



Devotional for 2020

A Word of Thanks and Advance Apology

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A special thanks also goes out to the South County Ministerium. You have made this project a life-giving challenge. Without your support, this Devotional would not have happened. It was an extremely short deadline for contributors and an even shorter deadline for the editing process.

Please accept our apologies in advance for any editing errors or omission that were inadvertently added during this whirlwind exercise. It was a challenge worth the effort. It has brought us all together as faithful Disciples of Christ living in the beloved community. Thank you for your willingness to experiment with us as we partner with the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ. We are excited to journey through Lent with you.

How to Use This Resource

Each day has scripture readings from year C of the revised common lectionary maintained on the Vanderbilt University website. There are 47 readings and reflections. These readings are traditionally used to help frame your day. You may read as many of the selections for the day as you would like, but are encouraged to at least read the passages on which our contributors are reflecting each day.

Before beginning, pause to quiet yourself and create a place where God might dwell in your time of devotion and reflection. Offer up a small prayer that God might guide your time. To end your devotion time, pray for the things that are weighing on your heart as well as the hope that you may be mindful of the day's devotion.

Finally, be sure to write any questions or thoughts you would like to share with someone later. Our faith development is a community endeavor. Hopefully, this devotional will provide a jumping off point for growth and community.

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Isaiah 58:

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

When I read this scripture, it reminds me of someone trying to show off, a kind of “look at me” mentality. Growing up, that was always frowned upon in our house, trying to be boastful, or doing things for the recognition it may bring, instead of doing it for God’s glory. When I think on it now, I picture God with a frown on His face, looking down at those who are boastful, and thinking to Himself, “Are you serious? You only have all of this because I gave it to you”. Oh, how quickly we forget that everything we have is from God, and to God we should return it. When I think of treasures, I think of wonderful memories and the love of those around me, not the material things I have here on earth. Those things won’t get me anywhere, especially to heaven. That can only happen through my belief that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, and by sharing His love with others around me. This Lenten season, let us all remember what our Father in heaven gave up for us...His only Son, to die on a cross for OUR sins. Not His, because He was sinless, but so that we could one day sit with our Father in heaven and partake of the wonderful eternity He has promised.

How are you giving back to God? And are you doing it without being boastful or expecting anything in return?

Toni Wetzel, Mt. Nebo UMC

Thursday, February 27, 2020

Psalm 51; Romans 1:1-7

Jonah 3:1-10

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Listen to God. Heed God's warnings. Set time aside to pray and fast to hear from the Lord. It doesn't matter who you are, what you have or what situation you're in, obey the Lord and He will use you. You have to be open to Him and what plans He may have for you.

Humble yourself, turn from sinful ways and call on God. Don't follow what the world does, follow what God's word says. God is merciful and loving, but wants his people to obey and follow in His ways. God shows compassion to his people. God wants a dialog with us not a monolog and wants to know what's on our hearts.

Don't wait until you're in the "belly of the whale" to finally listen and obey God. Just think how much time, effort and discomfort Jonah would have saved himself if he would have listened to God the first time. Spend this Lenten time to read your bible, pray and draw closer to God! Make a habit of it and don't let it stop after Easter.

What is God telling you? How does God want to use you?

Linda Smith
Salem UMC

Friday, February 28, 2020

Romans 1:8-17; Jonah 4:1-11

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is [b] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

“Have mercy on me Lord.”

The first time I sang in front of a congregation was when I was three years old. It was at a Sunday evening church service and I sang a duet with my Dad. I still remember the song: *“Mercy Lord, I beg of thee. Break these bonds of iniquity. And fill me with love and purity. Mercy, mercy, Lord.”* At such a young age, I had never experienced “bonds of iniquity” and so I had no concept of what mercy meant.

As the years progressed, I came to know those bonds, not only in the lives of others, but in my own life as well. Yet, I did not come to really understand the concept of mercy until my Honduran friend taught it to me. In Spanish, the word for mercy is *misericordia* - in accordance with my misery. It means to step into the place of the one in need of mercy - to feel what they are feeling, experience what they are experiencing, and then judge them from that position. That is what God offers. He felt our suffering and judges us from that place of pain.

Have you cried out for that kind of mercy? Have you offered that kind of mercy?

The Rev. Virginia Carr, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Lappans

Saturday, February 29, 2020

Psalm 51; Matthew 18:1-7

Isaiah 58:1-12

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness[a] will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

Isaiah 58:1-12 reads much like a court proceeding in which a case of injustice is brought before the Lord. In this case Judah feels that they have faithfully executed all that God ask of them. They even site that they have fasted, yet He has not answered their fasts.

God responds, through Isaiah, much like He does through the prophet Micah (a contemporary of Isaiah) that the people of Judah are careful in performing their ceremonial duties or outward religious performances, but that their hearts are not right with God. It is easy to do certain activities like show up to church, give a faithful offering, lead a Bible study small group or hold an office in the church. What Isaiah is saying is that these are all good, but they do not make up for a person’s character. God’s call is not for outward show but for the transformation of the heart and according to Isaiah 58:1-12 and Micah 6:6-8, this is best revealed by our treatment of others, especially those who are in need or distress.

What areas of your spiritual life are for show and in what ways is God calling for a transformation in your attitudes and character?

Shawn Paris - Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, March 1, 2020

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Guilt and anxiety are deep emotions that we all have experienced. In my life I have had times of great guilt and times when I have felt so tense and anxious, I cannot function properly. The thoughts are consuming and complex. We tend to psychoanalyze our guilt. We push guilt to the deepest part of our souls and rationalize why we chose to sin the way we did. I believe acknowledging guilt is healthy, because when we are acknowledging why we have sinned, we can allow this guilt to drive us to seek forgiveness and God's mercy.

Regardless of the sin you can always find peace in God because God is faithful. We don't have to keep feeling guilty about our sin. God is there to heal and restore. Let's not stay in the mire of our guilt. God's redeeming love offers restoration and healing from the inside so that we can go forward forgiven.

