

The Dahlongega Lumpkin County Ministerial Association invites the community to its annual Ecumenical Lenten Services that will take place Tuesdays at 12:00 Noon at Dahlongega Baptist Church from March 12 through April 9. The theme this year is "The Blessings of Lent" where we will explore the graces received from a season of prayer and self-examination.

A meal of soup, sandwiches and dessert follows the service and people can reasonably worship and eat in an hour. The offering received during the service is dedicated to the work of the Ministerial Association which sponsors Side by Side, and supports other ministry initiatives in the community.

There will also be an Ecumenical Good Friday this year on April 19th at 12:00 Noon. It will also be at the Baptist Church though there will be no meal following. The theme of this observance will be "The blessings of the Cross".

For the Lenten services a different local pastor will organize each week. The pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church, the Rev. Dr. Gerhard "Mike" Michael, will begin the series on March 12. The following Tuesdays proceed as follows: The Rev. Dr. Steven Wright, Pastor at Dahlongega Baptist Church, on March 19th, The Rev. Frank Colladay, Pastor Emeritus of Dahlongega Presbyterian Church, on March 26th, The Rev. Father Michael Revak, Interim at St. Luke the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, April 2, Rev. Robin Parr, Associate Pastor at Dahlongega United Methodist Church, April 9. The Good Friday will be led by a team of these pastors.

Dahlongega UMC Events—Holy Week

Spy Wednesday, April 17: Prayer Walk, 7 AM—8 PM. Sanctuary and surrounding areas around the church grounds. The prayer walk is interactive and is an individual walk in which you can participate any time during the day. Take as much time or as little time as you feel led. I promise you it will deepen your walk with Christ and help you to experience the Resurrection of Easter!

Maundy Thursday, April 18, Sanctuary 7:00 PM

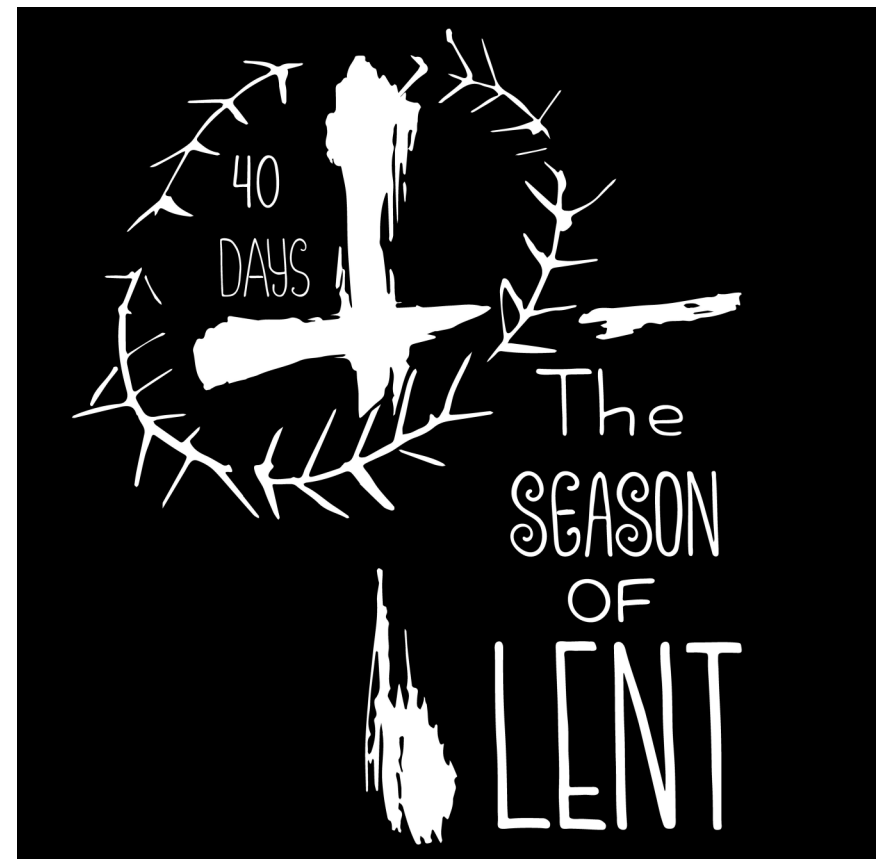
Easter Sunrise Service, Ecumenical Service, Rev. Dr. Steven Wright, DBC, Lumpkin County Middle School Football Field 7:00 AM

Easter Services DUMC: 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, and 11:00 AM.

Giving Up, Giving In, Giving Out

A Lenten Devotional

Dahlongega UMC



“Preparing Our Hearts for Easter”

What is Lent? The word “Lent” comes from the Old English word “lengthen,” which simply means “spring” — when the days lengthen and new life springs forth. It is a time in which we anticipate the victory of the light and life of Christ over the darkness of sin and death. It is, to borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis, a season of a kind of “happiness and wonder that makes you serious.”

Lent is the 40-day period before Easter when Christians prepare to witness, celebrate, and participate in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early church, the forty days before Easter were devoted to study of the essential elements of Christian teaching so that the new converts could make informed and faithful confessions of faith on the day of their baptism. Later, Lent became a time of contemplation of Jesus’ suffering and the significance of the Christian faith for daily life. Christians throughout the centuries have marked the season with prayer, study, and fasting (or, more recently, “giving something up for Lent”) as a way both to identify with Jesus, who fasted in the wilderness for 40 days, and to focus on the importance of their faith.

Lent starts on Ash Wednesday and runs to Maundy Thursday. If you’re counting, you’ll realize that there are more than 40 days between those two dates. That’s because Sundays in Lent are not counted. Given that each Sunday celebrates the resurrection, the Church teaches that it’s not appropriate to fast on Sundays.

The practice of daily devotions stems from Lent’s emphasis on deepening one’s faith through study and prayer. Lent offers the opportunity to take up a “discipline” or “spiritual practice” for 40 days, not as a way of meriting God’s favor but because disciplined practice increases our appreciation and understanding of the faith. It’s a way for us to actively “Give Up, Give In, and Give Out.” These pages contain some of the reflections of what this all means and how it draws us closer to Christ.

