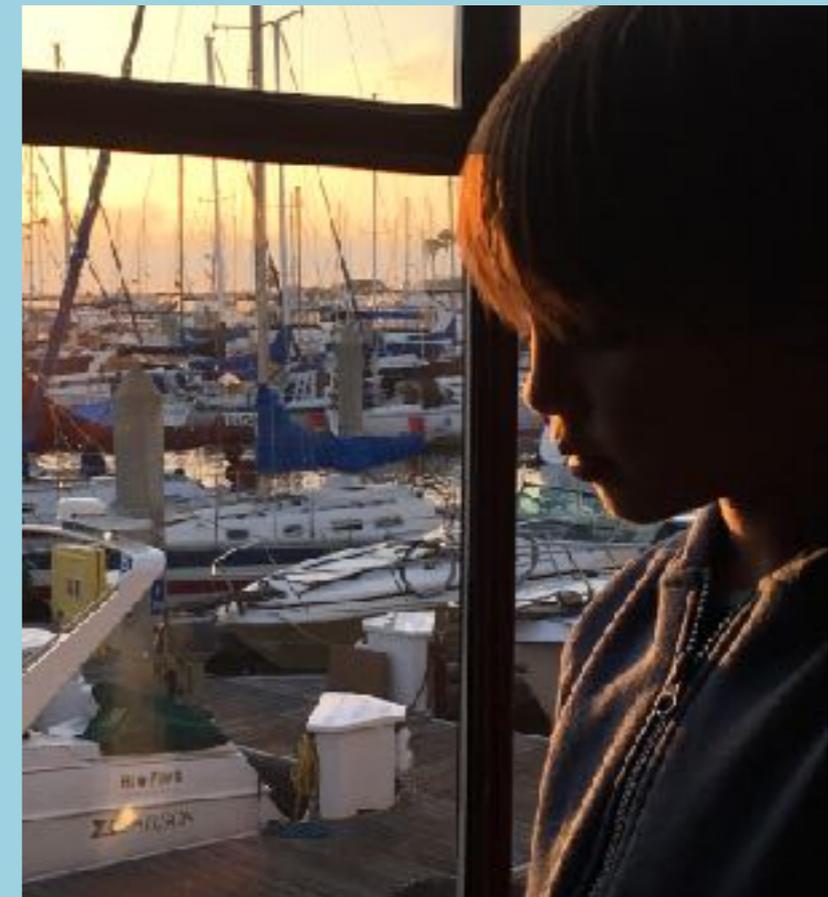
Thursday

*Memories flutter like clouds o'er the lake
Days of childhood fun and laughter
These are the things I would pass on
For generations to come after.*

*I think of previous generations of love shared
The murky waters washing clean
The hurts and pains I would absorb
A reminder of living water, it would seem.*

*A legacy of lake living, passed along in faith
Ordinary lives, common gifts
These are the sacraments he gives
These are the blessings we lift.*

*Days of rest, of sweet connection
Fill my heart, renew my soul
I bask in the light of life and love
My spirit fresh, restored, made whole. (VMB)*



Friday

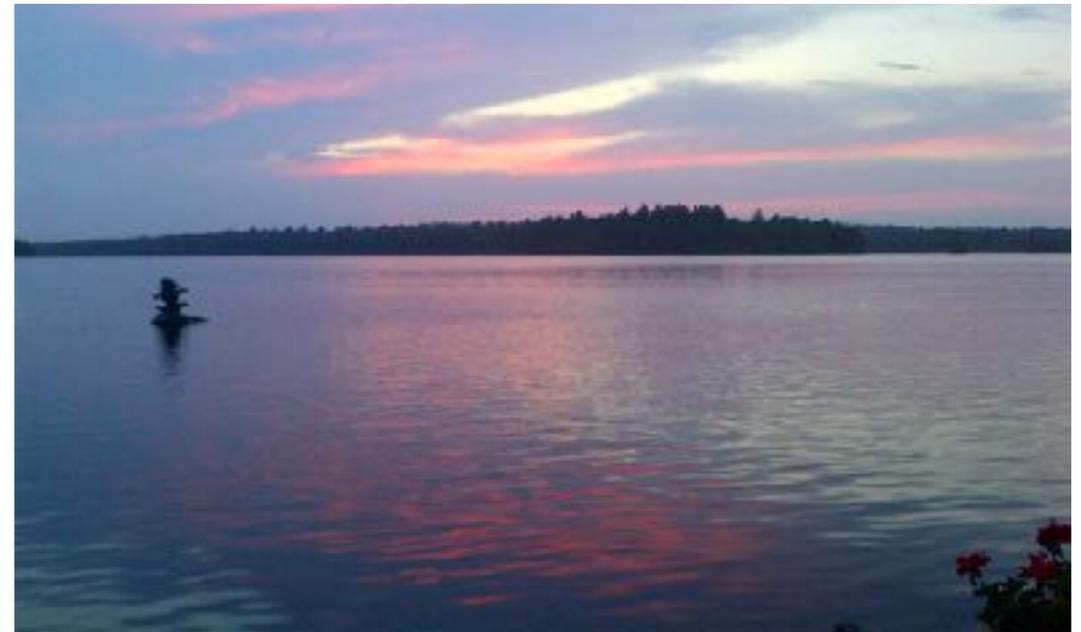
“When God began to create the heavens and the earth— the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters...” Genesis 1:1-2

The lake that is my retreat and refreshment, is surrounded by woods and fed by and emptied by streams of flowing water. It was made by damming one of these mountain streams, to harvest ice to be sent by train to the industrial city of Elizabeth NJ in the 19th c. to keep food cold in “ice boxes.” Early in the 20th c. the lake was purchased and settled by Philadelphia Quakers seeking peace, tranquility and simplicity, which continue to this day, for summer respite from the heat of the city, then as now: Life-giving ice; life-giving retreat.

During this evening of respite as I sit on the edge of the lake, images of this divine gift of water come to me: God’s Spirit sweeping over the waters at creation ...Jesus – and we – are birthed from the waters of a womb ...Jesus walked the shores of Lake Genneserat and gathered his first disciples ...the glass of cool water at my side. Jesus said, “All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, rivers of living water will flow out from within him” (John 7:38).

Prayer:

Creating God, how many gifts you’ve given us! Thank you for life itself, and all we need to sustain that life, including physical water and spiritual – living – water. May the living water of Jesus flow into and through and out of me into the world and all its creatures. Amen (FP)



Saturday

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

One day many years ago, when our four daughters were just new to lake-living, we spent some of our vacation time there, while their Dad was working. The first day dawned beautifully, so as soon as we had cleaned up breakfast the five of us put on our bike helmets and made the 5-mile loop around the lake.

Since we wanted a less energetic activity before our lunch break, we decided to go for a sail. We had a 12-foot O'Day sailboat at the time, so we all hopped aboard. We even decided to bring the family dog, Maizey. The trip down the lake was beautiful—the wind was perfect and we flew to the other end of the lake. But by the time it we were ready make our usual tacking route back to our dock, the sky had turned an ominous greenish-pinkish gray and the wind began to come at us from all directions. Since we couldn't seem to turn around with just the sail, we got out the paddles to try to turn the boat in the right direction. No success.

The girls started to get upset, as we realized we were caught out in the middle of the lake, with no way to be able to make it home before the storm came. I was trying my best to hold everything together without scaring them more, simultaneously trying to corral the dog, who was so frightened she kept trying to jump overboard and praying the somehow Jesus would come walking across the water to calm the storm as he had so long ago on the Galilee. Together we prayed for God to protect us from the storm and to help us not be afraid.

As we looked up from our prayer, the wind had turned the boat in the direction of the Camp Aldersgate, our Methodist Camp whose waterfront was at the other end of the lake from our dock. We headed toward their dock, and landed safely—girls, dog, and all. The resident director saw us heading in and came to our assistance, helping secure the boat ashore and giving us a ride back home—just before the skies opened up. We said a prayer of thanksgiving for the mercy of a safe harbor in the storm and a friendly face to give us aid. I believe that Jesus calmed that storm of fear that we felt in the midst of a scary situation and made a way for safe harbor for us, just as he did for his disciples so long ago. Thanks be to God! (VMB)

Prayer: Dear Lord, for offering safe haven in the storms of life, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Week 39 Gathering Sheep



Anyone out there remember the 1984 hit, What's love Got to do with it? Tina Turner?

"Oh what's love got to do, got to do with it
What's love but a second hand emotion
What's love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken"

Today I wanted to ask the question – what's sheep got to do with it. I spent a lot of time, thought and research in the what seemed to be a possible theme for today. Sheep.

If this might be one of Jesus' last encounters on earth – then the whole feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep dialogue must be a big deal.

I pondered, I worked all kinds of angles and I still was questioning what's sheep got to do with it. Today I wanted to ask the question – what's sheep got to do with it. If this might be one of Jesus' last encounters on earth – then the whole feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep dialogue must be a big deal.

I pondered, I worked all kinds of angles and I still was questioning what's sheep got to do with it. They have hauled their catch ashore, Jesus invites them to bring some of what they have caught and add it to what he has already provided for them. This is a holy moment.

But Jesus also invites them to contribute what they have "Bring some fish", you too have something to give. They eat breakfast, then Jesus calls Peter aside, Jesus' conversation is mixed between questions about love and sheep.

"Do you love me?"

Jesus gives Peter a specific direction each time Peter answers the question When Peter says, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" we might expect Jesus to say, OK don't forget this. For the last time Peter was gathered around a charcoal fire was when he was in the high priest's court yard and denied his Lord three times.

But instead Jesus responds to Peter's testimony of love for Christ with a command expressed three different ways:

"Feed my lambs."

"Take care of my sheep."

"Feed my sheep."

Lord, what's sheep got to do with this? I kind of get the love part, of course I love you. I know you probably are worried because I fell apart before but do we have to really bring that up?

Love that miserable second hand emotion. Love – broken hearts – broken promises. And that's when Tina Turner got in my head. Maybe although I wanted to give you some wonderful commentary on sheep and the shepherd in the bible, but that isn't this lesson. It is love. "Do you love me..."

Jesus looks at his broken children and asks that question. Not love that is an emotion. But we are invited into relationship with the one who is love, and that invitation is unconditional. That is the Good News. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Mollie's Chicken

*Come Lord Jesus, be our guest,
May this food by thee be blest,
May our souls by thee be fed,
Ever on the living Bread.*

Mollie, Diane's mother-in-law could be counted on to make this dish for church suppers as well as a treat between services on Christmas Eve.

- 4 Chicken Breasts, halved
- 1 Tbs Poultry Seasoning Salt & Pepper
- 1 (10³/₄-oz.) can Cream of Mushroom Soup
- 1 (10³/₄-oz.) can Broccoli Cheddar
- 1 cup Milk
- 1 pkg. Shredded Cheddar
- 2-3 Crowns of Broccoli, frozen is ok
- 1 large pkg. Wide Noodles
- ½ stick Butter
- 1 Cup Bread Crumbs

Place all 3 cans of soup in a saucepan with the cup of milk. Heat on low until blended together. Set aside. Boil chicken in large pot with enough water to cover well. Add poultry seasoning, salt & pepper. Remove from water and cut into bite sized pieces. Cook broccoli in some water, for about 7 mins. Do not over cook. Trim stalks from broccoli and set aside. Cook noodles until done. In a casserole, add a layer of chicken, then a ladle of soup, and some shredded cheese. Next, add a layer of noodles, and cover with soup. Then add a layer



cheese, followed by broccoli, and cover with soup. Layer with cheese. Repeat, if necessary until all ingredients are gone. Mix together butter and breadcrumbs, and sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes.
Notes: Freezes well!! Defrost in the microwave for 20 mins, then bake for 10-15 mins.



Tuesday

Once more he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep." - John 21:17

Adopt a Classroom

Consider transforming the portion of the church to be used for children to have their own special space. This project might include painting, repurposing furniture and electronics to make this area a dynamic place for them to discover, create, and learn about our awesome God.

To facilitate this renovation ask for families and individuals to "adopt a room." This gives people an opportunity to share their gifts (cleaning, organizing, painting, decorating) as well as an opportunity to share in this important ministry to children. (GY)





Wednesday

Lord, Speak To Me, That I May Speak

Lord, speak to me that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone.

As you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children, lost and lone.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet.
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
your hungering ones with manna sweet.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious truths which you impart.
And wing my words that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

O fill me with your fullness, Lord,
until my very heart o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show.

O use me, Lord, use even me,
just as you will, and when, and where
until your blessed face I see,
your rest, your joy, your glory share.

Frances R. Havergal, 1872 #422 UM Hymnal

Thursday

You are the Great Shepherd.

You know me by name.

You know my wanderings, you know my tendencies to stray, you know I am more prone to follow the crowd.

You know me by name Lord. Despite my shortcomings, you know me fully, and when I turn away to wander down a dangerous path, you come looking for me. You do not let me wander off alone, you do not abandon me, you do not let me go unchased.

And Lord, deny it as I may, I know your voice. I can hear you calling me when I stray. Sometimes I wander off even further Lord, even though I hear your voice calling. I know you're calling me back God, but sometimes it's so hard.

Lord help me to listen for your call.

Lord help me find my way back to you

Lord...Help me remember you are the Good Shepherd.

Amen.



Friday

Life can be hard - is there something you're struggling with?

Life is full of joy - is there something your thankful for?

Are there things you want to work on?

Take a moment and write out your prayer needs. Hand them over to God. Know that over the next few months we will faithfully pray for your needs.



Saturday

Oh my God- you are amazing. I give you thanks for your Son Jesus Christ who has taught me to be nearer to you, who has taken away my sin, who is my Lord and my friend. I give you thanks for your Spirit, which is always leading me, directing me, hastening me to seek you in this world more. I love you more than words can express.

I pray that you help to always find the joy in this world Lord. I know that you are always with me, and that you uplift me. May I always have enough faith to remember to come back to you in prayer.

I love you Lord, and I offer myself in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us all. Make me, mold me, use me Lord wherever you see fit. Put me doing, put me to nothing, but in all things put me to you Lord. Amen, (GM)



Week 40 Love and Weddings



On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman,[a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. John 2:1-12

I love weddings. I think that Mary did too. It was at a wedding where she asked Jesus to perform his first miracle. We need miracles to remind us how special God is and how God is always working in our lives.

There's no more wine! Oh no, a party without something to drink. (Wine being the drink of the day, since the water was not pure.) Mary knew her son could do something about it, so she spoke to him. Being the good son he was, Jesus made wine out of water. He made the very best wine for the wedding feast.