Are you submitting to the Holy Spirit's restorative power in your life to overcome the guilt?

Ashley Fritz, Middletown UMC

Monday, March 2, 2020

I Kings 19:1-8; Hebrew 2:10-18

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

In Psalm 32, I felt like God will forgive you if you have done something wrong, but he wants you to admit your mistake and God doesn't holding any feelings against you. It also says you will hurt if you don't talk to God. I also thought about when you tell God your feelings, he will clean out everything you have done wrong. Psalm 32 talks about if we believe in God and pray, we don't feel to go against him and the devil will just pass through us. God is keeping us safe so the people who are dangerous don't get near. Like we are a crab and God is a sea anemone, the squid is the bad guy. To me the main theme was God is always on your side, even if you have done something wrong. This reminds me when Jesus was on the cross, there were two other men. One said you should not be on the cross you have not done anything wrong; I have been collecting taxes for years. Jesus said you will be in the kingdom of heaven with me because you believe in me now.

When will God get impatient? Because we have continued to ask for forgiveness from God.

Maddison Dorsey, Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Hebrews 2:10-18

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

As we move through Lent and the upcoming Holy Season of Easter, it is a teaching moment that Paul writes to the Hebrews reminding them of the importance of keeping a firm grip of our Lord's word.

God Almighty sent his son in human form to experience mortal pain, suffering, and temptations. All leading up to his ultimate sacrifice on Calvary for our redemption and salvation... leading a path for his family to eternal glory.

A common origin exists between Jesus and we his followers. We are the family of God. A family needs to constantly work on its relationship. We all experience mountains and valleys in our personal and church family life. It is critical we remain on task to do what is best for our Christian family.

Keeping faith with Jesus' message of forgiveness, redemption and salvation is the key to a strong church family. During this most holy season, as we face internal and external conflict, we need to keep a firm grip on asking ourselves "what would Jesus do, and what would he expect from his family?".

In Christ.
Bud Price, Mt. Nebo UMC

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

Psalm 32

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control." Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

When I first read Psalm 32, I was focusing on telling the truth. The more I studied it, a new realization became clear to me. When I read this passage through the eyes of someone who has decided to trust Christ and have faith that he will guide their path, I read it as a message of hope. There is a sweet sound of freedom that God gives us when we choose to trust in his direction. I imagine being on a tightrope and although I have all of these harnesses and buckles attached to me, it only gives me anxiety. "Surely all these safety contraptions mean they know I'm going to plunge to certain death!" Then I look out and I see Jesus standing on the rope just ahead of me. He's smiling and he's holding out his hand. I can hear his gentle, deep voice saying, "Trust me." I realize I don't need all of these straps and tethers, they're really just holding me back. When we choose to follow Jesus and trust in his direction, we can rest in the fact that he's got us. It's no guarantee that things will be easy or that we won't be hurt along the way, but by choosing to take his outstretched hand and let his unfailing love guide us along this path of life, we can rejoice and be glad because he is our rescuer.

Further Reflection:

How does the burden of sin keep us from choosing to trust God?

Amy Garrett – Mt. Nebo UMC

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3

2 Timothy 1:3-7

I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

One evening within the last year, I was parked at the post office lot, waiting for my husband to return from dropping off something to the church. It was dark outside, and the church was dark as well. My headlights were shining on Salem. She was quiet, and peaceful. As I sat in silence, looking at the enlightened building, I wondered “who has she welcomed all these years?” “What has she seen, and experienced?” Friendships. Separation. Love. Bitterness. Couples. Proposals. Marriages. Births. Baptisms. Divorce. Death. Prayer. Communion. Children. VBS. Sharing meals. Joy. Heartache. Love. Tears. How many generations of families have worshipped and served within her walls?

Among other roles, I am beyond blessed to serve as an altar guild steward. I have decorated for seasons, undecorated, changed paraments, replaced candles, organized communion elements, arranged lilies and poinsettias, climbed ladders, made doves fly, and numerous other visuals over the years. I have stood at the altar and prayed. I have stood at the altar and cried: for friends with cancer, for guidance during difficult times, for employment, for answers, to hear God’s voice. It was during one of those times not long ago, as I cried and prayed at the altar, I opened my eyes, and in front of me was my own reflection in the cross. All those times, I had never ‘seen’ this before. A warm, overwhelming feeling came over me. I saw myself in God and God in me. It was a humbling moment. I was not alone, and he assured me I never will be. All will be well. No matter what, thank you Lord God for your unconditional blessings and love.

I wonder if others who have served at the altar in years before me have ever noticed their reflection in the cross?

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

1 Corinthians 15:49 (NRSV)

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Thank you, God for the many opportunities and life moments I’ve experienced at my home church. I’m grateful for my son, watching him grow and being able to see God at work in him as he enters into adulthood and the next seasons of his life. I look forward with hope, for what God has planned for future generations of Salem UMC, Keedysville.

Further reflection: Do you remember to thank God daily? Are you serving by sharing your spiritual gifts with others? Years from now, what will your future descendants discover about how you lived your life in the church?

Prayer for today: *Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)*

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Lori Flook Bishop – Salem United Methodist Church, Keedysville, MD

Friday, March 6, 2020

Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

“The Lord is your shade...so that the sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night...”

I have a set of Russian stacking dolls which I bring out for Lent. There are six of them. Each week another doll, smaller than the last one, is revealed as I open them up. Finally, in Holy Week I reach the smallest one. This is the only one which is solid and cannot be opened. I do this each year to remind me that the Lenten process of self-examination and renewal happens by peeling off layer upon layer until we reach the core of our sinful being. Sometimes what might lie under a layer could burn me like the light of the sun. Other times it may be dim like the light of the moon, but can still sting. The assaults to my soul do not just come from others, they can also come from a truthful knowledge of my own sins. Where will my help come from? The Psalmist tells us that God will be a shade.

Are you afraid to examine your sins because they may burn? Here's the good news: God provides sun screen

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Saturday, March 7, 2020

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

The story of the Roman Centurion's encounter with Jesus is especially interesting. Not only was he a Gentile, but he was also a military officer.