I hope you find these devotions helpful. They are brief and are written by you, the congregation and ministers of Dahlonga UMC. Each devotion concludes with a prayer and a question to help you more richly experience God’s presence in your life and in the world.

Blessings on your Lenten Journey.

Easter, April 21 HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

He is risen! Christ is risen indeed! This cry resounds throughout the world from billions of voices. It is the cry of truth that is so needed in a world that seems so dark. The resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds us that death, darkness and sin never have the last word. Jesus proclaims,

“I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell . . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelation 1:18; 22:13).

God in Christ- who is infinite light and love - ultimately triumphs over all. As Paul shouted, *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).*

The Resurrection reminds us that life is both precious and eternal. And it gives us hope that no matter how dark things get in our lives if we turn to the light we may have life, *“if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.” (Romans 8:11).*

Hallelujah! Because He lives, you have life!

Rev. Dr. Steve Schofield

He is Risen!

He is Risen, Indeed!



Sunday, March 10

In, Up, Out!

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV) *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Giving In: Each of us comes to Christ by different means. But the one thing we have in common is that His grace was with us before we ever acknowledged Him. That nudge, that unexplained tugging, that sensation you felt letting you know there was something missing from your life, was God. He has been there the whole time, walking right beside you waiting for you to give in to that feeling and welcome Him into your life.

Giving Up: Once we take that first step and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior we must put aside the thought that we are in control of our lives, that we can find our way through our problems on our own. Our efforts will do nothing to earn favor with God. Only by giving up control of our lives and fully submitting to His will can we hope to enjoy the life He has planned for us.

Giving Out: We are called to be a light in the darkness. The gracious gift He has given us is not to be hidden from the world. God has a plan for our lives, we are to prayerfully consider the work He would have us do. Then freely give out to others the joy and grace we have been given through our salvation in Christ.

Prayer: *Father God thank you for loving us before we knew you. Thank you for sending your Son to settle the debt of our sins, allowing us to place our troubles at His feet. Lord guide us, direct our path as we go into the world to create disciples for the transformation of your world.*

Points to Ponder: Have you truly accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you submitted your life to His will? Are you willing and prepared to go where He will send you?

Ray Polk

Monday, March 11

Giving Up : Sin

Scripture Reflections: 2 Chronicles 7 : 14, 1 Kings 8 : 46-51, Joel 2 : 12-14

Upon reflecting on the idea of giving up sin I wondered how one on the street would define sin. Would the definitions of sin change with each person I stopped? The definition as defined by dictionary.com is as follows: immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law. The definition again made me ponder would the definition of immoral act change with each person if again I hit the streets to ask. As I struggled through these ideas I realized I need first to worry about what Sin I carry that God would see as an immoral act against his divine law. The sin he desires me to give up. As I probe deeper I wonder what sin I may be sitting in that I am not aware of in my life and what sin am I blatantly sitting in that I am extremely aware of. Because I have sinned what does it look like to give it up? As a follower of Christ my first act should be to commune with God and ask him to reveal to me where the hidden sin rests in me. Because I also have sin that I blatantly sit in I need to humble myself, seek his face, and turn from my wicked ways whether they are hidden or blatant. This giving up is a repentant moment where I change my heart and plead with God for forgiveness knowing God will forgive all my offenses and shower me with grace and mercy. He is anxiously awaiting for us to “GIVE UP” to give up our sin, to give up fighting him when he is calling out our sin, and to give up ourselves to his greater glory.

Prayer for the day: Heavenly Father I love you and thank you for your overflowing grace and mercy on my life. God I come to you and ask that you show me where I am hiding sin in my innermost being. Lord I do not want to rest in this sin I want you to have it and send it as far as the east is from the west. I want to live a renewed life in you today. A day without the weight of this sin. Lord for the sin I have been committing with full awareness I ask you for your forgiveness and mercy. Thank you for loving me during this giving up process help guide me along this journey to freedom in GIVING UP.

Questions to ponder: Where are your sins hidden? Where are you sinning but have excuses of why it is not actually sin? When are you going to submit yourself to God's gentle nudging and give up the sin to your heavenly father?

Amy Enright



Saturday, April 20

Holy Week

JOHN: 13: 36-38 “Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.”

In the darkness of this Saturday, we stand between the two promises Jesus made to Simon Peter. One is joyful and unconditional – the promise that we, too, will go where Jesus has gone, provided only that we believe in Him. But not yet, because first, there is the other promise to be fulfilled – bleak, and horrible, and apparently non-negotiable.

Like Peter, we are doomed to deny Jesus, to betray him, to let him down in countless ways, great and small. Why must we betray him? We don’t want to, any more than Peter wanted to. But we know that we will. So did God create us to be a sinful people? No, I am sure he didn’t, but He did give us a most singular gift – Free Will – and we have used it as the freedom to sin. No, we don’t want to ... but Yes, we seem unable to resist it.

What Peter didn’t know on that first Holy Saturday, and what must have obsessed him throughout the days that followed, was whether Jesus could ever forgive him. The answer came from the resurrected Jesus over a makeshift breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee two or three weeks later. It was simple and straight forwarded: “Feed my sheep”.

Jesus put him to work. For us, as for Peter, the good news is that, amazingly, Jesus understands. It is implicit in the great mystery of the Incarnation, the foundation stone of our faith, which St. John unveiled for us in the Christmas gospel – “the Word became flesh and lived among us”. Jesus, the Son of God, assumed our nature and our substance in order that He might atone for our sinfulness, once for all, on the cross at Calvary. So He knows what it is to be human. He did not sin himself – his godhead shielded Him from that – but He experienced our nature, so He has compassion – the ultimate compassion – for our weakness.

Prayer: Christ have mercy on me a sinner. Call me to work so that I may carry your name into all the world. Amen.

Question: Do you remember a time in which you denied Christ? Do you remember when you were forgiven? It is right this very moment!