I remember officiating at a Hindu/Christian wedding. I wanted to connect with both cultures so I learned the word for Grandma "Nani Ma. In my message to the bride and groom; I thought that I would talk about the bride's grandmother and the gifts she would bring to them: her recipes, her wisdom on life, but most of all her love. I knew that the grandmother was in her 90's and lived in India, so she would not be attending the wedding. I got to the venue with my prepared message, and as I was speaking I noticed a screen with the face of an elderly woman's. It was Nani Ma! She was being skyped in from India. As I shared my story about her, many people were so moved they began to cry. It was so endearing talking about this wonderful woman, and there she was listening to my words. I call that a miracle.

I felt the delight that Mary felt on that wedding day in Cana of Galilee. Jesus performs miracles every day. Let's look for them. Let's be like Mary, and expect them. Amen. (FN)



Recipe



Monday - Wedding Cookies

1 Cup butter, softened
1/2 Cup powdered sugar
1 Tsp vanilla
2 1/4 Cups sifted flour
1/4 Tsp salt
3/4 Cup pecans
2-3 Cups Powdered sugar (for rolling
baked cookies in)

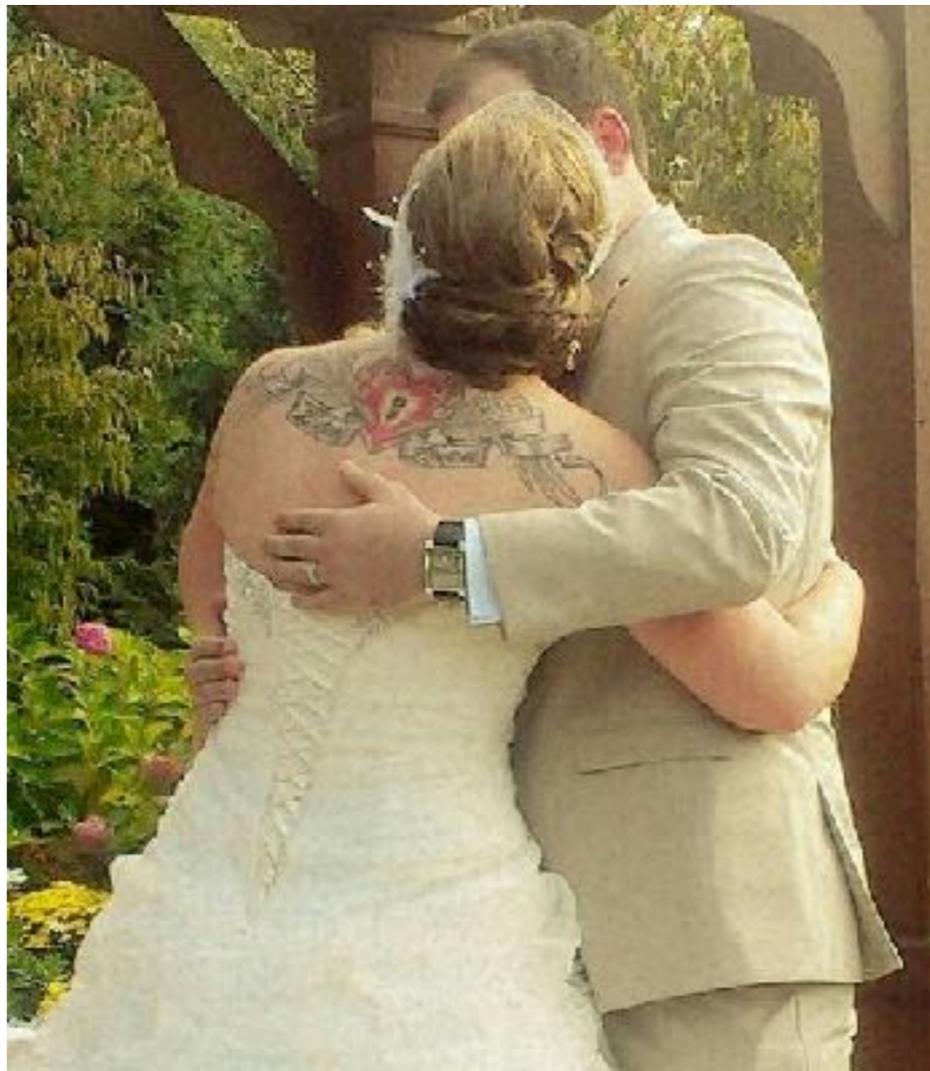
DIRECTIONS

Cream together butter and 1/2 Cup powdered sugar until light and fluffy; stir in vanilla. Mix together flour and salt; add gradually to butter mixture; stir in chopped nuts. Chill dough. Form dough into small balls and place onto parchment-lined baking sheets.

Bake at 400° for 10 minutes or just until the cookies start to turn light golden-brown; remove from oven and allow to cool slightly; while cookies are still warm (but NOT hot) roll them in powdered sugar until evenly coated; cool cookies completely on wire racks. Cookies may be rolled in powdered sugar a second time once cooled to room temperature.



Lord God, Creator of the universe, Father of us all, we gather to celebrate the love and commitment that have united this couple. Bless them with all the sweetness life has to offer. Amen.



Tuesday

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Rom 15:19

**Thank you. We have this special honor, to be a part of these special days.
We are grateful for blessing of sharing your joy.**



Wednesday

Just as artist sees potential in things that the rest of the world needs them to reveal, love recognizes the potential in another that bring it out into needs a touch to plain view.

Love, like many wonderful things takes time and the right perspective. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Artist care about the details, how something is created makes a difference. The artistic talents are wide and varied musicians, designer, painters and writers. Each has it's aspects that make it unique. I'd like to compare the weaving of two lives together to the art of weaving a tapestry.

Tapestries are often in fact constructed back to front, in a sense. The weaver sits on the back side of the tapestry where the knots are, so that they can be tied cleanly and kept out of the way, you can't really see clearly what your pattern looks like until you step away from it to take a look.

Sort of like life. This is a fascinating concept -- living life back to front! We have to step away from it to take a look, from time to time. And I guess, in a way, some of us try to do just that. We take up meditation as a way to step back, or simply stop long enough to look at what we're doing! Prayer is another way to have this effect: it can give us a sort of god's-eye view, or at least time to step around to the "front" of our lives, where the pattern is, for a moment.

Some tapestries have clear and definite images on them, others have less defined lines, still others are, apparently, free-form creations of color and texture, blended in unique ways. All are expressions of the artist herself or himself.

I believe we are all artists, in some ways. Wherever we are in our lives, we are engaged in the art of making a meaningful life. Creating a tapestry, weaving a life -- these are sacred tasks. We use what threads are given to us, what we can find in the life around us. And at our best, we create lives that are considered and care-fully put together.

May all our weaving be done with patience, care and love.
(GY)

Thursday

What do we consider most important in life? Are there more important things for us than money, goods and power? Do we find love of God and neighbor, friendship and affection and concern for each other greater and lasting and worthy of living for? What is the answer we give Jesus today?

The best use of life is love. Make it your number one priority. Make it your primary objective. Make it your greatest ambition. Make it your life purpose.

Why? Because God says make it your highest goal?

Love is what life is all about.



Friday

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

There are many things we deem important in life... but in the end it is the way we have loved that lasts.

Lynn's parents on their 63rd wedding anniversary.

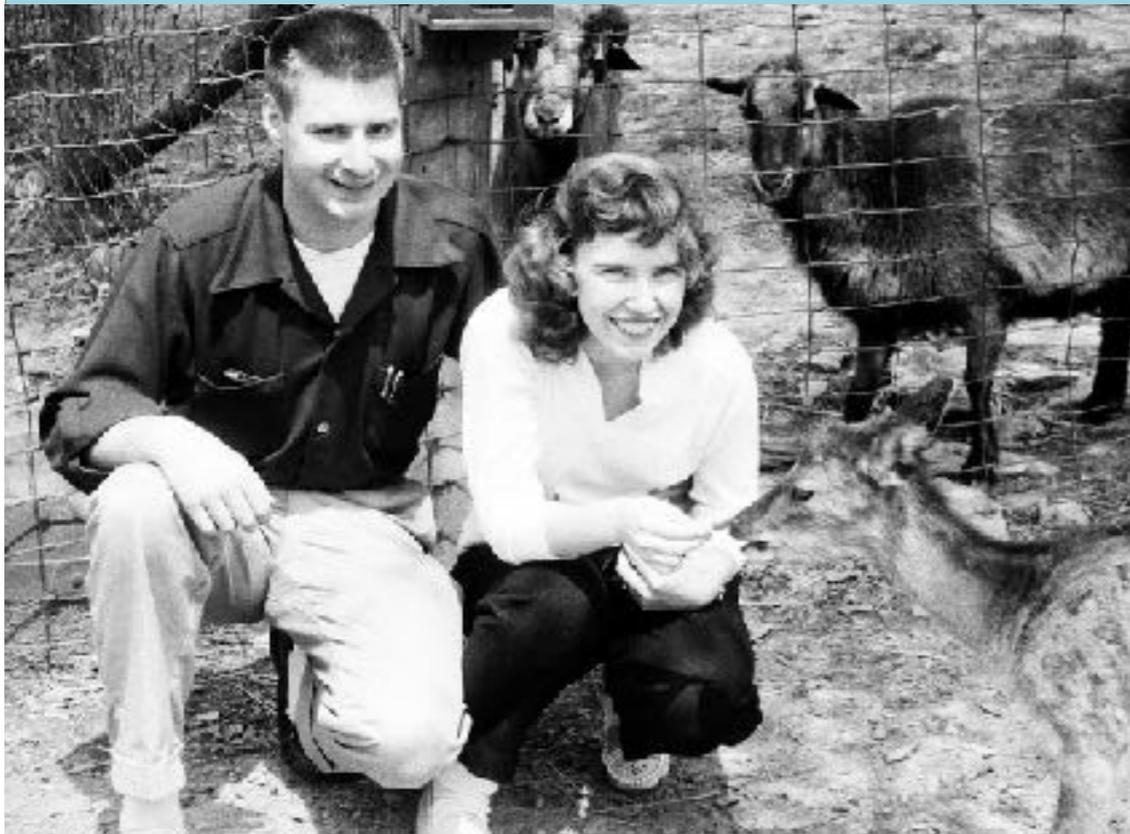


“For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” Ruth 1:16-17

Saturday

My parents just celebrated Sixty-three years of marriage. My Mother was hired by my Grandfather from West Minister Choir College in Princeton to come and be the Minister of Music at St Paul’s Methodist Church in Lancaster, PA of which he was the pastor. My Mother fell in love with the boss’ son. There was a little bit of drama over the fact that my Mother was two years older than my Father, but that has obviously not been a problem. They were married in Richmond Virginia at my Mother’s home church. There were three ministers at their wedding. My Mother’s minister from the church; my Father’s father who was also my Mother’s boss, and my Mother’s brother who was a Baptist Minister. There was definitely an abundance of clergy. In the end my Mother’s Brother was the one to actually marry them, although all three took part in the service. What a way to start their marriage!

(LM)



Week 41 Beach Scenes



He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

He named the land “Earth,” and the water which had come together he named “Sea.” And God was pleased with what he saw. Then he commanded, “Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit”—and it was done. So the earth produced all kinds of plants, and God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the third day.

Then God commanded, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals[a] begin; they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth”—and it was done. So God made the two larger lights, the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night; he also made the stars. He placed the lights in the sky to shine on the earth, to rule over the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God was pleased with what he saw. Evening passed and morning came—that was the fourth day.

Then God commanded, “Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings, and let the air be filled with birds.” Genesis 1: 10-20

I grew up a mile from the beach and spent all of my summers there. When I was small my mother would bring my sister and I there every day. We would meet our cousins and friends and sit in the same spot by the inlet in Avon NJ where the water was a little calmer. As we got older we would venture a little further away from the inlet so we could body surf and ride the waves. After I got married my husband and I moved away from the beach to northern NJ for his Job. I never knew how much I loved the beach until we moved away.

When we were having our first child we decided we were going to do a vacation at the beach. We packed up our six week old son and drove to the Outer Banks in North Carolina. We rented a house with family members there and that was it. We fell in love. Unlike NJ the beaches there were not crowded, there were no boardwalks or businesses on the beach, no boom boxes playing loud music, and no one sitting on your blanket.

We were fortunate enough to go back there most years our kids were growing up. We would go with family and then friends that became like family. We wanted to share this beautiful place.

In the mornings I would sit on the deck with my coffee and devotional book, looking out on the ocean. I would think how blessed I was and how amazing God is. The beautiful water that goes on forever. The quiet sound of the waves and the smell of the ocean air. The birds that would hop on the shore looking for food, or the horses that walked by occasionally. It was my vision of heaven. Even on days when the water was rough and the waves would crash onto the shore there was a knowledge that God was present. Our youngest child, our “baby” is now 18. It has been a few years since we have been to the Outer Banks, but the ocean is still the place I long to be. It is a refuge for me and a reminder that no matter what the problem is that I am worrying about, God is present and in control. He knows how many grains of sand are on the beach, and every kind of fish that is swimming in the ocean. Certainly he knows what I am concerned about. I know this in my heart, it is just a little easier for me to remember when I am sitting at the beach. (DD)

Prayer: Lord help me to be still and know that you are God at all times in all places, Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Hearty Pasta Salad

*Bless our friends,
Bless our food,
Come, O Lord and sit with us.
Amen.*



1 lb shaped pasta, gemelli, fusilli or bowties
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
3 tbs lemon juice
1 ½ tsp finely grated lemon zest
2 large garlic cloves, very finely chopped
2 scallions, thinly sliced
1 ½ tsp chopped thyme
2 large celery ribs, thinly sliced on the bias
1 lb sliced cooked sausage (Kielbasa, Italian, Country)
½ red pepper, thinly sliced
1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes, cut in half
¼ lb smoked mozzarella, cut into thin strips
1 cup chopped basil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cook the pasta until al dente. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup of the cooking water. Transfer the pasta to a large bowl. Drizzle lightly with olive oil and toss to coat. Let cool to room temperature.

In a medium bowl, stir the lemon juice with the lemon zest, garlic, scallion and thyme. Stir in the 6 tablespoons of olive oil and the reserved pasta cooking water.

Add 1/4 cup of the dressing to the pasta and toss. Add the sausages, peppers, celery, tomatoes, mozzarella and the remaining dressing and toss well. Season the pasta salad with salt and pepper, sprinkle with the basil and serve.