He cared about the men he led and when one became gravely ill, he sent friends to ask Jesus to come heal his servant. Then he seems to have second thoughts for he goes out to find Jesus. "Don't trouble yourself," he tells the Healer. "just say the word and my servant will be healed.

He explains that he gives orders and they are obeyed, and he receives orders and he obeys, "But say the word and my servant will be healed."

"I have never seen such faith," Jesus says, "not even in Israel." And the servant was healed.

In what ways can you increase your faith?

Penny Estes Wheeler – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; Matthew 17:1-9

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again". "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Looking At Jesus

Jesus talking to Nicodemus is the best-known conversation in the Bible. It is during this time that Jesus explains because of the depth of God's love, Jesus was sent to bring us eternal life.

Jesus refers to an incident in the Old Testament when God punished the people for their complaining by sending snakes to bite them. When the people apologized for what they had done, Moses prayed for them, and God told him to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole so that those who look at the snake would live. Moses made the snake and those who looked at it were healed. It does not make sense that looking at a snake would heal people, but it happened.

It also does not make sense that just believing in Jesus will give us eternal life. It would make more sense for us to work to earn life. It does not need to make sense to us for it to be true. Jesus was put on the Cross so that by believing in Him we can have eternal life.

Do you know that believing in Jesus has given you eternal life?

Pastor Bob Sharp, Benevola UMC

Monday, March 9, 2020

Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9

Hebrews 3:1-6

“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. ³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,”^[a] bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”

We are God’s house – we are His creation. Everything we have belongs to God, including us. If we keep our faith and honor him, He will be pleased. We need to believe and keep faith so that His house will not crumble. We can do this by keeping our eyes looking at Jesus because he is the Son of God and is our path to eternal life. During Lent we need to get rid of all the distractions that keep us from God and doing God’s work, so that we, too, can be a faithful servant like Moses.

What is in your life that prevents you from giving yourself fully to God?

Dylan Horton, Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13

Isaiah 65: 17-25

“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD. (NIV)

We live in a broken world in which sometimes it seems that things just can’t get any worse. We read the news filled with accounts of sickness, death, fighting, poverty, and lawlessness – the list seems endless. We cry out, “Lord, what is this world coming to?” God spoke through Isaiah at a time when the people had lost all of what they had; they had been defeated by the Babylonians; many had been killed, their youth carried off to a foreign land and their homes and property occupied by this conquering force. They had lost their way of life and had completely lost hope. Isaiah reminds them that God has not forgotten them; there will be a coming time when God would set all things right. As Christians, we try to lead lives of faithful service, but God has never promised that bad things won’t happen to good people. And many of us have seen our fair share! When we are faced with hardship, do we remember God’s promises to us of a coming time when we will only rejoice? Isaiah’s words are as significant to us today as they were for the people then. How happy it will be to live in full communion with God and each other, no more fear or sadness or pain.

God, help us understand your plan for us when times are hard. Help us keep your sweet song in our hearts of this great time to come and let us rejoice in this promise.

Shari Palm – Mt. Nebo UMC

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32

John 7:53-8:11

Then they all went home, I but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 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."

Recently at the grocery store while waiting at the checkout, I was standing in front of a woman who seemed to be very impatient. As life would have it, the cashier was in training. The woman behind me was making snide, sarcastic remarks and I could see the cashier becoming increasingly anxious. While watching the woman with us struggle, with us not moving quick enough and the cashier struggling with being ostracized, I started praying for her. And I hoped the woman could find it in her heart to forgive the cashier for being new. I also prayed for the cashier to forgive the woman for being so rude.

It is ironic we are so quick to judge other people and not see our faults. I prayed both women would find Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior and leave a life of sin.

Reflective question: Why are there so many people who haven't found the Lord?

Gail Smith, Mt. Nebo UMC

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Psalm 95; Colossians 1:15-23

Exodus 16:1-8

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord."

"Give us today our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

Every Sunday, and other days of the week, millions of Christians around the world pray the prayer taught to the disciples by Jesus, the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. As part of it, together we pray "Give us today our daily bread." Many pray this asking for daily food. Obviously, this is important. However, our daily bread is so much more.

Our daily bread is everything we need to make it through each day. It is the Lord's teaching through scripture. It is wisdom, compassion and a sense of mission and caring. It is security, patience and righteousness. It is love, joy, peace and hope, and so much more.

In Exodus, we read the story of God providing daily manna to the Israelites in the desert. Each day He only provided manna for that day. When some tried to hoard and save extra, it became rotten and filled with maggots. He was teaching the Israelites then, and us today, to trust Him for everything we need for each day. Jesus says in Matthew 6:34, "... do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." In other words, graciously accept what God gives you today and trust Him to provide for tomorrow.

Prayer: Father, please provide me what I need to make it through today and please give me the confidence to trust you for tomorrow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rick Bishop
Salem UMC of Keedysville

Friday, March 13, 2020

Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22

Psalm 95

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice, "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

“Let us sing to the Lord.”

Birds chirp, angels proclaim, but only humans have the ability to sing. So, when we sing our praises to God, we are offering something which only humans can give. This is why St. Augustine said, “To sing is to pray twice.” And what should we sing in the midst of Lent? We should sing praises to God for all the mighty things he has already accomplished in our lives. You may not be a trained vocalist and you may sound good only in the shower. However, you can still try this as a spiritual practice: sing to the Lord.

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

Exodus 16:27-35

Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day. The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.'" So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come." As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

A daily miracle. That is what the manna was that the Israelites survived on for 40 years in the wilderness after their disobedience of not trusting God enough to obey and take possession of the land. They were being punished as a nation and still God provided a daily miracle. Now some might say that it was only a six day a week miracle, but I disagree. In verse 29 the Lord explains that the double portion is provided on the sixth day (Friday), for both the sixth and seventh day. Normally, you couldn't keep it overnight or it would spoil so this was indeed a miracle on the seventh day.