Tuesday, March 12

God’s Shield

Scripture: Matthew 6:34

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. “

When I read this scripture it reminds me to surrender each day to Jesus. I grew up in a home that living “One Day At A Time” was practiced daily – I am so very thankful for that upbringing and example. Even so, I still at times let the cares of the world become worrisome. I have learned through the years to pause when I feel fear or worry creeping in on me. Pausing to remember that Jesus is our shield – He remains alert on our behalf. He watches over us continuously protecting us always. When I keep Jesus First I don’t waste my energy on worry. I’ve noticed when I don’t waste energy worrying – I have strength to spare – strength to face each day. I encourage you during the Lenten season and beyond to let go of worry – and to invite Jesus to be your shield of armor. Jesus has the ultimate plan for us and only He needs to know what lies ahead – we just need to trust and surrender each day to Him. Jesus is better than any security system we can buy – allow him to be the great protector that He promises to be.

Prayer: God Grant Me The Serenity To Accept The Things I Cannot Change and The Wisdom To Know The Difference. You are the great shield and protector. Guide us through this Lenten season and beyond to open our hearts and minds to surrender each moment to you. Lord, we thank you that you created 24 hour days – so that we can rest and restore each night. Please forgive us when we bring tomorrow’s worry into today. In Christ Name We Pray, Amen.

Question to Ponder: Are you allowing Jesus to be your shield of armor in times of worry?

Amy Thrailkill

Wednesday, March 13

Giving Up Sin

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

As we grow in our spiritual walk, we still will have sin in our lives, but often not obvious to us. If there is something blocking the continued growth of our relationship with Christ or if we are exhibiting a negative behavior or feeling, then often there is a root behavior or sin that needs to be addressed. We personally have had a time in our lives where we were restless, discontent, and feeling distant from God. When we got sick and tired of being in this place, we prayed and asked God to show us the sin and the cause of the sin that we needed to give up. By sharing with trusted friends and by prayer, God revealed the root (reason for this sin) and then allowed healing in that area through His power. The process is painful because often these sinful ways of life become the norm for us. But the restoration allows us a greater contentment and an increased relationship with our sweet Savior. There is a peace beyond all understanding with an ability to handle situations that used to baffle us as we take on the nature of Christ. If you have something God needs to take from you, ask Him, tell Him you give up or surrender and then watch how He changes your life and your relationship with Him.

Prayer: Lord, God you know my every action. You know when there is sin in my life. Show me why I am doing this and then help me to give up the strong hold on my heart and allow me to be washed clean, forgiven, and changed. Help me to continue my daily walk with you so that I may continue to grow in a more intimate relationship with you.

The question is like the question Jesus ask the paralytic at the gate: do you want to get well? If the answer is yes, then ask Him to reveal the sin and what is behind the sin- then ask Him to heal you! Now trust Him in the process!

Art and Mary Fowler

Good Friday, April 19

Today we are celebrating Good Friday, the day that our Lord and Savior Jesus was killed by crucifixion. Given that this is a remembrance of a violent murder, some people may wonder why it is called Good Friday. It's called that for the simple reason that the Bible tells us this sacrificial act of Jesus was the greatest gift of love the world is ever known.

Good Friday celebrates the great truth that God became a human being in order to both give us eternal life through salvation and to go through life fully - including death - so that we would be free from fear. His sacrificial act of love gives us freedom from sin and guilt and a hope for the future. The Bible instructs that since we are human *"He too shared in [our] 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."* (Hebrews 2:14-16). Jesus Himself tells us this was an act of love, ***"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*** (John 15:13). Paul tells us *"God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"* (Romans 4:8) and John tells us *"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* (1 John 4:9-10).

So when we gaze upon the Cross, we do not see an instrument of torture and death. On the contrary, we see the instrument of God's greatest expression of love for us. Good Friday indeed!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son, Jesus. Thank you for loving us this much. May the cross always remind us of your great love and sacrifice. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Question: What do you see when you look at the cross? Do you see love?

Rev. Dr. Steve Schofield

Maundy Thursday, April 18

Scripture: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* John 13:34-35

On Maundy Thursday the church gathers to remember when Jesus gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room to eat his last supper with them. The gospel writer John tells us that after supper Jesus gave the disciples “a new commandment.” Maundy is from the Latin, meaning “command;” thus the church calls this day “Maundy Thursday.” Simply put, that new commandment to the disciples and to us as the church is “that you love one another.”

At supper Jesus had demonstrated an act of deep humility and love, in his taking on the role of their host through washing the feet of his guests, the disciples. Through the ordinary bread and wine that he served them at supper, he revealed that this meal represented much more than we could have ever imagined - the sacrifice of Jesus’ body and blood for the salvation of the world. Our Sacrament of Holy Communion is the remembrance of this Maundy Thursday dinner, in which Jesus used the still ordinary elements of bread and wine to enable followers of all times to remember this universally significant, life-changing and life-giving sacrifice.

After supper, as he was preparing to make the ultimate sacrifice for us, Jesus gave us one simple commandment as our ultimate guide in our Christian walk. He established love as the hallmark of the Christian community. On the next day, Good Friday, he demonstrated what that love looks like. The unfathomable love that is our precious, free gift - that the Creator God of the universe loves us so much that He not only became one of us, but that He demonstrated by clear example and taught in simple, relatable language how we should live, and then took upon Himself our soul-condemning sins in His own death. All of this so that we might live and be in fellowship and communion with Him. Oh, how much He loves us! We need to do the same for each other.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, it is with thanksgiving and awe that I receive your unconditional, unfathomable love. Give me the will and strength to follow your commandment to love others, as you have loved me. Amen.*

Question: In what ways can I demonstrate this unfathomable love to others?

Rev. Med and Susan Roach

Thursday, March 14

Giving In: Sanctified

Sanctification, to us, is an inward spiritual process when God brings about holiness and change in our Christian lives by means of the Holy Spirit. It takes a lifetime and He convicts us on areas that need to be changed, helping us to grow in holiness and wholeness with Him. Hopefully we can begin to view the world, other people, and personal problems from a more biblical perspective. Our goal is to make choices that begin to be motivated by love, kindness, compassion and not selfishness.

“Giving In” to us means to surrender to all the little whispers we hear from Our Lord. What one may deem sacrifice; we feel the opposite because we continue to experience being called by the Holy Spirit.