Tuesday,

When Morning Guilds the Sky

When morning gilds the sky,
our hearts awaking cry:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
in all our work and prayer
we ask his loving care:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

To God, the Word on high,
the hosts of angels cry:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Let mortals too upraise
their voices in hymns of praise:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let earth's wide circle round
in joyful notes resound:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Let air and sea and sky
from depth to height reply:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this, when day is past,
of all our thoughts the last:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
The night becomes as day
when from the heart we say:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Then let us join to sing
to Christ, our loving King:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Be this the eternal song
through all the ages long:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Translator: Edward Caswall (1854)
#438 UM Hymnal

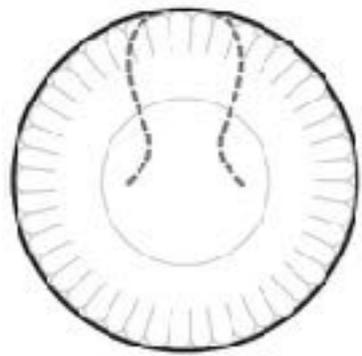
Wednesday Paper-plate seagull

Take a plain white paper plate. Draw a head shape at the top of the plate with pencil or crayon. (it kind of looks like a light bulb

Next, cut around the head but leave it connected at the bottom

Then, fold down the wings! It's starting to look like a seagull, isn't it?

Color the wings, draw face and little feet, add goggly eyes and face.



Thursday

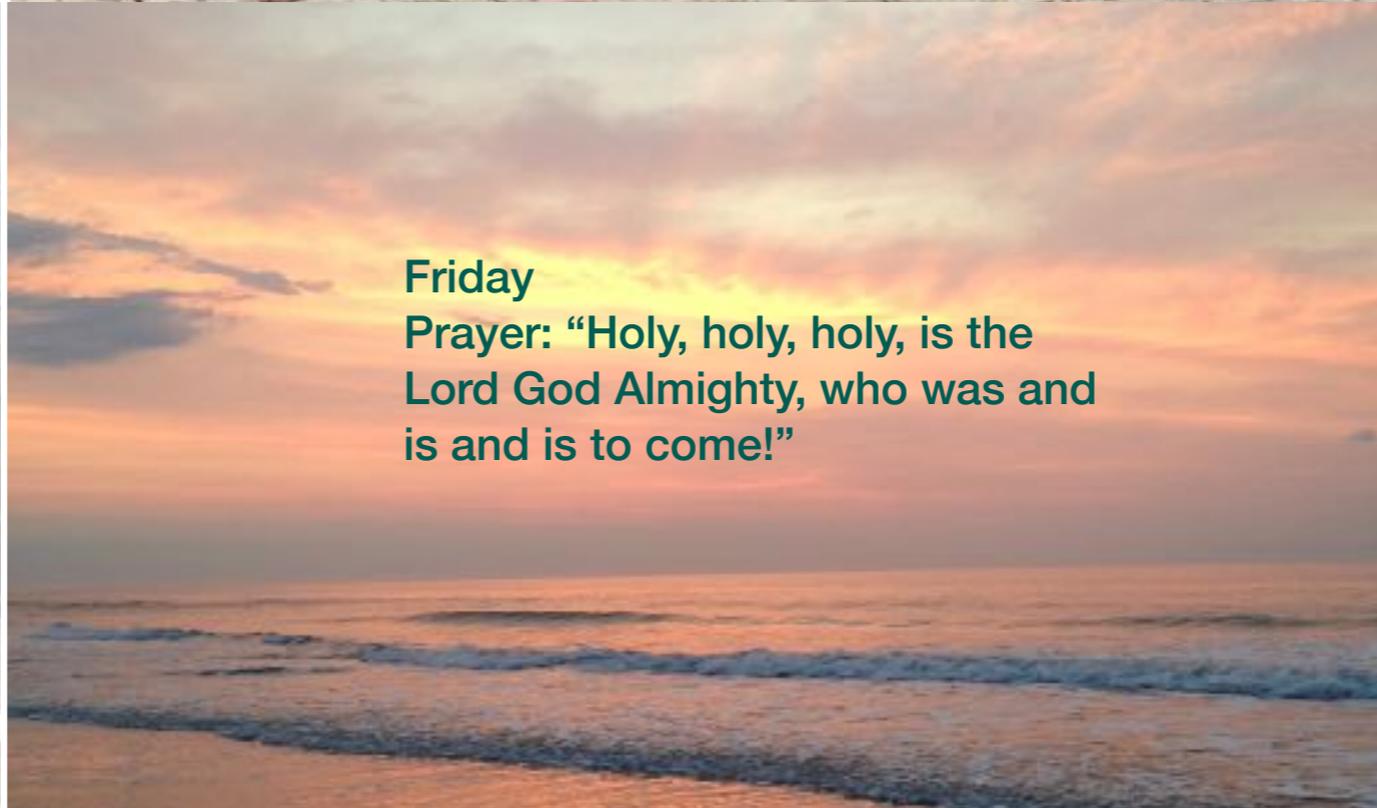
Look at the dunes along the shore. In many places they are the only protection a house has from the wildness of the sea. How has God been your dune? What are you afraid of right now? Ask God to help you see the dunes he's placed in your life.

Be still, and know that I am God! Psalm 46:10



Friday

Prayer: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

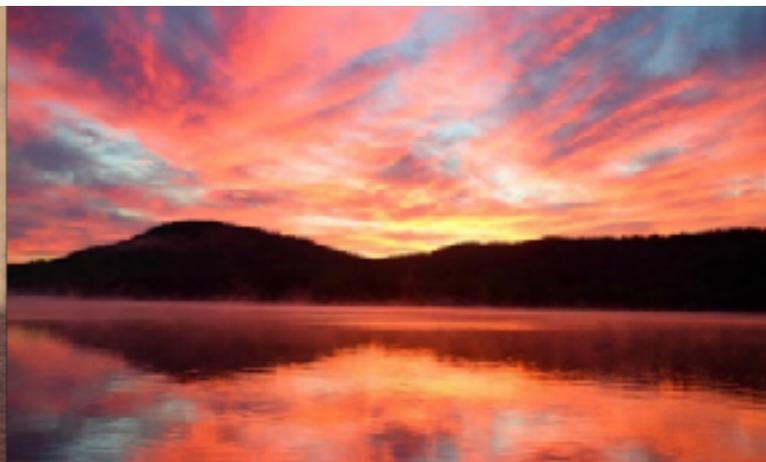


Saturday

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass."

They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed. Mark 1:16-18

Jesus is calling you. Are you ready to fish?



Week 42 Flip Flops



"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" Romans 10:15

I live at the Jersey shore, three blocks from the ocean. Our next door neighbors have a box on their front porch and on it is written, Flip Flops. That's what we wear all summer long.

Everyday that it's sunny my husband or I will say to each other, "Let's go to the beach!" The answer is always a resounding Yes! To walk in the sand and feel the sand between your toes is a great feeling. To look at the vast ocean and know that God created all of this beauty for us is overwhelming. God created us and places us on this beautiful earth and gave us beaches to enjoy. I think about Jesus and how he walked this very earth so that we might know how to live.

Where have you walked lately?

A few weeks ago I went to Guatemala on a mission trip with my dentist so we could bring dental care out into remote villages. Some of the children had nothing on their feet. Why? Because they didn't own any shoes. So our team gave every child a few pair of flip flops. They were so happy to have a simple pair of flip flops to cover their feet. We also gave the children small toys like little balls, or cars or stuffed animals. The joy that they expressed by their laughter and their smiles was incredible.

Today I am grateful for all of the blessings God has bestowed upon me. When I put on my flip flops I think of the beautiful feet of the children in Guatemala and the joy they brought to me. I think of Jesus and the love that exuded from him wherever he walked. What do you notice when you go walking? Think of the simple things of life that bring you joy! (FN)



Recipe



Monday - Stuffed Peppers

We thank thee, heavenly Father, For every earthly good, For life, and health, and clothing, And for our daily food.

4 large red, yellow, or orange bell peppers, halved, seeds removed
3/4 pound lean ground beef or turkey
1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup cooked quinoa or rice
3 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
2 teaspoons paprika
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 can (8 oz) no-salt-added tomato sauce
3/4 cup frozen corn, thawed
1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

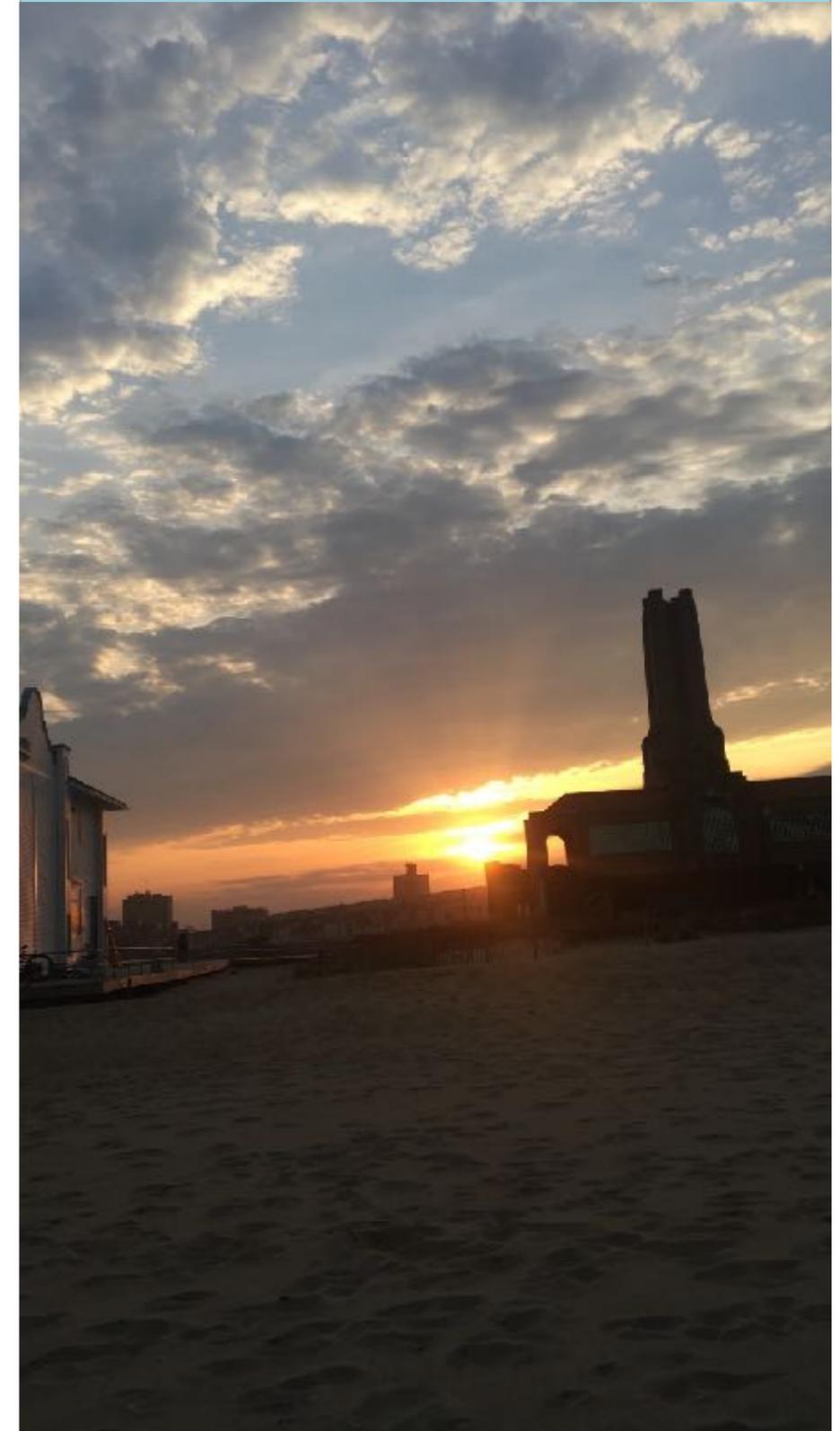
Optional toppings:
Avocado, slices
Fresh lime juice
Hot sauce
Cilantro, chopped
Sour Cream

Preheat oven to 375 degrees and lightly grease a 9x13 baking dish or rimmed baking sheet.
Brown off meat, remove from pan with slotted spoon. Add onions and garlic till softened. In bowl mix quinoa, corn and seasonings. Stir in onions, garlic and ground meat.
Generously stuff halved peppers with mixture until all peppers are full, top with tomato sauce, Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil, top with cheese bake for another 15-20 minutes, or until peppers are soft and slightly golden brown. For softer peppers, bake 5-10 minutes more.
Serve with desired toppings.



Tuesday

The sunset never ceases to amaze me. I love to capture them whenever I can in order to remember and relive the unbelievable beauty of creation



Wednesday

What Kind of Shoe Fits You?

Flats: Do you find yourself static in your Christian life? Do you need to get yourself motivated? It's so easy to find ourselves like that, just moving along without much life to us. Sometimes we need to just get ourselves energized and get excited about living the Christian life.

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Psalm 51:12

Loafers: Are you burned out and finding it hard to take on ministry? Are you being pulled in to many directions and not using your talents for God's glory? Is there something you have been longing to do to use your gifts and talents but cannot build up your motivation?

"You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything." 1 Corinthians 12:12

Pumps: Do you find yourself pumping people up? Are you an encourager? What a great pair of shoes to wear, however who is in your life to encourage and motivate you? Do you sometimes feel inadequate in the face of challenges? We all have times when we need encouragement.

"That's why you must encourage and help each other, just as you are already doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Tennis Shoes: Do you find yourself running from one thing to another? Are you spending more time on the urgent than the important? Do you feel like you have lost control of your time and your plans?

"With all your heart you must trust the Lord and not your own judgment." Proverbs 3:5,6

Boots: Do you find yourself only doing things your way? Have you become so accustomed to taking the lead that you miss opportunities to allow others to use their gifts? How do we balance being responsible for the health of our ministry and sharing the burden?

"Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ." Ephesians 4:32

Waders: Do you find yourself in shallow waters? In the shallow water, we're often busy, and we generate a full array of programs. But we don't catch fish! Our ministries become more about doing than about reaching out.

"When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper and let down your nets and you will catch a lot of fish!" Luke 5:4

Slip Ons: Do you find yourself slipping on your faith just for Sunday morning but missing the passion you once had for Jesus? Is the fire you once had now dying? Do you feel like you are wandering around in the desert, feeling lonely and alone?

"Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way." Psalm 23:4

Flip-Flops: Are you open about your faith? Do you have a comfortable manner of sharing your beliefs? Are you open minded about hearing other's experiences if they are different than yours?

"Continue to ask, and God will give to you. Continue to search, and you will find. Continue to knock, and the door will open for you." Mat 7:7

Work Shoes. Do you find yourself working and doing all you can do for God's glory? It all boils down to serving Christ and following Him. If we are following Him and obeying His Word we will bear much fruit for Him.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24. Adapted from idea by Julia Bettencourt

Action

Take off the shoes you are wearing and lay them before God. Ask him to fit you

Thursday Shoes on Grates

I love shoes.

I own too many and I cannot walk in some of them; but I love them.

At my first church, I had a pair of these adorable spring heels. They were teal and white, with a cork heel on them and I was obsessed with them. Trying to embrace spring, I decided to wear them to church one Sunday. They're just a little too high for me to walk well in them: but I did not (and honestly still do not) care!