But why? Why was this so important that the Lord asked, "How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" in verse 29. Why were the people to rest as verse 30 says they did?

Trust! God was teaching them that He was trustworthy. They hadn't trusted Him enough to claim the land He had promised them. This daily reminder was designed to build their trust in Him. God provided their daily bread with a daily miracle.

Have you learned to trust God fully?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11

John 4: 1-42

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Last Sunday we heard Jesus tell Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life". Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, and a well-connected man in every way (John 19:38-42). If ever there was an insider, it was Nicodemus.

If ever there was an outsider, it was the Samaritan lady Jesus talked to at the well. Samaria was outside of Israel. Its people were outside the proper gene pool and outside the faith. The well was outside the city of Sychar. This woman who comes to the well is outside of anything that passes for friendship. She has no friends among the other women in town (they come to the well as a group while she comes alone). She finds herself on the outside of five different marriages (divorce, death, abandonment?), and John doesn't even tell us her name.

The point is surely to tell us she is part of that world Jesus told Nicodemus God loves so much. Jesus waits for her, initiates a conversation with her, asks her for a favor, offers her an opportunity for life with him that is so fulfilling, complete, and satisfying that it will overflow. And her life does indeed overflow and change – her relationship with Jesus overflows into relationships with her townspeople (verses 28, 39-42).

John tells us Jesus "had to" travel this way through Samaria. In what other ways (beside geographical) do you think Jesus "had to" travel through Samaria?

Rev. Ron Schlak, Interim Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Boonsboro, MD

Monday, March 16, 2020

Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1-27; 2 John 1:1-13

I John 1:2

He who gives life was shown to us. We saw him, and we can give proof about it. And now we tell you that he has life that continues forever. The one who gives this life was with God the Father. (International Children's Bible)

Being in Middle School can be hard. People curse, say mean things, and are sometimes really mean. You can start to doubt things like religion and faith. But this section really provides proof that people have seen, touched, heard, and watched Jesus. That he is real and will save us when we confess to our sins. That no matter how bad our sins are, he will forgive us. God's word gives me hope and reassurance about my faith and that we will go to heaven.

How could help others believe?

Anna Jackson, Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Psalm 81, Genesis 29:1-14

1 Corinthians 10: 1-4

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Knowing our ancestors is a hot topic right now. It can enlighten us to why we look and speak and act the way we do. Finding out where and when they lived connects us as a family.

In the above verses, Paul is reminding the Corinthians and us to remember our forefathers and all they went through. Most importantly that God was there. He provided for each of them. They all experienced God and were united under His care and guidance.

As we personalize these verses, we need to remember all God has done for us. By following His lead and enjoying the sustenance He provides each day, we will become more united as a Christian family.

Are we truly searching God's Word for guidance and giving Him praise daily for all He is doing in our lives?

Ann Wright, Mt. Nebo UMC

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

John 7:14-31

Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly." At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

The scriptures depicting Jesus speaking to the Jews at the Festival of Booths have always resonated in me. In John 7:18 he tells the Jews about teaching. "Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him." Hearing that Jesus didn't claim his teaching to be his own, but attributed it to the power of God through him is amazing and humbling to me.

Teaching in children's Sunday school is a responsibility and a privilege. I pray before studying a lesson that God will give me the wisdom that I need and to be present with me during class. This is the lesson I have learned from the greatest of teachers. If the son of God gives all the glory to his Father, then I feel compelled to do the same every time I get the chance to teach.

Dear Lord, thank you for the teaching experiences I've had at Weight Watchers and in the classroom. Relying on you and giving you the glory has made teaching a joy!

Reflection: Are you using your gifts in your church?

Dianna Basile, Mt Nebo UMC

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Psalm 23; I Samuel 15:10-21; Ephesians 4:25-32

Ever since I was a child, I attended church almost every Sunday. If I didn't attend on Sunday, it's because I attended the Saturday's evening services. During those days, I did it because it felt like it was a requirement from my parents to stay on the good graces of the church. As I enter into my young adult life, I still attended Church Services because I didn't want to let my parents down and it did felt like a sense of belonging.

Now; middle age, I realized the importance of the Sabbath Day. Starting off my morning sitting in a chair drinking a cup a coffee with no noise but just to witness the morning coming up is so peaceful. Attending Sunday's morning Adult Bible Class has help me to understand the messages in Church Services and more important, to worship. Afterwards; having lunch with my wife is enjoyable Sunday's tradition to reflect from the Bible Class and the Services.

Now;...it's time to go home, time to rest, perhaps take a nap or do something enjoyable around the house. All of this, learning, worshiping, resting, spending time with your family just on 1 day has help me renew, restore and prepares me for the week that's coming.

Jeff Jones, Salem UMC

Friday, March 20, 2020

I Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

This coming Sunday is celebrated as “Mothering Sunday” in my tradition. It is a day to go home to visit your mother and attend your mother church – the one you grew up in. It is a day to enjoy your Mom’s home cooking and her fussing over you. It is also a day to feast on God’s Word and to share communion with those in the church who “mothered” you spiritually. No matter what may be happening in the world around us, no matter what evil may have reared its head this week, God has prepared a table for us, inside the church, in front of the whole world.

Have you visited your mother church lately? Have you eaten at the table God has prepared for you?

Rev. Virginia Carr, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church

Saturday, March 21, 2020

I Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

David was thinking of his own experience tending sheep when describing the Lord as a shepherd. Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for their provision, direction, and protection. John 10:11 refers to Jesus as the Good Shepherd. As the Lord is the Good Shepherd, so we are His sheep—not frightened, passive animals, but His obedient followers. When you accept the Good Shepherd, you follow Him!

Our Shepherd knows the “green pastures” and “quiet waters” that will restore us. We follow Him obediently to experience them. When we don't follow, we are rebelling against God and our own best interests. Peace comes when you follow Him!

We struggle with pain, suffering, disease, injury and are completely helpless when it comes to death. There is only One that can walk with us in that shadow, enable us to not fear evil, and bring us through to the other side. When you believe the Good Shepherd, you follow Him!