One example of sanctification, for us, is a ministry that went from challenging to evolving into a quid pro quo experience. We were asked to meet with residents at a long-term care facility twice a month on Sunday to deliver a Christian message. We had no idea where to begin as we had no training in this field, but we accepted the task at hand. The themes of our service are always relevant to aging with scripture, hymns, prayer, and reflection questions to help the residents to keep their eyes focused on God as they continue their journey through aging.

Through sanctification, this little service has helped us grow spiritually and we can see growth in others at the facility as well. Even some employees attend. Hence, the quid pro quo experience!

Philippians 1:6 speaks to us often about what sanctification means to us; *And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.* (NLT)

Dear Heavenly Father, How we rely on Your TRUTH to be a guiding light that shows us which direction to go. In all seasons of life it is Your truth that comforts us, corrects us, and shows us the way. Thank you for this gift. Please give us strength not to be tempted to stray from you and your teachings. Have us to always look forward, not backwards as we grow and mature in you, Christ Jesus. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Can you identify phases of sanctification in your life? We certainly can!

Bob and Janice Brown

Friday, March 15

Surrender All

Scripture: Philippians 4:4 6-9

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Devotion

In our materialistic world, the word surrender has a very negative connotation. It means that you lost or gave up. It means that you were weak and just quit. In a world that emphasizes self-reliance, there is no room for the word surrender.

However, as a follower of Jesus Christ, the word surrender is extremely important. To surrender to Jesus means that you recognize your own inadequacies and are willing to surrender to His will. The first verse of the popular song “I Surrender All” by Amy Grant says it all:

All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live

To surrender to Christ means that you totally trust His will for your life. You give up your way and give in to His way. By doing this, you are free to live in His love and receive His abundant grace.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for all of the gifts that you have given us that have enabled us to do so many things. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to know the unlimited love of Jesus. Give us the strength to surrender our will to Your will. Help us to understand that we need to let go and let You totally control our lives. Amen.

Question

In this world that emphasizes self-reliance and independence, will you have the courage to surrender your life to Jesus Christ?

Bob Keller

Spy Wednesday, April 17

Matthew 26:1-16; Luke 23:34 “As you know, Passover begins in two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Jesus’ straightforward comment showcases His honesty with the Twelve, His sense of the Holy Spirit’s prophetic voice, and, for us, His 21st century disciples, a glimpse into the timeline of His last week on earth. Luke 23:54 indicates that the Crucifixion probably occurred on Friday afternoon, so two days previous puts us at Wednesday of what we now call Holy Week.

Matthew continues with the agenda for several key players in the Passion drama that day. In Jerusalem – at the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest -- Jewish religious leaders were discussing how to eliminate Jesus without attracting too much attention. (Interestingly, *they* decided to wait until *after the Passover* to avoid riots by the populace. *That* didn’t happen!)

A few miles away in Bethany, Jesus ate dinner at the home of Simon the Leper, whom He had healed. When a woman poured expensive perfume over Jesus’ head, Matthew writes that some of the disciples judged her action wasteful. She should have sold the perfume, they protested, and given the money to the poor. But Jesus said she was “anointing” His body for burial, thus *doubling down* on the prediction of His death. (One wonders *why* the disciples seemed so shocked when His words came true.)

Finally, the scene at Simon’s dinner party was apparently the “last straw” for Judas, provoking him to head over to Caiaphas’ house with an offer to betray Jesus.

Sometimes called “Spy Wednesday,” this day highlights Judas’ despicable treachery toward One Who had taught and loved him so deeply. Songwriter Michael Card pens, “Why did it have to be a friend who chose to betray the Lord? And why did he use a kiss to show them? That’s not what a kiss is for. Only a friend can betray a friend; a stranger has nothing to gain. And only a friend comes close enough to ever cause so much pain.” Incredibly sad, but true. Yet having read this passage frequently through the years, I am struck forcefully, maybe for the first time, by the *dinner-table dissension* among Jesus’ disciples – after three close-knit years together, and despite the fact that Jesus now made no secret of the danger He was facing! Why weren’t they more sensitive to His mood? Why didn’t they feel protectively alert toward their dear Friend? Shouldn’t they, now well into the relationship, have waited for His explanation, instead of opining loudly and berating the woman “harshly”?

I can only imagine how chagrined, how ashamed they felt when Jesus did explain...and as His deeper meaning dawned, later.

Prayer *Dear Jesus, Forgive me for failing to look into Your face, to pick up on Your cues, before I speak and act. Forgive me for jumping in impulsively, hastily, with my opinions, prejudices and earth-bound perspective, ignoring Your Kingdom principles. May Your Holy Spirit grow in me Your character traits of patience and self-control, so that I develop Your habit of seeking Our Father’s will – and words -- in every situation. In Your Name, Amen.*

Question to Ponder: Am I seeking to listen, to be sensitive to, to anticipate the wishes of, to trust and to obey my dearest Friend, Savior and King?

Revs. Gary and Christy Greenwald

Holy Tuesday, April 16

Holy Week

Today is holy Tuesday in Holy Week. Apart from that, it is far from the most popular day in the church calendar. What do we know about this day in the life of Jesus and his disciples? Nothing, except that they were in Jerusalem to remember Passover.

Nothing, except that Jesus seems to know that this was the time where the way he had chosen to live his life would finally collide with the powers of church, state and all of humanity.

He was one out of all – one, distinct from everyone who had ever lived. But for him that wasn't enough. It was not enough to be unique. Not enough to be distinct. Not enough to be special, to be noticed, to be oh so amazing. Today, unremarkable, not popular, nothing special Tuesday, is the day we have a reading that reminds us, *“unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” John 12:24*

Jesus did not come into this world simply to teach as one with authority, to call out evil spirits and to heal (as Mark's Gospel defines his daily ministry). Jesus did not come into this world solely to reveal God to us so that we could see how God is (the Epiphany). Jesus did not even come into this world just to have the Word become flesh and dwell among us (the Incarnation – Emmanuel – God with us).

No, on this simple Tuesday, Jesus reveals that he came into this world so that there not be just one grain of God come among us, but that in its dying it becomes so numerous that the number of grains and fruit that come forth from that one will be beyond number.

Jesus came into this world so that you and I might become what he was, grain that, by its own self-surrender, gives new food and new grain, and new life to so many others that the multiplication cannot be numbered. Today, in the theological story of things, it is no more than a single grain buried in the earth. But watch, wait, see what will happen. Today is why this quiet day and every quiet day matters so much.