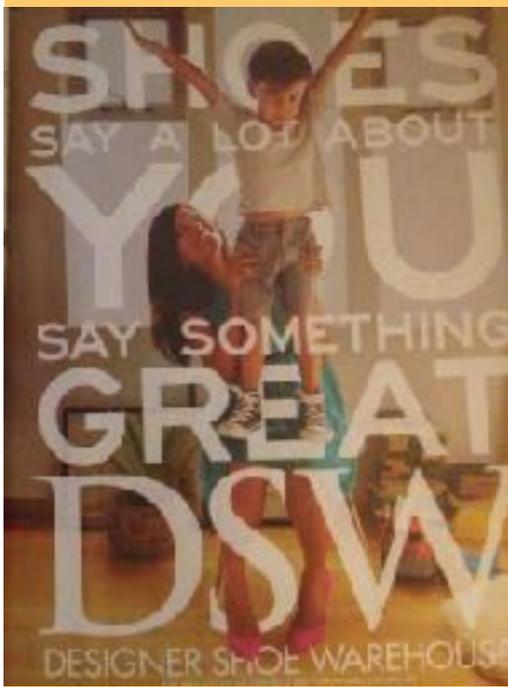
I walk into church confidentially, and as I'm setting up for service, I needed to fix something on the other end of a pew. There were half a dozen congregants milling about, and one of the ladies commented on my shoes and how impressed she was that I could walk in them. Promptly, as I was shuffling down the pew, my heel got stuck in the holes of the grate for the heater; and I fell. Hard. On to the wooden pew. Bruising my hip.

I stood up to twelve pairs of eyes at me. The woman who had just complimented the fact that I could walk in them started at me as though she thought I was going to die.

I started laughing and told everyone I was fine (inside, I was dying). I took my shoes off to preach; which made the six people that were witnesses to the event pre-church chuckle.

I walked out with a bruised hip and a little bit of a bruised ego; and a reminder that we cannot take ourselves too seriously in ministry.

So laugh, smile, wear those crazy shoes, and always remember it only takes a grate to take you out! (GM)



Friday

We love shoes, all kinds of shoes. LLBean hiking boots from 1973: they came with a promise to replace the leather tops as they wore out; these are on their third tops and I can't stop loving them! Water shoes and crocks have been a favorite for these "salsa sisters". The Teva water shoes are worn for blueberry picking along the waters' edge and in swampy places blueberry bushes love. Hiking shoes take take me into my beloved woods. Then there are "Jesus sandals" and shoes worn on a mission trip to Guatemala. Finally, who could resist vintage floral Mary Jane's.

Shoes are important because our feet are important. Our feet take us places and where we put our feet determines what direction we'll go in. What we wear on our 'spiritual' feet is important too.

While we love a comfy crock, sometimes we need to hiking shoes for to traverse that day's terrain. Sweet floral shoes might be good for Sunday morning, but they like wouldn't hold up to the blueberry bogs.

"For we walk by faith, and not by sight..." With the right pair of "shoes" there are no limits to where Christ can lead you.



I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God. Phil 9:11

Saturday

When Stephen and I were on our honeymoon we visited Boldt's Castle in the Finger Lakes. The Castle had a very romantic, but sad tale. This castle was built on Heart Island by George Boldt for his wife Louise. After 4 years of extravagant construction – shortly before the work was complete, Louise suddenly died and George stopped all the work. For 70 years the castle sat, not touched and falling in disrepair.

Sadly this beautiful castle was one man's dream, he alone held the dream and without anyone to sustain it during hard times, it slipped away. Too many times we spend our life fostering a dream alone with out partners. "A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality." John Lennon

Over the years I have been blessed beyond measure with partners in ministry, people willing to try new and untried things. I have learned a successful vision is one that endures, it matters to the people you care about as well as people beyond the organization. Sometimes ministry is hard but never stop serving. Remember you can't out give God – so keep being extravagantly generous – the world needs you and God in turn will bless you.

Understand that things will not be perfect, I know for sure they never have been and never will be. There will be things that just don't work, there will be times when you miss opportunities. Sometimes the mistakes will be great opportunities, others well they are just mistakes, learn from it and let it go. I know I wasted way too many nights worrying about things that don't matter today.

Keep dreaming – you never know what God might have in mind. When Stephen and I visited the Boldt castle it was still in great disrepair. You could see the beautiful possibilities but it was a far complete. Now 40 years after the repairs and renovation work began it is a true castle. It hosts weddings and lavish parties. It is even more beautiful than George had ever planned. Your dreams will move you into places, with people serving God in ways we could never imagine today. But that requires you carrying on the dream. (GY)

Week 43 Growing Things



And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. - Genesis 1: 8-13

There is order in creation. By day three in the Genesis 1 creation story, God is ready to the create growing things. On day one and two we find God has created light and a separation of land and water. Without light and without land and water separated, there could be no vegetation. God, in God's infinite wisdom, knows that order and preparation for growing things are important. And God gives the gift of plant life generously! Trees and plants yielding seeds and fruits of every kind. In creation, God provided well so that every beast, insect, fish, bird, and human being could have plenty to be sustained on the journey of life. (Unfortunately, human beings have not always managed creation or human power and greed in a way that has been able to keep God's creation from suffering from hunger and/or starvation.)

I find that I am spiritually (as well as literally) fed through the practice of organic gardening. There is order. The soil must be prepared and maintained. Compost and manure ramp up the soil nutrients so plants will grow well. Seeds must either be started indoors in fine soil until they are transplanted into the garden, or sown directly into the ground at a certain depth and distance for optimum results. Sunlight is needed. Mulching, weeding, and watering when needed keep the plants from being choked out and the soil moist so the plants can grow. Being watchful for insects and other pests that can harm the plants is also necessary. All these steps are needed for the plant to fulfill its purpose of producing food or flowers. Being a gardener is tough work, but it is rewarding...and I have spent countless hours in prayer on my knees while remembering that all of the produce, while the work of our hands, are given to us first as a gift from God. (VMB)

Prayer: O Lord, today as I do my work, whether it is gardening or making other things grow, I pray that I might glorify you and bless your creation. Amen.

Monday

Growing seeds into plants is a newer experience for me. For years my husband and I planted things like beans and radishes from seeds planted directly in the garden, but bought plants from commercial growers for our tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cabbages, etc. A few years ago, I decided that it would be fun to try growing our own, and so I tried it...and was so glad I did! Not only can I be sure they are grown organically, but it's so much fun to watch the seeds sprout and grow into healthy garden plants that bear fruit.

Here are some pictures of the beginnings of my seed starting project for this year and some observations. Although I planted all of my seeds in similar pots, some sprout quickly and others seem to take their own sweet time to break through the soil. (Carrots [which I sow directly into the earth] are said to have a deep root into the ground before the lacy fronds of their tops are ever visible to the eye.) Seeds and plants sprout and grow differently.

In the first photograph, the two pots of lettuce seeds have sprouted quickly while the pepper plants have not yet emerged. Each plant is distinctive in its leaf and color. Sometimes even varieties of the same veggie have varying coloration. Each plant is beautiful in its own way and holds great promise for some delicious meal to come. Each seedling strains toward the light so that it can grow strong.

I am reminded that we are like the seedlings. Each gifted by God to grow and mature in our faith at our own pace. Each looking and growing uniquely; each having a special place in God's realm. Each needing the light and love of God to be whole. Each one needed and necessary to God's Garden for it to be complete. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you God, for making each one of us as unique and special creations. Continue to bathe us in the light of your love and nurture us as we grow that we might bear fruit for your Garden. Amen.



Tuesday

A hands-on activity: Container garden.

Get some potting soil and either a few small pots or some take-out containers with holes in the bottom for drainage. Fill the containers about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with the soil. Place a few seeds (flowers or veggie) on your soil and cover with just enough potting mixture to give the depth that the seed package says to plant the seed. Gently water, trying not to disrupt the seed position. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the Creator who designed the seed and gave the earth. Put the pot in a warm, sunny window, and watch the seeds emerge. If you do not have special grow lights, you will have to have a nice sunny window and keep turning your pot so the plant will grow straight. Each day as you watch the seed mature into one or more young plants, take time to marvel at God's creation. When the seedling(s) have developed into small plants, they may be transplanted into larger containers (and, weather/temperatures permitting, put outside.) This will take some time—be patient!

To transplant: Find or purchase a large flower pot that you wouldn't mind having on your deck or porch. (I sometime use Home Depot buckets, which are usually much less expensive than real flower pots. You need to drill drainage holes in the bottom and you can even spray paint them in festive colors if you would like.) Fill the bottom with an inch or two of pebbles for drainage, fill the rest of the container about $\frac{3}{4}$ full of potting soil. Gently ease the seedling(s) from the original pot/container. Hold the seedling secure in the center of the pot; surround the roots of the seedling with potting mix until the dirt is even with the soil level of the original plant. Water gently. Put in a sunny spot and water regularly. Depending on the type of plant and size of your container, you may be able to plant more than one plant/container. (VMB)

Prayer: Thank you God, for giving us the wisdom to be co-creators with you in growing our vegetables and fruits. Help us to care for your creation as you care for us. Amen.

Recipe



Wednesday Salsa

Oh dear Lord, we thank you for the magnificent feast you have provided and for the beautiful cooks who have put it here.

For the garden that has flourished, we thank you. Help us to remember people who do not have this food and are hungry.

Amen



10 cups tomatoes, peeled, cored, and chopped

5 cups sweet peppers, chopped (green, banana, red, yellow, ancho, whatever you have)

5 cups onion, chopped

2 ½ cups hot peppers, seeded and chopped (mostly Jalapeños)

7 cloves garlic, minced

½ cup cilantro, minced

1 Tablespoon salt, Kosher or regular

1 ¼ cups cider vinegar

½ Tablespoon ground cumin

3 cans (5.5 oz) tomato paste

In a large stainless-steel pot, combine all ingredients except tomato paste. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and boil for 20 minutes. Add paste, cooking for another 10 stirring frequently, until thickened and flavors are melded. Ladle into hot jars and process 20 minutes in boiling water-bath according to Ball canning standards, or eat fresh. Enjoy! (VMB)



Thursday

"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" –Luke 8: 5-8

Jesus walked the earth in the midst of a largely agrarian society. There were no large agri-businesses. Small farmers at the town market helped supplement the small gardens that were a part of most fabric of every household. So when Jesus was trying to teach people about God wanted them to live, he used examples that they could relate to—sheep and shepherds, farmers and their crops, household cleaning, etc.

As a gardener, I know that sometimes I plant a row of bean seeds and they all sprout and grow into flourishing plants that yield loads of delicious beans. But sometimes I am disappointed because the seeds don't sprout right; other times the birds or mice come and eat away the small delicate newly sprouted seeds; sometimes groundhogs burrow under the fence and eat the plants off; and sometimes an infestation of bean bugs come and destroy the beautiful plants so that they don't produce. But, if I don't take the risk to plant the beans in the first place, I will never have the opportunity to reap any harvest at all. So I plant in faith, knowing that I may face things that will impede the success of my plan of a bountiful harvest.

Jesus is trying to convince his disciples to share their faith with the same kind of resolve. We are called to share the good news of Christ with the same resolve we plant our gardens. We prepare the soil and do what we can to ensure a good harvest, then plant in faith, and tend with care, knowing that if we do our part, God will do the rest.

Prayer: God of all circumstances, help us to be bold in our witness of your love and grace. Help us to scatter seeds of faith today as we live out our faith. Amen.(VMB)

Friday

From the small tomato seed from the packet purchased at the local farm store, to the sprouting seedling, to the newly planted young plant, to the healthy plant filled with ripe and ripening fruit; year after year I have witnessed the miracle of birth, growth, and fruitfulness...God's plan for creation.

As pastor I have also seen God's grace growing in human lives. From the small child baptized into the faith, to a young person giving their life to Christ in confirmation, to a young adult timidly sharing their faith with a roommate at college, to an adult who is active in their local congregation in mission to their community and the world for Christ. And I've seen adult lives that have been transformed by God's grace and love begin to have new life with the same pattern of maturing through the nurture of a caring community of love and justice. Thanks be to God! God's gift of grace to the world is not only the original creation, but the continuing creation and re-creation that happen over and over and over again. (VMB)

As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed: For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. -Isaiah 61:11

Saturday



Prayer: Lord of Creation and Re-Creation, may we sow seeds of new life today for Christ. Amen.

Week 44 Teamwork



Fall is here " How do I know? No it is not because children have returned to school, no it is not the change of weather. For me there is only one true sign that summer is over - and that is the return of football.

Now football never really disappears, there is always some kind of replay, and some channel where they are willing to talk football 365. However, there is that moment when I begin to hear in my head "Are you ready for some football?"

Football is a high priority in our family. Not necessarily my choice, but after 35 years of knowing Stephen Yeske (my husband), it is nonetheless a priority. Now for my family all football is good, but Eagles football is paramount.

Now the Philadelphia Eagles officially play their first game in September, however the team is in formation all summer long. Actually, it is during the off-season that they do some of their most important work. During these times the managers and coaches are looking at the individuals and trying to determine how they might be an asset to the team. We might have high hopes for one team member or another, but in the end it is all about how cohesively the team works together.

In the life of the church, we have just moved into our season too. Homecoming and Rally Days are happening across the region. Fall Festivals abound. Sunday School, Youth Group and Small Groups are back in session. We have high hopes for a good season. For this to succeed you need a team. No one person can be the church, we need each other for help and support. The scriptures describe the church as a body. Not a single organ, but instead many different parts put together for the whole. A single person, no matter how gifted they are can do all things.

I know as a local church pastor there were times I fell into the trap of trying to be all things to all people. If it's all about me and what I think, say and do then it is not a biblical representation of the church. It takes the body of Christ, it takes a team. To do anything of great and lasting value, it must be bigger than one person!

So, what is a Team? The dictionary describes a team as a group organized to work together for a common goal or project. A team has a unified goal. For the Eagles, it was to win the Super Bowl but what does a win look like for your church and your ministry? But a team is much more than a group that works together. Great teams trust, respect and care for each other. They are connected. A team begins with relationships.

How are you putting yourself out there to be in relationships with people in the church? In doing the work of God's kingdom, it is always important to regularly encourage and motivate one another. You have been called to bring people together from different walks of life to love Jesus, love their neighbor, and come together as a team to serve their community. This is the time when you are called to get out and show the world the team the spirit of God has formed. I can feel the excitement can you? (GY)

Recipe



Monday Leek and Potato

*Come, Lord Jesus, our guest to be
And bless these gifts
Bestowed by Thee.
And bless our loved ones everywhere,
And keep them in Your loving care.*

6 leeks, chopped
8 potatoes, cooked, peeled and diced
1 onion chopped, finely
½ stalk celery chopped, finely
2 large boxes of chicken broth
2 cans evaporated milk
1 cup heavy cream
2 cloves of garlic finely chopped
olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp. Thyme

Sour Cream for garnish

Cook potatoes whole in skins, when fork pierces cool slightly, peel and dice.