Ancient Eastern culture when people gathered for a banquet, the host would anoint the guests with fragrant oil and care and protect the guests at all cost. God offers that protection and safety in Him to His believers, even when enemies surround. When we trust the Good Shepherd, we follow Him!

David ends this Psalm with a desire to dwell with the Lord. God in turn desires to guide and protect us through this life so we can enter His house forever. When we love the Good Shepherd, we follow Him!

Do you follow the Good Shepherd?

Steve Hanson, Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, March 22, 2020

I Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Ephesians 8:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are [c]exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."

We all rejoice in the promise of resurrection. The hope that we have not only for ourselves but for our loved ones that have passed to their rest. Yet in today's passage the scripture tells us to "Arise from the dead," as if we could do it ourselves. Looking at the entire passage I realize that God is calling us to make a choice. We must choose to be filled with the Light that Christ will give us. We must choose to be Light in our behavior as it points to our walk with the Lord. If we ask, the Lord will fill us with the Holy Spirit and allow us to grow and glow with the light of praise and obedience that dispels the darkness. As we become more like Christ in word and deed, our conduct will stand out in the world of sin that we live in. Let us not sleep in the dark but live in the light, filled with the light of the Holy Spirit and the joy of our salvation.

How brightly do you choose to shine with God's light in your world today?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Monday, March 23, 2020

Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 146

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Put your trust in the Lord always, not worldly leaders or kings. The Lord will live on forever, mortal people will not. This is important because you need to put your trust in the Lord and not let people on earth influence your thoughts or actions and put you in toxic relationships.

Do you listen to the people around you or the Lord in your decision making?

JJ Berg

Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14

Isaiah 42:14-21

“For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame. “Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen.” It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.

God wants us to turn from our ways and to follow him. He will condemn those who have not turned, but will not turn away from them completely. He promises us that he will guide us in our journey with him and wants us to open our hearts to his word. He will be compassionate to those who “Are blind.” This scripture serves as a reminder for us to listen to the divine word rather than that of the foolish man.

Can you find a tangible item to help remind you to count your blessings and ask for forgiveness?

Tyler Deatrich – Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 45; Psalm 40:1-10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Psalm 40:5-10

Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.

It is incredible to think about the plan You have implement for each and every one of us. It is impossible to adequately describe all of Your blessings.

6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened[a]—
burnt offerings and sin offerings[b] you did not require.

More important to You than our offerings is opening our ears to You.

7 Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.

8 I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart.”

How wonderful it is when we accept Your call to us.

9 I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.

Because You are saving us from the sins of the world, we are eager to praise You publicly.

10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.

We freely reflect Your Grace and Mercy received from You to others.

Thursday, March 26, 2020

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Depression, Baseball, and God

The opening day of Baseball season is a time I look forward to every year. I have been through a lot of different "seasons" in my life: medical, relational, loss, grief, spiritual. I've experienced Clinical depression and anxiety which has played a huge role in my life throughout it all, too. But one season, I can always count on and look forward to being a constant in my life is baseball! More specifically Baltimore Orioles baseball! You see with all the change I've gone through in a recent and rather long season of depression, one of the only remaining constants I can snap myself back in the zone is Orioles baseball! Camden Yards is one of the few places I can drown out the "noise" of life and just enjoy the moment again! You see, I believe God hears our cries for help and reprieve and answers them in ways only he knows we will react and gain comfort from. Something so subtle and meaningless to some is extremely exciting, peaceful and rejuvenating to me. Plus, anyone that watches baseball knows the Orioles have had many challenges. The organization and the fans are going through a rebuild so that the Orioles can get better and stronger in the long run again. We too tend to go through rebuilds in order for our long term physical and spiritual health to become strong. God uses different methods, events, people and scriptures to help us along with our own personal and spiritual rebuilds. Just like Psalm 130 says, "From a sea of troubles I cry out to you, Lord. Won't you please listen as I beg for mercy? If you kept record of our sins, no one could last long. But you forgive us, and so we will worship you. With all my heart, I am waiting, Lord, for you! I trust your promises."

Psalms 130:1-5 CEV, no matter what we do, God is always moving to support us and love us and better us. If we just cry out to him and trust him!

So, I leave you with this....just like Orioles fans are trusting the GM and the Manager to rebuild the Baltimore Orioles organization to win again, are you trusting God to help you through your rebuild?

Kevin Welker, Trinity UMC, Frederick/Salem UMC, Keedysville

Friday, March 27, 2020

Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

“My soul waits for the Lord.”

“Spring has sprung, the flowers is risen; I wonder where all the birdies is?” I’m sure you all know this children’s rhyme. Whether it is spring temperatures, rising flowers or the return of the birdies, we all know that, without a doubt, spring will come. And so we wait, and even ask a groundhog to predict how soon this will happen. We do this because our waiting is not one of, I *hope* spring will come, but one of certainty - *when* spring will come. We are sure of its coming, so we prepare and watch as we wait. This is how we are to wait when we have cried to the Lord. We do not *hope* that God will respond, we *know* God will respond. So we prepare for that day, and we watch for signs of his response just as we watch for warm air, flowers and birdies. Take a walk outside today and look at all the signs of returning spring.

Do you see signs in your life that God is responding to your prayers? Are you preparing for the day when God acts?

St. Mark’s Episcopal Church

Saturday, March 28, 2020

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

Luke 24:44-53

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." 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. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

In verse 44 Jesus makes a profound statement. "...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." Then Jesus helps them understand how those prophecies told of the suffering of Christ and His resurrection. It was only with the help of Jesus that they were able to fully comprehend.

Then Jesus gives them a purpose or mission, to preach the fulfillment of the prophecies to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. But then He told them to wait. Wait for the "Promise of My Father upon you." Wait "until you are endued with power from on high." These were Jesus' last words before ascending into heaven before their very eyes.

God's word that can only be truly understood when you seek the Holy Spirit's presence when reading it. Sometimes you must plunge into "...the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms..." to fully grasp a richness of understanding.