Prayer: Lord Christ, from whose singleness love, hope and life come to be: grant that we may so give of ourselves that there may be love, hope and life for others, and thereby your kingdom comes. Amen.

Saturday, March 16

Follow Me

“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to follow after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” Luke 9:23

This is a challenging statement, uttered by Jesus well before his trial and crucifixion. The cross was for executing the condemned. We know from the scriptures that the condemned suffered the indignity of carrying their means of death to the place it will be used. But imagine what the condemned are thinking as they stumble along. I would guess it is not about the cares of the world. Life is over for the condemned. We are crucified in Christ, therefore we no longer live. Jesus Christ lives in us. This is similar to surrendering. If we surrender, we give up, admit defeat, turn ourselves over to the authority of Christ. Likewise, if we die to Christ, all that is of the world is of no concern, and our focus on Him is unobscured by the things of the world. It is at this point that we are trusting fully and completely in Jesus, depending Him, confident that he loves us and has good in mind for us. And then, then it is well with our soul.

Prayer: “Lord, I believe – help my unbelief. Trusting You is hard. Give me the strength and resolve to surrender all, and walk with you daily. I need You every hour.

Question: What is keeping me from surrendering all to Jesus?

Rick Nielson

Sunday, March 17

Love

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” I. Corinthians 13: 4-7

You obviously recognize the above passage as part of the familiar definition of “Love” found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. It is a beautiful description of the love which is to define my life and yours as followers of Christ. You and I like to read the Bible. But what happens when we let the Bible “read” us? What happens when we let the scriptures search our lives, our intentions, our behaviors? I am convinced that some of the most important study we do of the Bible, is when we actually allow the Bible to study us, not just the other way around. How does that happen? It happens when we submit ourselves into the pages of the Bible story. Take this example. In the space below, we have rewritten the passage from above, with one exception...wherever the word “love” or “it” is used you will see a blank. Take a pen or pencil and insert your name into each blank and then carefully re-read the text.

_____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast, _____ is not proud. _____ does not dishonor others, _____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not easily angered, _____ keeps no record of wrongs. _____ does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. _____ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

Now that is what it means to let the Bible read US! WOW! Does it present an accurate assessment of the current life you are living?

Prayer: *“Dear Father, it is your love that has drawn me to you. It is your love, expressed through your Son, Jesus Christ, that has saved me and forgiven me. It is your love that you desire to be expressed in my life. Help me to so live my life, that the passage above can truly be said of me.” Amen*

Questions: Does the Bible’s description of love align with who you are? Does it reveal any areas of your life that need to transforming work of Christ? Why not use these 40 days of Lent to ask the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work of healing and renewal in you?

Rev. Dr. Stuart Greene

Monday, April 15 Holy Week s A Groom’s Mother Story

Weddings are fun, exciting, beautiful, and even fairy tale-ish. They can also be challenging, exhausting, ugly, even down right difficult. The joining of 2 hearts, 2 lives, and families is a joyous occasion. Every parent prays for their child or children to find the love of their lives. Someone who will love them for a lifetime through the good and bad, thick and thin. And, oh the joy that comes when the question is popped, the joyful news shared, and the wedding plans begin. When, where, who, what? When is the wedding date? Where will the wedding take place? Will it be a traditional or modern wedding? Inside or Outside? Where is the Honeymoon? Who will be the Maid of Honor, Best Man, bridesmaids, groomsmen, etc.? Who’s paying for what? What’s for rehearsal dinner? This past October, our son married the love of his life. She is a sweet, beautiful, Jesus-loving young lady. We love her. The wedding was a small, beautiful, outside, traditional wedding. Note: all the choices made in that one statement. The day held picture perfect weather with all their family members in attendance. But getting to that great day was tough and challenging. Communication was sparse and I was found not knowing what the details were. I didn’t have the answers to the questions I felt I was responsible for. I struggled.

As God would have it, I ran into a dear friend whose son was recently married. I shared with her my wonderful news and struggles with the wedding to be. She listened patiently and then offered great words of wisdom for this mother of the groom: it’s not your day! What? It’s her day, Angie. Whoa! That’s wisdom folks!

It’s her day! Girls dream of the day when they walk down the aisle to marry the love of their life. They have been making plans since they were little about who they will marry? What the wedding would look like? Wedding dress? Who would be in attendance? The Fairy Tale, her dreams.

So that day, I gave up and gave in to whatever the plans were or were not, who was invited or not invited, and what color my dress would be! Ha-ha! I surrendered. I gave up and gave in to the process of not having all the answers, not feeling responsible for all the answers and supporting my son and new daughter-in-law. It was such a relief to surrender.

It was a beautiful wedding with picture perfect weather, and we were all there to enjoy. Everything worked out in the end. It usually does when God is in the mix. We sat back and enjoyed the day. God showed up and showed out.

Sometimes, the process of giving up, giving in, and giving out is tough. We struggle because we don’t know the details or the outcome. We don’t know what God knows. We don’t trust Him. We struggle.

Prayer: *Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”* In other words, stop trying to figure everything out. Put it in God’s hands and He will keep you on the right path, (for me, straightened out!).

Question: Where or what are you struggling with? What is that person or thing you haven’t turned over to God? Maybe because you don’t know the details, the how, or outcome? How’s that working for you? Surrender it today and watch Him show out!

Angie Mayo, Director MMO Preschool DUMC

Palm Sunday, April 14

Hosanna!

Zachariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Before we get too much further into Passion Week I want to revisit what I consider to be a major misnomer we often find in our bibles. Misnomer— it comes from a French word which means to wrongly name. Remember back a few days ago with me to "Palm Sunday," and the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem "humble and mounted on a donkey" the prophecy read. Anyone remember the two words that appear in most of our (English) bibles as the heading over this passage of Scripture? Here is the misnomer. They are these:
Triumphal Entry.

These subheadings, mind you, are not the Word of God. They are, rather, the work of translators. Likely the translators were themselves playing with the irony. I will leave that to those smarter than I. Suffice it to say though, this word, "Triumphal" is precisely the wrong word. Yes, it's the word we want and like but it's wrong. Why not, the "Humble" Entry or at least the "Prophetic" Entry.
Entries matter a lot. Just in case we entered this week with any notion of "Triumphal," as in "We will Rock You" in our spirit, there's still time to run back outside the gates and come in again. Crawl this time.