Cut up leeks, soak in cold water to clean out all sand. Drain and rinse.

Peel garlic and slowly sauté in olive oil until soft, chop finely.

Add more oil and sauté vegetables, add seasoning when tender add potatoes. Add broth, simmer for 1 hour.

Blend ½ of the soup, add milk and cream.

Serve with dollop of sour cream.



Partners in life, partners in ministry.

Tuesday Partners in Ministry

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...because of your partnership in the gospel. (Phil. 1:3-5)

For nearly 2/3's of my ministry I have been blessed to have been partnered alongside the same amazing woman. We have traversed some difficult situations as well as celebrated together in joy-filled times.

Diane is a deacon, she has wonderful gifts for mission, a heart for children - a true servant. She often served behind the scenes, bring food to the pantry, buying supplies for the parties, Her quiet way of being prepared has been a gift me and the congregation.

Never do ministry alone!

Find a partner to bounce ideas off, to commiserate on bad days, someone to laugh with and especially someone to pray with you.

Thank you Lord for ministry partners. (GY)



Wednesday

I have a friend who is bold enough to say when last minute work was being dumped on her, “Your lack of planning does not create an emergency for me?”

Now unfortunately there are many times when we are feel that we are stuck with the consequences of someone else bad planning. But if that takes over our life we are not living out the plan that God has for us.

Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it.

Planning means not putting things off till tomorrow. I will take a bible study next fall, I'll offer a prayer to a sick friend next time, I'll give to the ministry of the church when I get that raise, I'll get my kids to church soon.

I spend maybe more time than some with people at the end of their life. It seems that those who had a plan are so much more at peace. Not a plan to die, but when they were alive a plan on how they were going to live.

They took time to do the things that God asked them to be faithful in, and they had the faith to leave the rest in God's hands. They had shared their faith with those they loved and those who God put in their path. They had worked for God – serving and loving. They had been faithful in the roles that they held in life. They will not go down in history as any one famous, but they were wise beyond compare.

They were the grandmother who faithfully shared her faith with her family. The mother who spent hours on her knees in prayer, the teacher who was kind beyond compare, the youth leader who loved no matter how rotten the kids were. It was the one who was faithfully bringing food to the food pantry, the kid who asked his friend to church.

Being prepared is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it. (GY)

Thursday

Oh God. In Jesus, you sent out the disciples two by two, In the church, you send us into relationships with one another, in preaching and teaching your love and light you call us to be a team. We cannot do what you call us to do on our own. We cannot live alone God. Help us to open ourselves up to being vulnerable enough to be in relationship with one another. Help us to remember that we are not called to be alone-give us the strength to navigate the good and the bad of being called to be in teams. Give us the strength to view each relationship we are called as a gift from you. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.



My First Big Denominational Meeting

Let's all take a moment and be honest with ourselves-denominational meetings are not the most exciting things in the world. If you're a Methodist like I am, you will have a whole bunch of these-District Meetings, Annual Conference, Charge Conference , etc. You may have Synod meetings or Session/Presbytery meetings or some sort of other denominational meeting in your ministry. I have yet to be to one that is all fun all the time.

If you're a Methodist like me, there's something like hundreds of pages of paperwork that you have to do, or that you are in charge of making sure has been completed. These experiences can be completely frustrating and totally overwhelming, but they're worth it.

Never underestimate the power of this paperwork and these meetings though-they are documents of where your church is now, and they are glimpses into resources you can have access to through your denominations or group meetings. They're terrible, but can be helpful.

I find that these meetings also help remind me that I am not the only person who is living through ministry. My denominational meetings help to celebrate what's happening the local church, give me access to things that will help me to grow in ministry, and help me to remember that we are all in this together.

Prayer: Almighty God, I give you thanks for me denomination-the good and the bad of my denomination, the good things and the bad things-I give you thanks for my colleagues in ministry, both clergy and laity. I pray that even as I am concerned about this meeting, or quite frankly a little bored in this meeting, that you would send your Spirit to remind me that this is all a part of ministry, and to help me to see the good, the fun and the worthy in the midst of this. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen. (GM)

Saturday, We Gather Together



We gather together
to ask the Lord's blessing;
he chastens and hastens
his will to make known.
The wicked oppressing
now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to his name,
he forgets not his own.

Beside us to guide us,
our God with us joining,
ordaining, maintaining
his kingdom divine;
so from the beginning
the fight we were winning;
thou, Lord, wast at our side,
all glory be thine!

We all do extol thee,
thou leader triumphant,
and pray that thou still
our defender wilt be.
Let thy congregation
escape tribulation;
thy name be ever praised!
O Lord, make us free!

Theodore Baker #131 UM Hymnal



Week 45 Back To School



2 Timothy 1:7 - For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Wow, that was a fast summer! I cannot believe that we are back to school. I feel a bit disconnected from school life this semester. This is the first time I do not have anyone in my household in school.

While I was looking through all the back to school pictures, I became a bit nostalgic. There is something special about all the back to school rituals, new book bag, new lunchbox, and new shoes. When I was a child, my sisters and I looked forward to these treats. We wore uniforms so no new outfit, we had long hair so no haircut, but we did have one extra special treat.

My grandfather, who lived in the city and rarely visited, would always come to see us off the first day of school. My grandpa was raised in a farming village in Italy. He never had a great deal formal education. He left his home for America alone at the age of 14. One of his dreams was that his children would be able to go to school. Each year he celebrated with us the privilege of an education.

Along with our education at school, my grandfather also cared about our growing in faith. He bought us prayer books and read us stories of faith. He had worked many years for the church, and hoped that his children and grandchildren would have the same connection to their faith and their church as he did. He was our encourager.

The family is the first community of faith and the most powerful influence on the faith of children. For the most part, parents and also grandparents set the foundation for the spiritual life of their children. As parents sharing our faith with our children must be one of our top priorities.

Author Kara Powell who wrote the book, *Sticky Faith* noted "How you express and live out your faith may have a greater impact on your son or daughter than anything else." Our children need us to accompany them on this journey of faith. They need you beside them sharing our stories of faith, taking time for family devotions, prayer, or Bible reading at home.

The church is called to come along side parents and support them in their parenting and growing their children in faith. We are called to love, support, and encourage them as a family.

So this year, as you think about the backpacks, notebooks and other assorted school supplies - consider how will you will be an encourager to your own children's faith or those kiddos God has placed in your life. (GY)

Dear Lord, bless our children. Help us to point them in path that leads to you. Amen.

Recipe



Monday

*Lord, thank you for this day,
For work and play, family and friendship.
Thank you for this food, may you bless it to our bodies.
In Jesus name, Amen*

2 tube (11 ounces each) crusty French bread dough
8 oz Cream Cheese - Softened
1/2 Cup Grated Parmesan Cheese
1/2 Cup Grated Romano Cheese
1/2 Cup Shredded Mozzarella Cheese
1/4 Cup Sour Cream
1 14 oz Can Artichoke Hearts - Drained and chopped
3/4 Cup Frozen Chopped Spinach - Thawed and drained of excess water
2 Cloves Garlic - chopped
1 tsp Basil
1/2 tsp Crushed Red Pepper Flakes
Olive Oil

Coat a 10 inch oven-safe skillet with olive oil. Cut French Bread into 12 balls, place in a ring around the skillet. In a medium bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Scoop into center of pan. Brush the rolls with olive oil, and top with an additional sprinkle of cheese. Bake in a preheated oven at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. (If the bread browns too quickly, lower oven temperature or cover the bread with a ring of foil). Remove and let cool slightly before serving.



My daughter Ally made my favorite dish for dinner tonight. Spinach artichoke dip!! What an awesome surprise.

Tuesday

Teacher's Blessing: my mom is a teacher, and my first congregation was filled with teachers. This is a blessing I used with them every year.

**God of all of our days,
You have called these people to teach! You have called these people to do the work of caring and loving and growing our young ones, and sometimes our old ones.**

God there are days when the calling you have put on your servants is seemingly too much-so we pray for strength. We pray that you would uphold your servants.

God we know that you will send students to your servants that will test them and try them. Give them patience to see the blessing in all of them.

God you know that there are children who are hurting and that these children will sit in your servant's classrooms. Bless them that they might recognize their pain and love them through it.

God you are amazing. You have called us all to something special. Here in this moment Lord, pour out your Spirit on your teachers. Bless them and upkeep them, hold them in your love and your grace.

We raise up gratitude for them God, and pray your protection around them. In the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ, Amen. (GM)



Wednesday

Backpack blessing

Oh God, may this backpack be filled with your goodness!
May it be filled with fun and with laughter, with good friends
and good food.

In the times when it is lost, help us to find it again.
In the times when it seems to heavy Lord, give us the
strength to carry it.

God fill this backpack with knowledge, with learning with
growth.

As this school year begins, fill this backpack with reminders
of your love for us!

Help us to never forget how much you care for us and your
call to care for others.

Bless this backpack, and bless the person that wears it. In
the name of Jesus,
Amen.



These are my middle 3 grandchildren walking to school, Channing, Phoebe, and Eddie.

Kindergartner Channing was so excited to be going to school he would share with everyone on the way that "I'm going to School!"



Thursday

Jesus Loves Me

Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak, but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me, this I know,
as he loved so long ago,
taking children on his knee,
saying, "Let them come to me."

David Rutherford McGuire #191 UMH

Friday - Prayer Wall

"I will meditate on your
precepts and fix my eyes
on your ways."

Psalm 119:15

Write a prayer

Lift a praise

Say a prayer each day.

What's your favorite way
to focus on God's
promises throughout the
day?





Yet you, Lord, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;

we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8

Saturday

Crayon Molded Shapes

Preheat your oven to 230 degrees.

Silicone molds work great, but you can use regular mold.

Peel the paper off a bunch of old crayons (if you put the crayons in a dish of warm water, that the paper comes right off.)



Break the crayons into different sized chunks. Combine different size and colors of crayons in each mold.

Place the silicone mold on a sheet pan. Bake the crayons at 230 degrees for 15 minutes.

Pull the melted crayon out of the oven and let them cool.

Week 46 Tears



I love to travel, but hate to fly. On a recent flight home from a wonderful vacation, I looked out the rain streaked windows of the plane, and the flashes of lightning made my body tense in anticipation of a bumpy take off. Just pray, I thought, just pray. As the plane made its way smoothly into the clouds, it wasn't long before we rose above the storm. When we emerged from the darkness the view from my small oval window could not have been more different from what it was only minutes before. Above the clouds, the skies were crystal blue and we had an amazing view of the sunset that our friends still on the ground would miss that day. The beauty was so unexpected and so spectacular that I was moved to tears. I suddenly felt very close to heaven and awestruck by the goodness of God. At a loss for words, I could only express my prayer with tears.

While our modern culture often frowns on crying as a display of emotion, the ancient church recognized tears as a spiritual gift. So precious were the waters of the soul that some cultures actually kept tears in bottles, which were labeled like vintage wine. This practice is echoed in the words of the psalmist who reflects on God's faithfulness during persecution and says,

"You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?" Psalm 56:5

The medieval church understood the gift of tears as a sign of God's grace. Like the cleansing waters of baptism, tears purified the body and soul and were a visible sign of the Spirit's work in our lives; in this sense, tears were and are sacramental. The gift of tears are shed not in desperation, but in praise and thanksgiving for God's grace made known through the beauty of creation, the cry of a new born, a beloved hymn, or the presence of God in the storms of life.

The 16th century mystic and nun, St. Teresa of Avila wrote, "It is easy to know when tears come from this source (God), for they are soothing and gentle rather than stormy and rarely do any harm (Interior Castle)."

More recently, in a homily last year, Pope Francis even said that crying, prepares us to see Jesus.

If there is pain and sorrow in your life today, weep. If there is joy and awe, weep. Your tears are a gift from God, and each and every one that falls from your eyes are kept in God's precious bottle.

May our hearts never be so hard that the Spirit cannot bring us this gift, and through our tears perhaps we will experience the presence of Christ. Please pass the tissues! (JT)

Recipe



Monday - Grilled Jalapeño Poppers

A game day staple! Once we started making these snacks, not even blizzards could keep us from shoveling out the grill and firing them up! However, we eventually developed a deep winter cooking method with the broiler.

*Cristo, pan de vida,
Christ, bread of life,
Ven y bendice esta comida.
Come and bless this food. Amen*



15 medium Jalapeño Peppers

1- 8-oz pkg. Cream Cheese

1- 8-oz Shredded Cheddar Cheese

8 strips Bacon, cut in half toothpicks

Preheat grill or broiler. Prepare a broiler pan with aluminum foil if necessary. Cut off tops of Jalapeños and slice down only one side, so that the pepper is still whole.

Scoop out all the membrane and seeds. A spoon will work for this, but can cause a lot of dangerous juicy squirts to fly around your kitchen. I recommend using your fingers, if they are cut free. Just do not touch your eyes until you have thoroughly washed your hands several times. Gloves might help too.

Blend together the cream cheese and shredded cheese with a fork. Fill each pepper with just a small scoop of the cheese mixture, and wrap with half a piece of bacon. Secure with one or two toothpicks.

Grill or broil until the bacon is cooked through. Be sure to remove toothpicks and allow poppers to cool for a few minutes before diving in! The cheese will be extra hot & gooey!

Tuesday

“Jesus wept”

Remember the book of The Velveteen Rabbit, the story of a toy rabbit that becomes real through the love of a child?

The shabby horse shares what it means to be really loved, “It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

The velveteen rabbit asked if it hurt to become real and the horse said that sometimes it does, but being loved is the best thing. Love does sometimes involves tears, to give yourself fully has its risks. But, being loved is what makes us real. There will be tears shed.

There are times when I feel like the little rabbit, at one time I was that new servant of God. I could do so much, I could manage with so little sleep. But now, I am a bit shabby, my energy has worn down. Love can wear us out - all the giving and the receiving.

For all who are weary - are you tired of pretending that you are the energizer bunny? Are you ready to be real? Real people share with others when they are worn out. In so doing they find that in sharing their hurts others grow in faith and service to God.

There will be tears along our journeys of faith. God identifies with people who are hurting. During his life here on earth "Jesus wept." When we cry, God cries too. Jesus wept because God cares. He cries alongside each of us.

Our tears can also mark our growth and change. Our love will bring about the life God has for us. The REAL life God desires for us.