The mission of every believer is twofold. First, we must know the Word of God for ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit so we might truly understand God. Second, we are to share our understanding of God with our world.

Have you experienced that richness of understanding God's word personally?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Have you ever wondered what Martha was really asking Jesus in verse 22? In verse 21, it's as if she is scolding Jesus for not coming sooner, or perhaps just trying to express her faith that He could have healed her brother had He been there. Yet in verse 22 Martha says, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give to You." What was she asking? Jesus follows her statement of faith by saying, "Your brother will rise." To which she replies, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." But if that was really what she was thinking, what was she hinting at before. Was she asking for Jesus to raise Lazarus that day? Or was there some other need that she was silently pleading for?

Could it be that Martha's faith was strong enough to boldly ask Jesus, in a round about way, to raise her brother from the dead even though he had been in the grave for four days? Even though she seems to be saying the opposite in verse 24. Yes, that seems to be what she was asking. Jesus plainly states that He is "the resurrection and the life" in verse 25 and in verse 26 He asks if she believes what He is saying. To which Martha then plainly states her belief in who Jesus truly is, "the Son of God..." in verse 27.

Are we bold enough to ask God for miracles and believe that He will provide in His timing?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Monday, March 30, 2020

Psalm 143; I Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

I Kings 17:17-24

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

This passage is about how a widow's son dies and Elijah prays over him and God brings him back to life. This speaks to me that God can do things for you when you need help. You can communicate to God by prayer and He will help you.

Have you made time to pray to God today?

Lilly Berg

Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

Psalm 143

Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead. So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land. Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

We all have those weeks where one thing after another goes wrong. You spill the coffee on your shirt, the tire goes flat, you're late to work, the kids aren't listening, bills are due, you got in a fight with your spouse...life is beating us down! In Psalm 143, David is stuck again and pleading for God's help. Please God, deliver me from wickedness! These trials are the perfect opportunity to reflect on the good things that God has given us. You can probably look around the room right now and name several things that you have to be thankful for. As a working mom of two toddlers, I have many days that I plead for God's help! However, when I take a step back and look at my situation, I have so much to be thankful for. Those two toddlers are healthy and have so much fun energy. I have a caring husband who tackles the parenting role right along with me. The list goes on and on. Let us remember to be like David and cry out to God when we are in need of His help. For God will always be there to help us through.

When trials come your way, how do you respond? In anger, sadness, and resentment or by being thankful for God's blessings?

Katie Deatrich - Mt Nebo UMC

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

Psalm 143

Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead. So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land. Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

Prayer is a basic tenant for our Christian life. We all can grow in our prayer life. I know that my first prayers were prayers with requests. Little by little I have learned to be still and wait for answers. Silence is important. Hope in prayer means that our hands are open and reaching out with love. Hope is important. When we open our hands to receive, we gain compassion. We can recognize who our neighbor is, and that our neighbor is a person with whom we can share joys and sorrows. Compassion is important.

When we find ourselves deep in prayer, we become aware of the problems in the world. This calls for a revolution, a new way of living. Remember Jesus started a revolution. Change is important.

The following words of Mother Teresa fill me with hope for my prayer life: "I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that he will guide me to do whatever I'm supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I'm praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things."

Can the words of Mother Teresa help me grow in my prayer life?

Katie Smith, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

Thursday, April 2, 2020

Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 1:1-11

1 Samuel 16:11-13

So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

God's choice of a leader in Samuel reminds me how careful I need to be when I see new leaders rising up in our country as well as the church. The last son that Jesse expected to be chosen was David, yet Samuel did not stop looking until he found him. David went on to do great things, but also did some very bad things. That did not change the fact that he was chosen and favored by God. Exodus 22:28 tells us not to blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people. It is so easy to criticize. I catch myself doing that almost daily when I watch the news or have a political conversation, or even discussing church politics.

I also find it interesting how Samuel was so in tuned to the will of God. He knew who and what he was looking for and did not settle for anything less. My prayer for all of us is that we would be close enough to God to hear his voice as clear and distinct as Samuel did.

Bryan C. Smith
Salem United Methodist
Keedysville, MD

Friday, April 3, 2020

Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21:30;

Psalm 31:9-16

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side!” They conspire against me and plot to take my life. But I trust in you, Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

“Be gracious to me Lord, for I am in trouble.”

Have you ever been in trouble; the kind that consumes you with sorrow, makes your throat and your belly ache? The kind of trouble where you believe that everyone is out to get you? How do you pray at a time like this? “Be gracious to me Lord - give me a break. I’m distressed right now and I just want you to listen to me - don’t talk, don’t judge me, just listen.” This is what the Psalmist is saying and it gives us permission to do the same. It is alright for us to tell God exactly how rotten we feel. It’s ok to complain and gripe.

I grew up in a predominantly Jewish community where every kid knew some Yiddish. A person who whined and complained was called a *kvetch*. We don’t like whining and complaining and we don’t want to be called a *kvetch*. But we can become consumed by our troubles and the good news is that God can handle *kvetching* - this too is prayer.

Have you taken time this Lent to honestly cast your cares upon him?

St. Mark’s Episcopal Church

Saturday, April 4, 2020

Psalm 31:9-16; Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34

But I trust in you, Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. (Psalm 31:14-16)

You, Lord, took up my case; you redeemed my life. (Lamentations 3:58)

"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." (Mark 10:33-34)

At the end of the three days, I went to redeem my sport coat from the dry cleaner. I handed over my claim ticket, paid the price, and received back what was already mine (newly cleaned and pressed, of course).

When the psalmist cries out to God to save him, to deliver him from the hands of his enemies, he is crying out to be redeemed, to be bought back and brought back.

Each one of us feels the need for redemption when we are hurt, misunderstood, slandered, excluded, gossiped about. We feel it even more intensely when we've messed up, when the pain and sorrow we feel results from our own bad judgment, character flaws, or disobedience.

But Jesus gathers the disciples and willingly heads up to Jerusalem, ready to pay the full price for us. He is willing to be condemned, mocked, spit on, flogged, and killed. This is his claim ticket; this is the price he pays to receive us back from darkness.