Passion week is not our annual opportunity to put yet another exclamation point on our theological dogmas and doctrinal foundations. Passion Week is the annual invitation to become disoriented by the Holy Love of God, shaken to the core of our comfortable being, and dispossessed of our sentimental illusions about grace.

For all practical purposes, the best two word caption I can think of for all that is about to unfold. . . . Hell Week. The only one making a "Triumphal" entry into Jerusalem was Satan himself. This is the week that the very Gates of Hell were opened, unleashing ALL HELL on the Son of God. Remember that time in the desert when we were told that after unsuccessfully unseating Jesus with his tawdry temptations, "he left him until an opportune time"?
THIS IS THAT TIME.

Prayer: God help me walk into Jerusalem as a humble servant, for only in my humility may I truly enter into the presence of Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen!
Question: Will you sing with me—"I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back."

Monday, March 18

MIRROR, MIRROR

"I know, LORD, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant." Psalm 119:75 – 76

Stunned! That is the only word that comes to mind. Anyone that has had a cancer diagnosis dropped on them in a doctor's office can relate to that. After 57+ years of a fully healthy life I was facing a Glioblastoma, stage 4 brain tumor. The worst of the worst.

This may be hard to believe, but I thank God for this tumor and the challenges God has placed in my life. I find that God does not speak to us through our ears but through our circumstances. After the tears, the soul searching, the questions to God, the peace of Jesus finally came when I quit trying to be the master of my life and chose to be like Jesus, to give it ALL to the Father. This Lenten season do you strive "To be more like Jesus"? What does it mean to you to be more like Jesus? To be nicer, kinder, more forgiving? Trying to be good on your own is not sustainable. The only way is to be Deeply rooted in Word. Your roots in Christ must be bigger than the tree others see in your daily interactions. That is because the roots you need to weather life's storms can only be achieved by being immersed in God's word. To turn yourself completely over to Him.

I have always lived my life with Christ as my guide but, I have also lived with one foot in the world. Participating in church activities, tithing, witnessing; but as James says, works alone are not enough. We need to grow in Christ, to be more; to live to add to His kingdom. He has brought both my feet to be in Him. We are God's plan A to reach the world, there is no plan B. I love the parable about the sower, to live to spread the seeds of God. I had to ask myself that even though my friends and co-workers know I am a follower of Christ, have I spread the seeds to them for God to water; to strangers?
C.S. Lewis writes in his book, "Mere Christianity", that as Christians we are mirrors, reflecting God's light on all we encounter. On the day of my diagnosis I reassessed my mirror.

I found that as a mirror I have been more like one in a disused room where one would trace their finger down its surface. In that clean space, if you stood just right, at the right angle, you would see the light reflected.

Prayer: As we contemplate Christ's sacrifice, my prayer is that God will not only cleanse the world from us with the baptism of the Word, but that He will purify our souls with the fire of the Holy Spirit. That we will reflect His light with brightness to the fullest of the abilities He has given us.
Question: How are you a reflection of Christ?

Jeff Campbell

Tuesday, March 19

Giving In: Surrender

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

The word surrender can mean several different things: submit, quit, back down, yield, and concede. OR: abandon oneself entirely to a powerful emotion or influence; give in to.

Can you picture Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane after he's just had supper in the Upper Room with his friends where he tried to get them to understand what would happen in the very near future. In the Garden he is surrounded by his friends who he hopes will be a comfort and pray with him as he steps away to be alone and pray to God the Father. It was a great burden knowing he was to suffer and then die for the sins of the world. He prayed mightily for God's will, which he accepted.

Surrender. Give in. Isn't this what Jesus did? Surrendered to and gave in to God the Father's will for him. Because of this he is able to relate to us in our trials. Jesus knew his strength came from his relationship with God the Father who IS the source of strength.

As we are all unique, so are the trials we each face. Throughout our life some challenges may be far worse than others. But none of our trials are a surprise to God. He knows, before we're knit together in our mothers' womb (Ps 139:16), the life we will have. How our free wills will come into play all the days of our lives. His promise is to be with us, never leave us or forsake us (Deut. 31:6).

Like Jesus, we are to SURRENDER and GIVE IN, every concern we have to God the Father, HE IS OUR SOURCE OF STRENGTH. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. This will thwart the enemy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me anchor myself in the truth of who you were, who you are and who you always will be. In my chaotic life you remain unchanged. Thank you for the plans and purpose you have for my life. Help me to always GIVE IN and SURRENDER. You are my solid rock, my firm foundation and my peace. Amen

Question: What changes do you need to make to make it a habit to surrender and give in?

Carol Papka

Saturday, April 13

ROMANS 8: 1-11 "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

Over the years, I have discovered that the life of faith is less about saying no -- and more about saying yes. Saying yes to God.

It would seem, on first reading of the 8th chapter of Romans, that St. Paul -- from pulpits, tracts and treatises, there has been a flood of thundering commentary on the dangers of the flesh.-- and how our eternal life prospects are severely jeopardized should we become too cozy with the temptations that course within us and are dangled in front of us.

All God wants is to be with us. To be close to us. To be intimate with us. God wants to move on a continuum with us -- from being a stranger to an acquaintance to a friend to an intimate friend with God God's desire for intimacy is to allow the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and then set us free. God gives us the chance -- and the choice, over and over again, to say yes to that gift.

The sins of the flesh purport to offer an intimacy -- but it is a fabricated and false intimacy; more about instant gratification than anything else. We live in a culture that is massively devoted to instant gratification, which can be fun and exciting -- in the moment. Instant gratification is also easy to sell, and can be readily bought. And it doesn't last.

But the intimacy of the Spirit is deeper, more abiding and less flashy (and less fleshy). It is transforming. It can set us free. That is what St. Paul is writing about. The intimacy of the Spirit has never been for sale. It is a pure and holy gift.