Are you missing the real gift of life? The journey can begin today. (GY)

A Prayer of Hope

I'm so very tired, Lord; bone-weary of work, heart-sick over broken relationships, disillusioned with the priorities I've been choosing, and wondering how I got to this place. I want to follow you with my whole heart and life; I want to know such abundant life within that I have joy that bubbles over instead of feeling spent and worn-out. But I don't always do what I know I should do; I don't always live as though you have made a difference in my life.

Give me eyes to see your priorities and the will to follow well. Keep me disciplined where I have wandered. Give me grace in the places I have been too hard on myself. Heal my wounds and brokenness and help me find a way to the wholeness you dream for me. Give me strength to say no when I need to rest so that I may faithfully serve you with my best self. Give me a future with hope—that I may know you are the Lord of my life now and always. In Jesus' I pray. Amen.
(VMB)



Thursday

A PRAYER OF SUSANNA WESLEY
You, O Lord, have called us to watch and pray. Therefore, whatever may be the sin against which we pray, make us careful to watch against it, and so have reason to expect that our prayers will be answered. In order to perform this duty aright, grant us grace to preserve a sober, equal temper, and sincerity to pray for your assistance. Amen.

Friday

Prayer

Woman, why are you weeping?

Lord sometimes I cry because I am happy, sometimes I cry because I am frustrated, sometimes I cry because I am entirely overwhelmed. Sometimes I cry because I am so desperately broken.

Lord, whatever the reason I may weep, help me to remember that you are with me. That you weep with me. In my joy, in my pain, in my sorrow, in my frustration, Lord you are always with. Help me to understand my tears to be cleansing, to be necessary. Help me to feel all of my emotions Lord, and to know you feel them with me. Help me Lord to remember that you are always with me. Even when I feel entirely alone. You wept in the garden, and you weep with me, now and always. Amen. (GM)



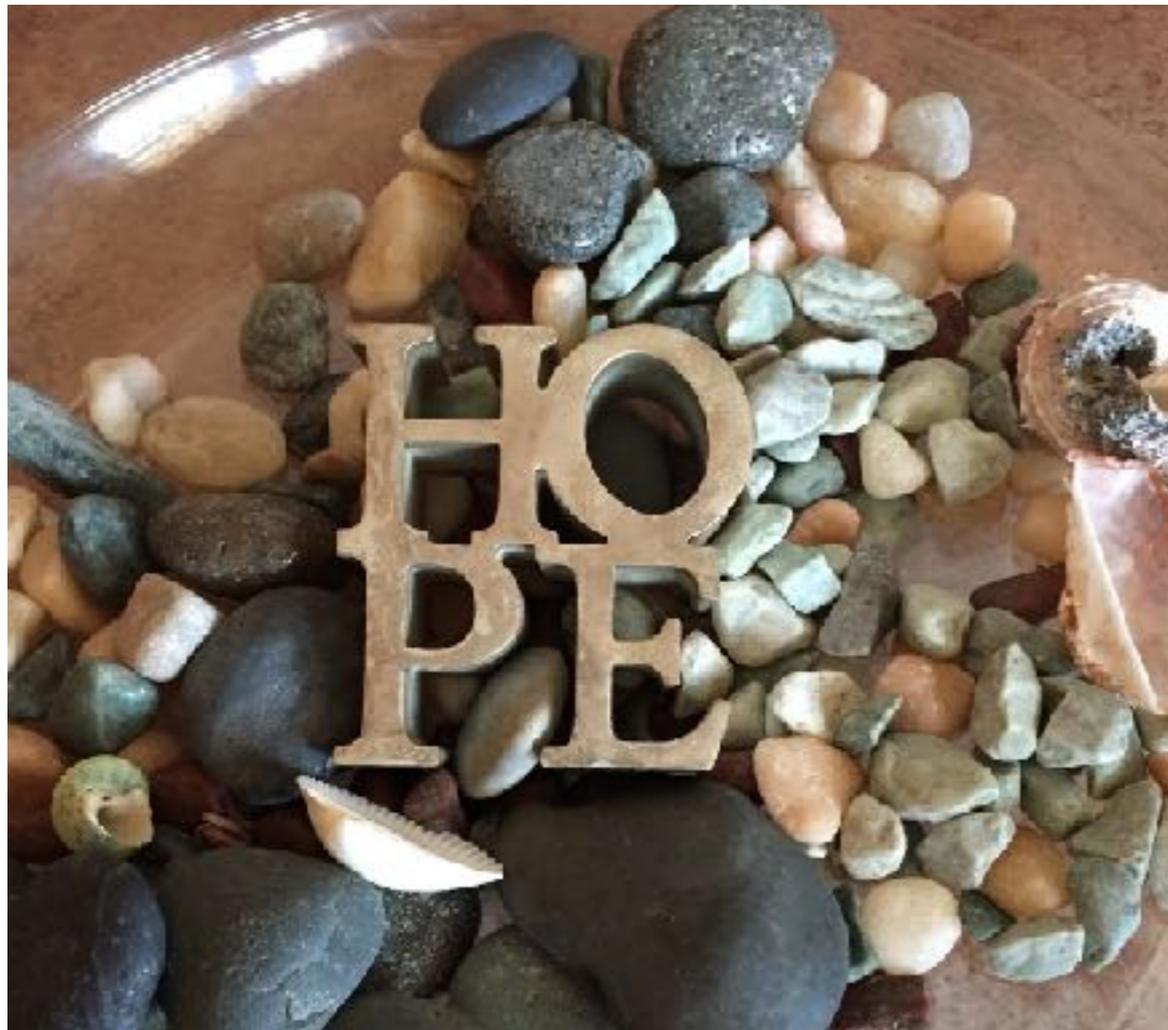
My Hope Is Built

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

*When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.*

Edward Mote #368 UM Hymnal



Week 47 Time, Time



*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Time is something highly treasured in our world today. We have so many “time saving” appliances to give us more time for other activities. We have monitor our days with judgements of being on time-or late. We also have things that are “timeless” and activities and events that are in perfect timing. We live in time, but God is outside of time. God chooses to reach into our lives in time. Time is always God’s time.

There is so much instant timing on things in life. We want faster and faster internet and we order products on the internet and want them delivered almost instantly. It is interesting that we expect instant timing from God. “God, I want this problem fixed now.” When things don’t happen instantly as we want-many in this modern world feel there is not God or God doesn’t hear them. The thing we don’t realize that God is outside of time but walking with us through our time. God knows exactly what we need and it will happen when it is the best time.

What we find most difficult in our world in taking time for God. I am not just talking about worship or church activities, but actually taking time for relationship with God.

Do we take time to invite God into our day or do we jump out of bed and start the day; never stopping until we drop over at night. Do we consider that doing things we enjoy, such as cooking, gardening, walking, reading are all opportunities to invite God into that time?

All time can be God’s time if we invite God in. If we take the time to invite God into our time then all time becomes Holy time. Whether we struggling in our time or enjoying our time, God is there in Holy time and therefore perfect time. (LM)

Recipe



Monday - Chicken Pot Pie

For health and food, for love and friends.

*For everything thy goodness sends,
Father, in heaven, we thank thee.*

2 cups cooked chicken cut in small chunks
1/3 cup butter
2/3 cup all-purpose flour
1 quart 1/2 and 1/2
1/4 Cup Chicken broth
1/2 small yellow onion, minced
2 stalks celery, chopped fine
2 cup frozen mixed vegetables
1 tsp thyme
1/2 tsp pepper
1 tsp salt

2 prepared pie crusts

In a large saucepan, melt butter and then slowly add flour, stirring until consistency of peanut butter, do not brown. Slowly add cream and keep stirring till thickened.

Heat broth add celery and onion, cook for 3 minutes. Add to cream sauce.

Mix in chicken and vegetables into sauce and season. Pour into pie crust, top with 2nd crust. Make a few slits.

Place the pie on a baking sheet and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the crust is deep golden brown and the filling is bubbly. To prevent the crust from getting too brown, you might want to cover it lightly with foil for the first 15 minutes of baking time. Let sit for 10 minutes before cutting.



Gabbi is the best at capturing time in a "selfie" with friends.

Tuesday Friends

Have you ever really connected with someone?
Had a friend who really had your back?
Who has God placed in your life with whom you can laugh
and cry?

To have a friend, you must also be a friend. Take time to
nurture and care for that relationship.

The greatest gift we can give a friend is our time.



Wednesday

Grandparents are proud of their grandchildren, and children should be proud of their parents. Prov 17:6



Thursday

*“The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the splendor of the old.”
Proverbs 20:29*

The day began with a flurry of text messages - greetings of happy birthday, candles, balloons and birthday cakes. At first this took me by surprise, then I was just testy. I ignored most of the good wishes but wrote back to one friend, “thanks but it’s not my birthday.” I scoffed at his reply, “you’re kind of secretive about your birthday, why is that?” He was right, I am not communicative about my birthday. What was up with that? Maybe I just didn’t want a reminder that I’m getting older.

Many of our churches might have the same problem. They just don’t want to be reminded of their age. You are well aware of our “graying church” - aging buildings, clergy and congregations. On April 23, 2018 the United Methodist Church turned 50 years old. How did we celebrate our birthday? Did we get stuck longing for the “good old days”, or did we celebrate the treasure of time and look forward to our future? I suggest we draw on the splendor of maturity to reclaim the biblical mandate to love God, love neighbor and make disciples. Love is timeless. (GY)

Friday

Time, time, time. God we never seem to have enough of it. It always seems to be slipping out of our hands or we are trying so hard to speed it up! We desire so greatly to be in control of time. Lord, help us to remember that your timing is perfect and I am not. Help me Lord to embrace your great love, and to submit myself to your timing. in the name of your perfect Son, Amen.

My mother’s sisters through the years (LM)



Saturday

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Cor 5:17

When we first moved to Hunterdon County we were awed by the winding country roads, bordered by lush farmland and dotted with picturesque red barns. We always took note of the cows and the horses and the bountiful cornfields. We often remarked that God had blessed us with a touch of heaven.

However, soon we took for granted the beautiful fields, and the livestock, hopped on the highway for the quicker access to our destinations.

But on one clear July morning, suddenly, I took a glimpse of the scenery surrounding me and I was awestruck. I was in the center of a great work of art. The sky was clear blue, the clouds fluffy white, the fields of corn beautifully lined the side of the road, the fields decorated the hillside and a beautiful red barn completed the landscape. Had I been blind to the beautiful scene God had blessed me with each day? How had I missed this wonderful site before?

The daily grind had blinded me to the goodness of God, right before my eyes. As a result of the recent changes in my life though, I was able to recapture the awe I once knew by seeing God’s creation through fresh eyes.

Each day are given a chance for a new start, an opportunity to take a look around at all we have taken for granted and give thanks. This is the opening to ask for forgiveness or offer forgiveness, to set aside differences and celebrate uniqueness. To stop thinking about about the way it has been and focus on how it can be, to forget about problems and concentrate on relationships.

I know this is a tall order, however the first step is to stop, take a look around with fresh eyes and give God an opening, I believe you too will find yourself in the midst of a scene you have been zooming right past. It’s not too late, God is waiting on you. (GY)

Week 48 Halloween Thoughts

I was recently reading an article on why we are so pumpkin spice crazy. If you look around there is little that has escaped this cultural craze. Pumpkin spice has pervaded everything - candles, coffees, M&M’s, peeps, ice cream, even spaghetti sauce and dog shampoo!



Actually it isn’t the pumpkin at all – these items are not pumpkin flavored instead it is the spices that are traditionally used in pumpkin pie that are the desired flavors. Pumpkin spices are cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and ginger. They are warm, fragrant and lively. They can make us cozy but with a little zing, welcomed and connected.

So I wonder, how might our small groups improve with a little injection of SPICE?

Sharing – Do we plan enough time for people to share what’s happening in their lives? Small groups are to develop community. The members need to feel safe to share personal stories and reflect without judgment or comment. Small groups focus on mutual accountability, this is a means to consider how we are growing in our relationships with God and each other. How have we encountered Christ in our week? How have we fallen short? Sharing matters in small groups.

Pray – Prayer invites God into the activity of the group. Small group is a place where those who are more timid can explore the spiritual practice of praying. The group should honor different prayer practices, both praying aloud and in silence. Providing written prayers that may be read, or appropriate scriptures such as the Psalms that can be prayed aloud can be helpful. Prayers for one another is the power of small group ministry.

Inviting – One goal of a small groups is to help grow the congregation, for this to succeed the members need a multiplication mindset. A group that is open to new members can eventually reproduce into another group. This will allow for new leadership to rise up and serve. An open attitude also allows a place for new people to plug in when they visit the church. A welcoming approach will keep small groups from being inward focused and stale. When small groups are reproducing the kingdom of God is growing.

Care – Caring for one another builds relationships. Small groups are a place where the body can care for one another in times of need as well as celebrations. However the group might consider how they are called to care for those outside their group too. How might the group rally around a cause, a mission or a specific person or community? How might they serve in the larger church ministry.

Experience Christ – A small group is a place where each person can encounter Christ for themselves. People can learn about God on their own, there are plenty places to grow in knowledge, however it is in community that we can point out Christ’s presence in one another’s lives. How are our small group environments creating a warming of our hearts? When transformation happens in the lives of the members of the small group, this is how the ministries of our churches are transformed.

Finally, small groups this fall are a great opportunity to share some of our favorite pumpkin spice items so light the “pumpkin harvest candle”, brew a pot of jack o lantern coffee, maybe try my Spiced Pumpkin Soup recipe and enjoy a spicy small group. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Spiced Pumpkin Soup (GY)

*Without Thy sunshine and Thy rain
We could not have the golden grain;
Without Thy love we'd not be fed;
We thank Thee for our daily bread. Amen.*

3 cups chicken broth
1 (15 ounce) can pumpkin puree
1/2 onion, finely chopped onion
2 celery stalks, chopped
2 tbs butter
2 tbs honey
1 can evaporated milk
1/2 tsp ginger
1 tsp cinnamon
dash nutmeg

Sauté onion and celery in butter, when translucent add pumpkin and chicken broth.

Stir well.

Add spices and honey. Simmer for 20 minutes.
Add milk stir well. Salt and Pepper to taste.

Heat through and serve.



Tuesday

*Everything was created through him;
nothing—not one thing!—
came into being without him.
What came into existence was Life,
and the Life was Light to live by.
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out. John 1:4-5*

When I was a child the dark changed everything. After the bedtime routine, bath, prayers said, the sheets tucked in, the kisses dispensed and then light turned out. Within a few moments my previously safe world I believed would soon be a scary new land that was loaded with danger.

From about 1st grade to 3rd grade my mother rarely had a night that I did not end up at her bedside. Driven there by scary dreams. I was sure there was evil out there just lurking – ready to scoop me up. Certain times of the year, especially Halloween made the whole ordeal even worse.

I was not alone in my fear of the dark, actually these fears have actually dissipated over time because our “light pollution” means that things are not quite as dark as they once were.