This is how he redeems us: his death in exchange for our life; his suffering in exchange for our peace.

When was the last time you noticed Jesus actively redeeming you from your bad judgment, character flaws, or disobedience?

Jay L. Perry – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matthew 26:14-27:66; Matthew 27:111-28:54

Philippians 2:5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus did two things in this passage that we can emulate. First, He humbled Himself. Too often we allow others or circumstances to humble us, but Jesus took a proactive approach. He chose to be humble. He chose to set aside all the respect, adoration and glory that was actually due Him and instead become a living sacrifice to introduce us to God the Father in a fuller and richer way.

Second, He was obedient to the point of death. We rarely think of being obedient as adults. In the world today few even consider being obedient at all if it's an inconvenience of any kind. Yet, Jesus was not only obedient, He was obedient to the point of death and a torturous death at that.

What then must be so important about being humble and being obedient that Jesus set this strong of an example? Love, true unselfish love. Love was Jesus' motivation. Love for God the Father. Love for mankind. Love for the law of God to which He was completely obedient.

How unselfish is our love for God? Do we love Him enough to be both humble and obedient?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Monday, April 6, 2020

Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11

Psalm 36:5-11

Lord, your constant love reaches the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the skies. Your righteousness is towering like the mountains; your justice is like the depths of the sea. People and animals are in your care. How precious, O God, is your constant love! We find protection under the shadow of your wings. We feast on the abundant food you provide; you let us drink from the river of your goodness. You are the source of all life, and because of your light we see the light. Continue to love those who know you and to do good to those who are righteous. Do not let proud people attack me or the wicked make me run away. (Good News Bible translation)

When I read this chapter, it makes me think about how amazing God is, and how much we should appreciate Him for all He has done. One thing that REALLY sticks out to me is that He is the source of all life and that shows that we should really appreciate Him because if it wasn't for God we wouldn't be alive.

What are some ways that you know God loves you?

Owen Parish, Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Isaiah 49:1-7; I Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

Psalm 71:1-14

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel. For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. I have become a sign to many; you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long. Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him." Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me. May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

God knew you before you were born. The almighty God that created the universe knows how many hairs are on your head, and how you take your coffee. You were created to be a light bearer – a person who shines with the light of the Spirit, so others may see what God has begun in you! Your successes will be because you have been faithful to God. He has been your provider, sustainer and strength for all of your days. He will be your strength when you are weak. You may not think yourself worthy to be used by God, but God provided Jesus with His power, and God will provide you with what you need to serve Him. Do not worry that the world calls you foolish, God's foolishness is greater than any person's greatest wisdom. Call out to Him and He will answer you. If you don't know what to say, call on the Holy Spirit to help you. The Lord has created you to serve Him, and He has given everyone gifts. He will help you to use your gifts for His glory. You can use your gifts to benefit others by showing compassion, caring, helping, and loving His people. In fact, because you have a gift, God expects you to use it. Do not waste it. Pray for guidance faithfully, and you will be shown how to use your gifts to glorify our Father God.

Betty Snyder, Mt. Nebo United Methodist Church

Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other. Who is my accuser? Let him confront me. It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me?

All passages for today fully confirmed my thoughts & feelings. I knew where I belonged...who I belonged to...where I was "called to be"...who I was called to be with. Ridicule of "being brain-washed" was troubling, but fortunately years of my childhood & Sunday School & church life had "ingrained" in me the "Path I would Walk" as an adult.

When I am "needy", the "Sovereign Lord" has strengthened me and given me Hope. I have had good reasons "To believe". I know my "Purpose" is to encourage others in their faith...by calling them, by writing them & sending uplifting cards, by visiting them when able, and being more open to sharing my faith and 'Faith Walk' verbally.

Encounters of meeting "strangers" have blessed my life immensely and I hope theirs. I am thankful I have been given the gift of courage in witnessing to allow these encounters to happen. It has also opened -up more outlets to play for others I have never known.

My Daily Devotionals have been the source of much growth in many ways. We "meet" others who have been bold and brave enough to share their lives...their trials and obstacles...their spiritual growth while going through these times...come out a more faithful "Servant of God" because of it. To God, our Sovereign Lord, be the Glory.

Have you found Your Purpose?? Let God's "nudging's and encounters" be noticed. It could change your life for the better.

Betty Lou Breeden, Mt. Nebo UMC

Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020

Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14; I Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants. Truly I am your servant, Lord; I serve you just as my mother did; you have freed me from my chains. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord—in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.

You have freed me from my chains!

My relationship with God is a constant work in progress. It is something that I am trying to make time for every day. I have found that when I am far from God, I find comfort in things that aren't serving me. These are the chains that hold me down, hold me back from living in the glory and peace with God. When I remember that it is my purpose to do His will and not my own that is when those chains are removed. When I approach life in this way and ask myself, "How are my actions the acts of Gods will?" Then and only then will my self-seeking ways start to fade, my attitude and outlook on life will change and I will know peace! The chains have been lifted; my heart is light and full of Gods joy.

Today as I go into the world, I will remember what God has done and continues to do for me every day and I will be grateful. Thank you, God for freeing me from my worldly selfish desires as so I can be closer to you.

Questions for further discussion:

What are some of your "chains" that are keeping you from living a closer life with God?

What "chains" has God lifted in your life?

Kayla Barnes, Salem UMC

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

These are the seven last words of Christ. Was he quoting Psalm 22 to reveal its prophetic message? Was he crying out to God because he truly believed that God had abandoned him? Yes, yes and more. In this Psalm we find all the elements of prayer which were presented in each of the past Fridays' devotions. Perhaps they form a way to pray in our darkest hour of need.

- Cry for mercy - pleading for God to not be distant, but to enter into our pain.
- Seek shade - asking for God to provide protection.
- Sing - repeatedly returning to praising God for what he has already done for us in the past.
- Feast at the table prepared for us in the presence of our enemies - for Jesus it was the scripture which he was quoting. For us it can also be scripture, communion or even the presence of others.
- Complain - honestly telling God what we are experiencing.
- Wait for God to act - looking to the future with certain expectation and preparedness.