Friday, April 12

God's Time

Mark 12:29-31 (NIV) ²⁹ “*The most important one,*” answered Jesus, “*is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’* ³⁰ *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’* ³¹ *The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

The passage about Jesus being rushed to save the ruler's daughter, jostled along by many people, a frightened father, when a woman touches his robe to be healed from a bleeding disorder reminds me of our hectic lives today.

As a frantic father beseeches Jesus to hurry for his daughter's sake, Jesus stops. He could have kept going. The woman had stopped bleeding. But Jesus stopped and continued ministering.

As in all of God's Word, there are many lessons to learn in this short passage. I treasure the fact that as busy as Jesus was, he stopped, he took time and still had time-God's time.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Calm my heart. Help me surrender to your will, your guidance, your timetable. Let me know when I spend time in Your Word and in prayer, you give the time to do your will. In Jesus' name, Amen

Question

Do you serve on your timetable or God's timetable?

Larry & Suzanne Crossan

Wednesday, March 20

Giving Out

(Philippians 2:4 MSG) “Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” True happiness in one’s life is not thinking about yourself, but thinking and caring about the needs of others around you.

(Philippians 2:20-21 MSG) I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves, with little concern for the things of Jesus.

We as individuals are thinking about our own plans and not looking out for the interests of others. Helping others is what God expects of us. If you want to be truly happy, then helping others is the way to that happiness. Start your day asking God to guide you, instead of thinking and focusing on ourselves without God’s help. Unselfish people plan their lives around others and this comes naturally to them when God is the center of their lives guiding and teaching them.

It is easy to miss the needs of others when life gets busy and we are not paying attention. However, when you turn your focus to being a servant of God, you automatically think about who you can help on a daily basis.

Helping others is as simple as taking out the neighbor’s garbage can on trash day, when the weather is bad. Simply sitting and listening to someone who is having a bad day, because of an illness or a family situation can be of tremendous comfort to them. Finding a local organization where volunteers are a vital part of their mission i.e. CASA which are Court Appointed Special Advocates for children in the foster care system, Rainbow House, NOA, Jeremiah’s Place, Community Helping Place or a service organization in your church. There are so many worthy causes to help others in need that you don’t have to look far.

Instead of beating yourself up about all the opportunities you might have missed to help others, find happiness by serving God by serving others.

The Prayer: Father, Allow me to serve others with a joyful heart; never keeping score; always giving; never expecting to receive. Allow me to give of myself, to give of my talents and of my goods, to give of my time and of my energy, to give of my heart and of my soul. Help me understand the needs of others, you have been so gracious to me, allow me to serve others as You serve, choosing to extend mercy to the brokenhearted, like You have repeatedly shown it to me, Amen

Question: What does turning your focus to being a servant of God mean to you?

Jim and Linda Carroll

Thursday, March 21

I Thirst!

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, My God.” Psalm 42

How often have we thirsted? Thirsted for water on a hot summer’s day? Thirsted for love when we felt utterly alone? Thirsted for something, anything, that would fill us up so that our deep longing would be quenched? The Psalmist is feeling this kind of thirst. His enemies ask him, “Where is your God?” The Psalmist could have cursed God. He could have said that God doesn’t love him anymore. Or even worse, that God is dead. But instead the Psalmist immediately goes to a time when he was filled up with the power of God. He found that his thirst was quenched only in presence of God! It is at this point that the Psalmist exclaims, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!

Even in the time of darkness is God’s song with you? Cry out to God your Rock! God’s song will quench your thirst!

Do you hear the roar of the waterfalls? Although the waters seek to drown you, do not be afraid! Instead, drink of the water of life!

As we travel together these next 40 days, take your thirst to God. Tell Him you want to be filled up until your cup overflows!

Prayer: Abba, Lord. Have mercy on me a sinner. I am so very thirsty. Cleanse me, wash me, fill me up! May the water of life flow from me so that all may feel your love and grace. In the Name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Questions: When was a time that you were thirsty for God? How did He fill you up? Did it make you want to share God’s love and praise Him?

How can the image of a waterfall help keep you focused on the cross?

Rev. Robin Parr

Thursday, April 11

Your Dwelling Place

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!

*2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

*3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—
a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God.*

4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. (Psalm 84)

Here in the middle of Lent, this season of intense contemplation for Christians as we prepare for that joyful Eastertide celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, we glimpse the times of trial found in both Testaments but most particularly those of Jesus in the wilderness. Over this 40-day period, some of us may have engaged this opportunity for renewal by fasting from certain foods. Others might have fasted from “screen time” to encounter the Lord personally in those nearest to them. Still others may have taken on a new task, such as meditation, prayer, Bible reading, band meetings, or volunteering. Our common bond in all such activities is that each participant is seeking the “lovely dwelling place” of the Lord.

Psalm 84, at the time of its writing, most likely reflected the sense of people on a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to seek God’s company. To us, however, this psalm can also have contemporary meaning in the light of God’s loving gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we know each of us is a temple of the Lord’s. As a consequence, in all that we do, others should see that Love within us—in the care we take of our physical world, the earth, which we see as God’s dwelling place, and of all its inhabitants as well. And let us seek God’s goodness and love for all those with whom we walk. We need not travel far to seek the Lord of Hosts; the Lord is here.

PRAYER Oh Lord God of Hosts, we joyfully give you thanks that we need not search far to find your Holy Shelter, for it surrounds us and is in us. In this season of Lent, we look to the birds merrily building their nests throughout creation in anticipation of the glorious spectacle of the Renewed Life to come. Let it be so. Amen

Question: What does it mean to dwell in the Lord?

Rev. Robin Parr

“Mordecai sent her this message: “Don’t think that just because you live in the king’s house you’re the one Jew who will get out of this alive. If you persist in staying silent at a time like this, help and deliverance will arrive for the Jews from someplace else; but you and your family will be wiped out. Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this.” Esther sent back her answer to Mordecai: “Go and get all the Jews living in Susa together. Fast for me. Don’t eat or drink for three days, either day or night. I and my maids will fast with you. If you will do this, I’ll go to the king, even though it’s forbidden. If I die, I die.” -Esther 4:13-16

God has blessed us with the immense privilege and responsibility of being able to make our own decisions, and some of the hardest choices we have to make are the choices to surrender what seems best for ourselves in order to do what’s best for God and His people. Esther knew that she wasn’t required to risk her life to help God’s people. It was entirely her choice. She could have remained comfortable and safe in her position, with the understanding that God could use someone else for His purposes. However, she chose to surrender her comfort, her position, her safety, and her life to step in for the wellbeing of God’s people.