There is an old Scottish prayer for the late night jitters:

From ghoulies and ghosties
And long-leggedy beasties
And things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord, deliver us!

How about you? Are you kept up at night in fear of the things that go BUMP! Are your sweet dreams filled with nightmares. Sleep can be a wonderful comfort, but it can also be a hard time, filled with dreams and restlessness.

I do not know what is chasing you in the dark, but I promise you no matter what it looks like now, Jesus will not be moved out, push out chased out. Rest in that my friends. (GY)

Wednesday

“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. John 15:11

I think Jesus was fun! Jesus was a storyteller. Wherever Jesus went, children flocked to Him. (And kids are fun magnets—they are attracted to fun!) At their age, they don't fully understand all the theological elements and truth about Jesus, they don't know about justification, sanctification, or glorification, but here's what they do know: Jesus is fun! When they do come to realize the depth of the personal relationship Jesus offers, they'll even be more amazed by his love.

Jesus never intended for Christianity to be drudgery. Jesus came to give us life and life to the full-abundant life. We should have a joy that is uncommon! We should be like magnets, attracting others with our joy. People should wonder "what do they have?" We have the joy of Jesus in our lives! We should be happy!

Live like Jesus. Live life to its fullest. Live it like Jesus did. Live it to the glory of God. Live it up.



Thursday: 1 Kings 18:41-46—It takes courage to see things before everyone else does.



Imagination is a gift from God.

Do you sense that maybe God is calling you to something big in your future?

What unseen things in your future do you have faith in? (your kids growing up well, being a good parent for them, etc.)

What could you do today to move forward and prepare for that future?



Friday

**Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day!**

**All thy works with joy surround thee,
earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee,
center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain,
call us to rejoice in thee.**

**Mortals, join the mighty chorus
which the morning stars began;
love divine is reigning o'er us,
binding all within its span.
Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward,
in the triumph song of life.**

Henry Van Dyke #89 UM Hymnal



*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness. Psalm 96:11-13*

Breath prayers date back to the sixth century and focus on the breath as you pray through a certain phrase. It combines focused meditation with the lectio divina tradition. Breath prayers are meant to focus you on a just a phrase or short verse from Scripture. Pick a phrase of Scripture or a short verse and recite it as you breathe in and out. Focus on your breath and on the repeating of Scripture.



Week 49 Stained Glass People



“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 the 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.” Hebrews 12:1-3

All Saints Day is the time when we honor those who have passed from this life to the next, and it has become a very important day in our congregational life each year. When the church called it All Saints Day, the word saint did not mean someone who was perfect and flawless. In the New Testament, the saints are church members, the people in the congregation who have given themselves to be instruments and servants of God. We are saints and sinners.

One small boy was sitting up front for the children’s sermon when the minister asked what a saint is. The child, thinking about the pictures of church leaders depicted in the stained glass windows, said, “I know what a saint is. A saint is a person whom the light shines through.” This is the time when we remember the people who have been important in our lives, people whom God’s light was shining through to us.

We remember and thank God for the gifts and strengths and good examples of those who have gone before us – not only the ones we know, but others who may have been deceased for a while and we are still aware of our debt to them. We stand on their shoulders. They have contributed to who we are able to be today.

We celebrate them not because they are heroes and heroines and are set apart as more perfect than us. But because they are so like us. Who will one day remember us as saints? Those who love us will not remember us as perfect, but to whom will we leave a legacy of a good, generous life that pointed not to our own accomplishments, but to God?

Then there are the saints who are still working among us. The mother who faithfully loves her child despite their destructive behavior, the dad who works a job he hates to provide for his family, the seniors who crochet blankets for those who are hurting although their arthritis hurts them. The wife who cares for her husband with cancer, the grandmother who has taken on the care of a grandchild. The addict who shares his story to encourage another. The teacher who spends her own money to buy materials for her children. The widow who gives from her social security to buy snacks for Sunday school. And the list goes on.

All Saints’ Day celebrates those whose good examples remind us of what we can be at our best. The stories of their lives remind us of who we are, what we believe, and what we can become. They remind us how closely a human being can follow the example of Jesus. They draw us forward, give us courage, strengthen us to do God’s will, and lead the way. Their good examples remind us that God reaches out to us with grace and love and care. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Sour Cream Apple pie (GY)

Oooh, the Lord is good to me
And so I thank the Lord
For giving me the things I need:
The sun and the rain and the apple seed
The Lord is good to me.

5 Cups peeled, sliced, cored apples,
tossed with 2 tbs sugar 2 tsp cinnamon

For the Crust (this recipe makes enough
dough for two pie crusts)

2 Cups Flour

¾ cup Crisco

Little salt

¼ cup cold water

Add crisco to flour and salt mixture. Add
cold water by tbs to this mixture. It is
best to use a pastry cutter or just a fork
to get the pie crust going. Roll out on
floured surface.

For the Crumb Topping (1 topping)

¾ cup Flour

½ cup Sugar

5 tablespoons butter

½ teaspoon cinnamon

Once again it is best to use a fork to
make the crumb topping.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees

Mix apples, sugar and cinnamon.

Arrange apple slices in unbaked pie shell.

Mix topping until crumbly. Spoon mixture
over apples.

Bake until you see bubbly juices around
edges and top is lightly browned, about 50
minutes. You can cover if topping is
getting to browned.



My grandson Channing helped me make this
awesome pie. He is gluten free so his pie was
made with Gluten free flour, be careful to
choose the flour that measures cup for cup.



Tuesday

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven
and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer
any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down
out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed
for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne
saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people,
and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God
himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every
tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or
crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Rev 21:1-4

For All The Saints

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
thou Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
thou in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
and win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

William W. How #711 UM Hymnal

Wednesday

I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. 1 Corinthians 1:2

When I was growing up, I was raised in the Catholic Church. Saints were a part of my everyday life. I had statues and medals of Saints. There were statues of saints in every church, they were all around. Everyone knew if you lost something, you prayed to St. Anthony for help. St. Jude is the patron Saint of lost causes. St. Christopher protects travelers. There was a special saint for almost every category.

And then I became United Methodist.

We do celebrate All Saints Day but we don't have the statues and the medals. But I still pray to the Saints. I was very excited when Mother Teresa was canonized a Saint. She was a simple, humble servant of Jesus Christ who helped the lost, the lonely and the least of us. Saints are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. There are saints in our churches and saints in our loves. May you be blessed by them! (FN)

Friday - Side-Walk Memorial Project

"When your children ask, what do these stones mean- tell them!" Joshua 4:21-24

Using chalk, create "memorial stones" using the squares of the sidewalk surrounding the church. If no sidewalks or inclement weather - use newsprint then post the memorials to the walls surrounding the gathering space.

During worship, design tributes on the squares of the sidewalk surrounding the church or on large newsprint then displayed in a gathering space where all will enter our All Saints day party.

Thursday

A favorite children's message on All Saint's Sunday is to share a piece of stained glass, and to name a saint as someone the light shines through. Light shining through stained glass bring the colors of creation to life, drawing us ever closer to our creator God. These windows bring the sunlight of early morning into the parsonage living room where I sit to study and reflect. I am reminded that what we see - or smell or hear or touch - is only a small part of what is. God is beyond understanding; creation is deeper and fuller and more beautiful than our eyes can see. Praise God!

Prayer:

God of light and life, help us to see with your eyes, hear with your ears, that we might know you all the more, that we might better know and love others. Amen.



Saturday, Windows

In my last year at my first appointment, we decided that it was time to restore our stained glass windows. We had 6 huge windows, plus a circular window that needed to be restored.

When the company came to take our windows, they took all 7 of the windows at once.

In place of our beautiful stained glass windows; we had plywood. And plastic.

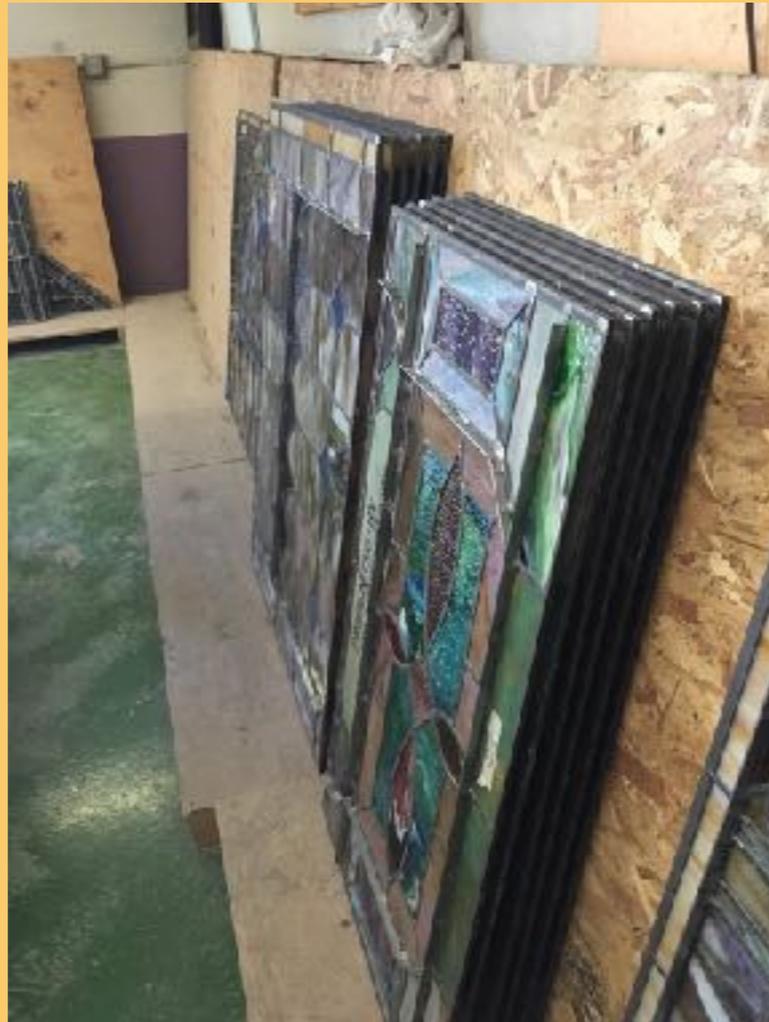
Like a lot of plywood and plastic.

I was standing outside one afternoon getting the mail and a car pulled up and said to me oh my gosh!!! Is this church closed?? I cannot believe they closed this church! I bust out laughing, “No, no, we’re just renovating our windows; they’ll be back soon.”

I cannot begin to explain how many people approached me to ask me about our “closed” church during the time our windows were out getting renovated.

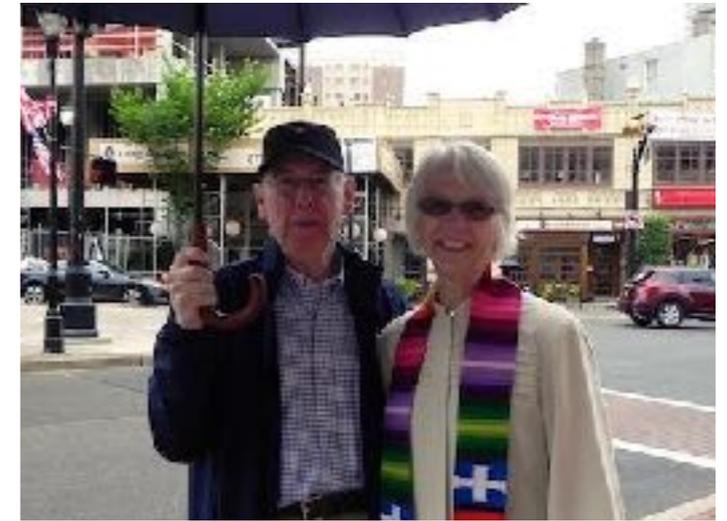
Eventually our stained glass windows came back, and they were beautiful!!! Sometimes, when I need a laugh I remember how the removal of our stained glass windows immediately sent the community into closing rumors.

Our stained glass windows do not define us, but they are a part of who we are and how we are known. (GM)



Week 50 Rainy Days

*“Well now, let me tell you
what I’ll do to my vineyard:
I’ll tear down its fence
and let it go to ruin.
I’ll knock down the gate
and let it be trampled.
I’ll turn it into a patch of weeds,
untended, uncared for—
thistles and thorns will take
over.
I’ll give orders to the clouds:
‘Don’t rain on that vineyard,
ever!’” Isaiah 5:6*



Wow, that’s harsh: “Don’t rain on that vineyard, ever!” There are people who seem to complain whenever it rains; I always wonder, do they understand that if it never rains, not only would we not be here but no life would exist on earth, not even “a patch of weeds...” I like rainy days; if I am indoors I like to be where I can hear the rain falling on the roof. It brings me calm and peace. I also enjoy walking out in the rain, unless of course it is too windy. I once walked once a week on the boardwalk at the shore with a group of women; when I first joined them, they said they walked in all weather. I took them at their word and showed up on a late summer rainy windy day; that day I walked alone, enjoying the solitude and beauty of the early morning.

One mid-September, I enjoyed a trip out west visiting one of my sons in Montana, where he drove us to Glacier National Park, a natural beauty beyond description. Arriving late in the afternoon, we drove the “road to the sun” to the top, a lovely drive with views in all directions, wildlife, trees. The next morning, we expected to drive up and take a hike along the edge; but the rain at the bottom turned to snow and ice above 5,000 feet where the road was closed. We drove around the park to the eastern side. When we couldn’t drive above the snow line, we parked and found a trail, which we hiked in the chilly 35 degree rain. One of my most beautiful and memorable walks, I was chilled to the bone when finished and it took a long time to warm up. But I was exhilarated, happy, filled to overflowing with love for my family and for all creation and our divine Creator. What a beautiful life-giving world we have the privilege to live in.

Without the rain, it wouldn’t even be a “a patch of weeds.” I celebrate the rain! (FP)

Prayer: God of creation, God of abundance, we thank you for the gift of rain that brings life to all creation. May we always appreciate the gift that it is, and treasure it, enjoy it even, celebrate it! Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Butternut Squash

*For food and all thy gifts of love,
We give thee thanks and praise.
Look down, O Jesus, from above,
And bless us all our days.*

2 large ripe bananas (about 1 cup)
1 egg
3 Tbs oil
1/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup packed, brown sugar
3 1/2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp sea salt
1/2 tsp cinnamon
dash nutmeg
3/4 cup milk
1 1/4 cup almond meal
1 1/4 cup Gluten free flour
1 1/4 cup gluten-free oats
2/3 cup butternut squash, pureed*

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease or spray a standard 9-inch loaf pan with nonstick spray, or line with parchment paper. Mash bananas in a large bowl until smooth and creamy. Then add egg, oil, sugar, brown sugar, baking powder, sea salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and milk. Whisk until well combined. Next add almond meal, gluten-free flour, and gluten-free oats and stir.