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Saturday, April 11, 2020

Job 14:1-14;19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; I Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66; John 19:38-42

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord's wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Jeremiah was a young man when he entered the service of the Lord as a prophet. Throughout his life he faced various trials due to his faithfulness to God's prophetic message. Many of these trials were life threatening and yet he remained faithful to God. In his book, Lamentations, Jeremiah writes of his anguish because of his persecution. He attributes his following God's instructions as "aging my flesh" and "surrounding me with bitterness and woe" (3:4-5).

Many today would question if this was truly God's leading since it is popular to believe that faithfulness to God brings His protection. This view is egocentric in that it views life solely from the perspective of the human need. Jeremiah was faithful not in order to receive rewards, favors or protection from God, he was faithful because he loved God and that put God at the center of His life. He was willing to do whatever God asked so that God would be glorified, and God's will would be accomplished. I love how Jeremiah weaves God's faithfulness into the midst of his lament, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed," (3:19).

Life brings challenges, sometimes daily. Do you feel confident to lament your anguish to God yet still trust Him regardless of your circumstances?

Shawn Paris - Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

Luke 24:13-49

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." "What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said." Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter." Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things. "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

Have you ever noticed that Jesus joins the two walking the road to Emmaus on Sunday morning as they were "discussing and arguing"? These men were disciples of Jesus and they were arguing. Jesus asks "What is this dispute..." and they stop walking and look discouraged. Having left Jerusalem before knowing of Jesus' resurrection, they couldn't help but doubt what He had taught, especially in light of what the religious leaders had been teaching all their lives. They had been so sure that Jesus had been the Messiah, but He hadn't met the expectations that their culture had taught them.

As they answer Jesus' questions and explain their concerns Jesus doesn't just reveal Himself instead He scolds them and takes them on a step by step Bible study "beginning with Moses and all the prophets..." Jesus didn't just provide the answer, He showed them the answers in the scriptures. We must personally know our scriptures so that we can see Jesus clearly. After the Bible study, in which Jesus patiently and clearly revealed Himself to them through the Scriptures, and they had accepted what He had shown them as evidenced by their hospitality, then Jesus allowed them to recognize Him.

How important should it be to us then to be able to know the Jesus of scripture and not just the Jesus of organized religion, if even Jesus Himself used those same scriptures to explain the Truth of who He is?

Juli Blood – Willow Brook Seventh-day Adventist Church

Monday, April 13, 2020

Psalm 118:1-2

These verses offer an answer to anyone who wonders if God still loves them after the mistakes they've made, "...his love endures forever". These verses show that God's love never falters, and never fails no matter what you've done, or what mistakes you've made. We were created in God's image, and God loves everyone, no matter what mistakes they have made, he forgives.

So, can you forgive in your life? How can you strive to be more like God in your daily life?

Joey Breeden, Mt. Nebo UMC (Confirmation Class 2020)

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Exodus 15:1-18, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Colossians 3:12-17

40 Scripture?40

In the Exodus reading, the Jews are joyous after God rescued them from the Egyptians. God miraculously parted the Red Sea and allowed the Jews to cross to the other side, but drowned the Egyptians when the waters came back together. They had seen the power, mercy and the miracle God did as He protected them from their enemy. The Jews were overjoyed and worshiped Him. They felt safe knowing they were His chosen people and God protected them from a great evil and suffering they would have experienced with the Egyptians.

The Psalms reading is a collection of praises to God for His mighty acts and the protection God gives those who worship and follow his commands. They shout for joy knowing God's mighty hand is ready and willing to protect them as they live a righteous life.

Colossians shows us how to live a righteous life. We are to live as compassionate people showing kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with each other and forgiving each other as God forgives us. Live together in perfect unity and peace. And be thankful.

The Lord has been so good to us all, sending Jesus to bear all our sins and through Grace, we have inherited eternal life. We need to be eternally thankful and try to live the life we know God wants us to.

Pray for God to give us the strength and guidance to live as He wants us to live, and be thankful.

Cliff Wright, Mt. Nebo UMC

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Joshua 3:1-17; Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!" I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

This song of praise begins, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever." I'd like to turn your attention to the last verse (24).

Have you ever heard the term "ear worm?" No, it's not a terrible infection. It's defined as a tune that repeats itself over and over in your mind; you just can't stop hearing it. Psalm 118:24 is one of my "ear worms." It reads, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." It has actually been set to music, and the tune is both catchy and repetitious. Once you hear it, it's hard to forget.

I believe verses in the Bible can become "ear worms," and that's a good thing. When we're struggling or confused, we can latch on to one of these "ear worms" for encouragement or guidance. Examples might include, "I lift mine eyes unto the hills...", "With God all things are possible," "The Lord is my shepherd," "(nothing) can separate us from the love of God."

I challenge you to discover your own "ear worms" and to repeat them as necessary throughout this Lenten season.

Judy Long
Mt. Nebo UMC

GRACE MATTERS

In these days of unrest, abusive behaviors, political wrangling, and acute anxiety, the Lenten season invites us to think and pray about what is essential, of primal importance, and ultimately what matters.

It matters that we keep quiet when many around us
shout absurdities.

It matters that we turn aside and be when everyone else
clamors to get even.

It matters that we return a glance of care when someone
looks our way for warm eyes.

It matters that we write a long, overdue note of warmth
to a former friend.

It matters that we carry well the weight we are called to bear.

It matters how we view not only the tonnage of accumulations,
but the gravity of grief as well.

It matters that we not deny grief, but allow God's love to help us hold it,
and letting go life's unneeded baggage.

At each tough edge of living, grace shows up. Along each pot-holed path
and with every turn in life's winding road, grace transports.

Life begins with grace, is fueled by the Holy Mystery, and concludes likewise.

Grace matters. I am a beneficiary.

Rev. Don R. Stevenson, Minister
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