Pour half of the batter into the loaf pan. Then scoop butternut squash puree into the remaining batter and stir. Add it to the loaf pan and use a spoon or knife to gently swirl. Bake for 1 hour – 1 hour 15 minutes, or until golden brown and a knife inserted into the center comes out completely clean. Let set in pan for 5-10 minutes. Then gently move to a wire rack and let cool completely.

*Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut butternut squash in half, place on a baking sheet lined with foil or parchments. Brush with a little olive and a bit of salt. Roast for 20-30 minutes or until tender and cooked through. Set aside to cool slightly. Scoop out flesh, add to a food processor or blender pulse until smooth.



Tuesday Rain Stick

*Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.
Joel 2:23*

Have you ever been able to just sit and listen to rain falling. How does it make you feel? A rainstick creates sounds like falling rain. It can be a great way to engage children, I have known pastors who use a rainstick as part of the renewal of baptism liturgy.

A rainstick is a long, hollow tube partially filled with small pebbles or beans that has small pins or thorns arranged cyclically on its inside surface. When the stick is upended, the pebbles fall to the other end of the tube, making a sound reminiscent of rain falling.



Sturdy cardboard tube (shipping tube is ideal)
Paint, sparkles, stickers to decorate
Brown paper or wall paper
Yarn

Rubber bands
Sturdy pins or thin nails
Beads, rice, beans, or other material for inside the rainstick

Take tube and carefully insert the nails in a circular pattern about 1-2" apart. Beads or bean need to slowly fall through to make the right sound.

Fill the tube with beads, dried beans, rice, or a combination. If you do not have caps for the ends, cut a circular paper and secure with rubber bands. Cover the tube with paper and decorate.

Dear God allow us to be reminded of your provision and faithfulness. Let the us rejoice in the sound of the rain. Amen.

Wednesday

Dreams are ideas that come from the imagination of God. They are the most amazing, uplifting, mountain top moments in our lives when they are coming to fruition, but they can be pretty painful when they seem to be failing.

When have you felt most tempted to give up on your dream?

Maybe you have been discouraged and dangerously close to doubting your dream. In those moments consider those whose dreams seemed to vanish, yet they hung in there.

By faith each of these faithful leaders lived out a God dream

Noah built
Abraham believed
Joseph dreamed
Ruth followed
Mary received

There are those in our midst who are living out their God Sized dreams, what are your dreams?

Write down something you would love to see occur through your life.

*Identify someone who can help you become who you were intended to be. Set up a time to meet for coffee, drop them an email, or write them a note.

*Remind yourself that God is at work constantly. Every day, identify one thing that happened in the world as a result of the choices you made. (GY)

Thursday

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. Luke 7:24-25

For 5 days we camped and for 5 days it rained. But our foundation was firm. These wise girls knew how to manage and what could have been a miserable time was the best time ever. Prepare for rain and it will not wash you away. (GY)



Friday All Creature of Our God and King by Francis of Assisi

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam,
O sister moon with silver gleam!
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

O brother wind, air, clouds, and rain,
by which all creatures ye sustain,
O praise ye! Alleluia!

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
ye lights of evening, find a voice!
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

O sister water, flowing clear,
make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

O brother fire who lights the night,
providing warmth, enhancing sight,
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfoldest blessings on our way,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee
grow,
let them God's glory also show!
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

All ye who are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
O praise ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God and on him cast your care!
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

And thou, our sister, gentle death,
waiting to hush our latest breath,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
and Christ our Lord the way has trod,
O praise ye! O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!





Saturday

Begin by writing names for God in the space below. Writing the name is a way to invite God into your time and to center yourself for listening. Start to color with markers, pencils, gel pens,.... Feel free to add additional lines and arcs if you want more spaces for color. In some of the empty spaces write words that come to you. Think of each stroke as a non-verbal prayer. Coloring in this space can be a time for just you and God.

Week 51 Life of Generosity



Teresa of Avila said, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out on the world."

While those words sound beautiful, many of us in the body of Christ struggle with how to care for broken people. I know as a pastor in the local church there are many times when I cannot imagine how I can say something about the poor, or needy or lost one more time... but then I do.

We as Christians need a way to discern in the midst of competing pleas for help and the seemingly endless needs that surround us. I have been thinking about this and I realize that there are a few familiar friends who had the same issue. What was their counsel?

John the Baptist: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Jesus: "I tell you this: whenever you saw a brother or sister hungry or cold, whatever you did to the least of these, so you did to Me. For when I was hungry, you fed Me. And when I was thirsty, you gave Me something to drink. I was alone as a stranger, and you welcomed Me into your homes and into your lives. I was naked, and you gave Me clothes to wear; I was sick, and you tended to My needs; I was in prison, and you comforted Me."

Paul too faced a world full of hurt. For years he called upon the churches he served and visited to give to needy in Jerusalem who were in distress due to a famine. He was challenging his young churches to reach out to people who they did not know, who were not of their tribe.

These are all examples of how our Christian giving is an important, visible expression of the interdependence of believers worldwide.

In October 2012, just a little more than a month after Bishop John Schol was elected bishop of the GNJAC, hurricane Sandy hit. The conference office and the bishop's residence sat right on the edge of the devastation. After seeing the devastation, talking to the people and time in prayer the bishop saw a God sized vision. That the people of the United Methodist Church in NJ would be the missionaries that changed their world, locally, regionally and globally. This effort lead to the rebuilding of 254 homes with the help of 11,741 volunteers.

Somewhere out there is a vision God has for you. Somewhere out there is a person for whom you are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. How will you respond when you are called? Will you be generous?

A life of generosity is one that is prepared to give not just as a response to need, but as an act of love - for God and for others. Allow God to inspire you to be the extravagantly generous to the visions that have been placed in your path. (GY)

Prayer: Open up our hearts, hands, feet to be a reflection of you in this world. Help us to give generously out of love. Amen.

Recipe



Monday - Crockpot applesauce

*For every cup and plateful
Please make us truly grateful
Forgive us when we're wasteful
For we're all God's family.
Thank you, Thank you. Amen.*

10 apples
1 lemon juiced
2 tsp cinnamon
½ Tsp nutmeg
½ Cup sugar
2 tsp vanilla
½ cup water

Peel, core, and slice apples and load into slow cooker. Add water. Cook on low for 2 hours.

Add lemon juice, cinnamon, vanilla, and sugar.

Cook on high for another hour.

Smash with potato masher until desired consistency.

Spoon into jars or containers and refrigerate



Tuesday

“Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

Luke 6:39 MSG

I used to think receiving was much better than giving, in my teen years that idea turned upside down. As a child, I would think about all the gifts I would receive for Christmas, I would be so obsessed that I would go hunting for my gifts when my parents weren't home. I would often find them and open them and then carefully rewrap them. I will say it was anticlimactic on Christmas morning when I had already unwrapped and seen my gifts.

And then the turnaround year came and all I could think about was the special gifts I would buy or make for others. I could identify with the sentiment: “Giving, not getting, is the way.” It was such a joy to give gifts that brought joy to the receiver. I was happy to be generous with my money and time to bring joy to others.

Christmas has never been the same since that year. My life has never been the same since that year. I can truly say that as I became more focused on generosity I have experienced for myself, that in giving away my life, I find life given back.

My prayer for you is that you may experience what it means to generously give our lives away for Christ.

May we all experience the joy of living generous lives!!
(JPB)

Wednesday

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. Ex 14:21

Have you ever tried to go forward in your life, but found something blocking your way? Something you could not find a way around, a way over, or a way under? Did you think that maybe you were going to be stuck in that place forever? Then remember how the Red Sea parted that day long ago.

Can you imagine how much faith you would need to take that first step into the sea? But with Moses leading the way, that is what the children of Israel did. Hopelessly trapped - God leads the fleeing Israelites to an entrance between mountains. They actually need to go the greater distance because Moses knows that the people would be too fearful to encounter outsiders and face the possibility of war.

Taking that first step can be a daunting task. The moment we are forced to put our belief into action we are not only taking a risk we are also now committed. I can only imagine how difficult faith had to be for those standing there at the Red Sea. But they stepped out in faith.

Where do we place our faith? Do we find it in ourselves, our family, our possessions, or our country. Or do we live a life somewhat devoid of faith. It can be safer not to act on our beliefs. Faith requires that we be open and willing to be changed. Doing something, taking action, requires us to trust in God and no longer in ourselves.

If it is God's will that you go forward, then God will open up your way. All you need to do is be still, and have faith. Doors will open, obstacles will move aside; if necessary, even the sea itself will part. (GY)

Thursday Apple Picking and Other Simple Pleasures

They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. Psalm 107:37-38

A cool, crisp autumn day
Perfect to be in nature
Precious moments captured
Love and laughter shared
Eating the bounty from the harvest
Simple pleasures, a gift from God.

Dear Lord, Thank you for the simple things in life, help us to not take for granted for the blessing in the ordinary. Teach us to treasure each day. Amen.



Friday

Be An Encourager

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 1 Thes 5:11,14

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. Heb 10:24-25

People accomplish more if someone believes in them and encourages them.

All of us can grow fainthearted without encouragement

Just one encouraging word can make a big difference in someone's life.

So encourage someone today!



Saturday
Freely, Freely

He said freely freely
You have received
Freely freely give
Go in My name
And because you believe
Others will know that I live

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name
I've been born again in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to

All pow'r is giv'n in Jesus' name
In earth and heav'n in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His pow'r as He told me to

Carol Owens 1972 # UM Hymnal



This is Daniel he helped us understand the joy in giving.

Week 52 Gratitude and Thankfulness



As they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and asked God's blessing on it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it and eat it, for this is my body." And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which seals the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many.

One of my family's favorite things to do is to eat together. Generally when we celebrate it's all about the food, and sitting around the table and eating and talking and being together.

I remember reading a news report that shared the results of a study by a group of sociologists somewhere. The study revealed that persons raised in homes where at least one meal a day was taken around a table with all members of the family present tend to be better adjusted, more successful, and happier as adults. Those kinds of studies always remind me of the family table at which I grew up.

We had one of those large country tables with benches instead of chairs. We played games and did homework and visited around that table. But most of all, I remember gathering around that table for our evening meal. Sometimes it would be just the family.

But often the gathering included visiting relatives, or a lot of friends. The more the merrier. There was never a time when an extra place couldn't be set, we always brought home the homeless from college or work.

Important things happened at that table. Decisions were made about school and work and play. Stories were told and retold, traditions were passed on, prayers were prayed, personalities were shaped, and dreams were dreamed. I served my first meal to my husband at that table.

It wasn't all sweetness and light. Often the table was where bad news was shared, where discipline was given, where fears were reluctantly revealed and forgiveness sought and given.

When my parents home was destroyed by fire, one of the hardest things we had to do was say good-bye to that table. I give thanks for the table... the familiar table... the family table.

In this season of thanks we will gather around tables together. As we sit around and share stories and blessings, laughter and tears, be thankful for the covenant between God and you - a beloved child. Be thankful for a promise of love, a promise of forgiveness and grace - and lavishly share that love. (GY)

Recipe



Monday - Baked corn GY

*Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat,
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you, God, for everything! Amen.*

3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground pepper
1 tablespoon minced onion
1 1/4 cup milk
2 cans corn
8-ounces sour cream
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
Topping:
1 1/2 Cups crushed butter crackers
1/4 cup melted butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F
In a medium saucepan melt butter
Whisk in flour and cook 1 minute.
Add salt, pepper, onion, and stir



Whisk constantly, add milk and bring to a low boil
Reduce heat and simmer 3 to 4 minutes or until mixture thickens slightly.
Add this mixture in a medium bowl along with corn, sour cream, and cheese. Stir.
Pour into an oven safe dish
Combine 1/4 Cup melted butter and crushed butter crackers.
Evenly spread cracker mixture over casserole.
Bake at 350 degrees F 25 to 30 minutes or until edges are bubbly and crackers are toasted.

A family of turkeys
out for a stroll in our
backyard.



Tuesday

Come Ye Thankful People Come

Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God's own field,
fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown
are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day
all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store
in the garner evermore.

Henry Alford 1844 #694 UM Hymnal

Wednesday

green with gratitude
for verdant earth in which
generations know each other
for verdant earth in which
trees can grow even out of rocks
for verdant earth with its
highest ice-capped mountains and its
tiniest creatures

green with gratitude
for verdant earth with
pathways that show the way forward
for verdant earth that
inspires us to search for and find
its creator beyond understanding

green with gratitude
for verdant earth whose
creator is made known through and by
never-ending abounding love in and for all (FP)



Thursday

Thanksgiving tradition at our table has always been a sharing why we are “thankful.” Take time to thank God for your blessings. Today we give thanks for you - for sharing this journey with us.



Friday This photo is from the morning that we celebrated my VBS chair for her 50 years of Vacation Bible School leadership at Frankford Plains UMC.

Linda Tartar was a deeply faithful woman of God who loved teaching children more than anything else in life. Unfortunately, Linda passed earlier in 2018-but I am forever grateful for the way her spirit and her faithfulness lives on in all of us. (GM)

Saturday,
Gratitude for my Sisters:

I am the youngest (and newest member) of the SALSA sisters, and I am eternally grateful to be a part of their ranks. The women in this group have mentored me, loved me, and passed many many things (both knowledge and BOOKS!) onto me over the last few years. These women have blazed trails in life and in ministry, and I am merely following along behind them.

These women have seen me through heartbreak, through doubt, through fear, through triumph, through excitement. We together have walked a mighty deep path as we drew closer to God and to one another. It has been an unexplainable, unintelligible blessing to be able to love and be loved by my sisters.

Miranda Lambert sings these lyrics in her song, Keeper of the Flame, "I'm walking in their footsteps I'm singing their old songs Somebody blazed this trail I'm treadin' on I'm bent, but I'm not broken I'm stronger than I feel I'm made of flesh and bone Not made of steel" This song continues to remind me of my SALSA sisters and of all of the women who have gone before me, and those that will come after me. Sisterhood is about building each other up, blazing trails and offering a helping hand to those that come after you. We shoulder each other's burdens and draw close to one another. We remember that we cannot do this journey alone and that we NEED one another.

My SALSA sisters are among the best gifts God has ever given me.

They are my safe harbor, my landing pad and they are also my sending group. They constantly challenge me to be a better pastor, a better woman, a better human. They have taught me more about God, faith and the life we live than any of them realize.

I am who I am because God gave me you ladies. Everything I do is to honor you, and to blaze the trail for those who come after me. Thank you for sharing your lives with me, for blazing the trails that you have, and for always offering me love, light and life in Christ.

I love you now and always. (GM)

*Thank you for making this journey with us. We pray this has offered
you hope, and encouragement for your journey.*

*Grace and Peace,
Your sisters in Christ.*



The End

Published by Salsa Sisters

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