God gives us the opportunity to surrender small things in our daily lives as a practice for the times in our life when the cost of surrender is much higher. Waking up a little earlier to set time aside to spend with God, praying in times of difficulty rather than leaning on physical comforts, and risking our image/reputation by sharing God’s Word when we feel His nudge are examples as small acts of surrender that create big changes in our lives. When we listen, God makes areas of surrender clear to us.

Question: In what areas of your life, small or large, is God asking you to surrender your will to His today?

Prayer: Lord, we ask to hear Your Voice as you call us to surrender. Surrender can be painful, but we don’t want to miss out on opportunities that bring us closer to You. Lead us into practices of discerning our thoughts and knowing when to surrender our will to Yours. We thank You for the privilege and responsibilities You see fit to give us through our choices. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

Stephanie Gaines

Therefore **be imitators of God** as dear children. (*Ephesians 1, NKJV*)

“I ALWAYS wanted to go to Australia!” said my friend Jackie. My response? “I always wanted to go Australia.” And so the adventure began. We felt clearly it would be a mission trip – we just didn’t know what the mission would be. And so we counted on God’s direction.

We flew into Melbourne, Australia, rented a car and drove on the wrong side of the road to my friend Steve’s house. We were in a Dissertation Writing course together, so we knew each other very well! Now he was a Bible teacher at a college and pastoring a mission church for the “God Squad” (Real “Hell’s Angels” who found Jesus and became the God Squad.)

As we ate ‘shrimp’ from the “bar-be”, Steve asked if I wanted to speak at church the next morning. “Of course!” Steve said: “No sermon, I want you to share the testimony of how you experienced God’s Grace in grief. My people are hurting and they need to hear that.” The church looked like a ‘biker bar’. There were more Harleys in the parking lot than cars. There were psychedelic pictures painted on the walls, and more leather and tattoos than I’d every seen in one place. The ‘praise band’ looked like a group of thugs and gang members.

I shared my testimony, and it was obvious that many hearts were being touched. I was in awe of God’s anointing, letting me be His vessel in a setting physically and culturally unlike anything I’d ever seen. After the service, people lined up to speak to me. I saw a normal looking woman. With misty eyes, she looked into mine as she held my hands. “When you came in this morning, I recognized you. I knew that I knew you from somewhere so I began asking around, looking for someone who knew who you were. I was so sure I recognized you!”

“Then... when you spoke, I realized that it wasn’t you that I recognized, but Jesus in you!”
WOW! I was overwhelmed! What a gift of grace! And the fulfillment of God’s will and purpose as He spoke through me.

Prayer: “O God, may I be so open and in tune with your Spirit, that as others see me, they will see Jesus.”

Question: Who will I meet today who needs and can see Jesus in me?
Rev. Gayle Hubbard

Saturday, March 23

Giving In and Growing

Romans 3:23-24 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

A very short time ago my view on sanctified would have been so very different than it is now. "Holy" people, as I saw it at the time were very hypocritical and extremely flawed. My list of actual holy ones got shorter over the years in the church. What is sanctified? I felt it didn't exist. I witnessed anyone from, strong congregation members to pastors fall to temptation and it rocked my faith. Eventually the betrayal of a church member hit me in personal and painful way. I decided my time in this "God" business was done. Ten years later, and four years back in church my understanding of is now different, but not completely changed. I know now that holy starts with someone much bigger than us. Much bigger than any person. We are all called as Christians to strive to be holy. We are called to be God's children and a reflection of His holiness. Also, after much study I understand that as Christians we are all sinners, broken, liars, thieves, and hypocrites. We all sit together as a congregation working every day at giving in. At letting go and letting God. He transforms us from the inside out. Only God can teach us all what holiness truly is so we can better reflect Him despite our sin. God states clearly, "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), that is why we need Him so desperately. These past two years giving in and giving it to Him have been a large part of my walk. Giving Him total control of my life and my walk and how that should look. He is molding, shaping, and refining like fire. And when I think I can't be refined anymore He starts again. I have also learned that years ago my faith was in people, not God. God alone gives us the example of what sanctified should look like. If we follow His perfect example and are willing to walk the road of giving in to his will COMPLETELY in our lives, we will be forever changed.

Dear Jesus, Help me to continue to learn about what sanctification means in my life. Grow me to be able to be a witness and a help to so many others who have been hurt by placing the strength of their faith in people, instead of in you. Grow me from the inside out by giving in to what my ideas have been of the Christian walk and what it should look like according to You. Show me what holiness should look like in my life. Help me reflect Your holiness to others. In a way that shows them You Lord. That giving in to You is the way to truly achieve sanctification. We can never do it on our own. Thank you Lord for Your help each day in this. Not ever my strength, but yours. Amen

Question: How can you move from just knowing Jesus to becoming holy and sanctified through Jesus?

Julie Johnson

Tuesday, April 9

Surrender

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your pats.

Luke 9:23-24 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

I often pray for the strength to walk the walk of being a Christ follower. It seems that I am "weak" to my own needs, wants, fears and even pain, and that I do not fully follow Him because of this short coming. There is no better image of submission than to picture someone lying face down before the throne of God. It is easy for me to imagine how *fast* and how *flat* I would be in front of His throne, however I easily take the other path when facing pressure either external or internal. I think a full act of submission is a full act of faith and trust. This requires me to push through, over and past my own limits, yet ironically He actually makes it easy. God gifts this to us with no strings attached other than a promise of true freedom from our own incarceration. I picture a "worshipper" with open hands extended to the cross. These open hands are ready to receive and not gripping on to the old ways. What a wonderful feeling to open your own heart, mind and soul to the outpouring of God's love, wisdom, grace, forgiveness, etc.

Prayer: Lord, You have given me the strength and everything I need to accept Your gifts. I pray for the clarity of vision to see those gifts and embrace them with my heart, soul and mind.

Questions: How does my willingness to trust my closest friend, spouse, or sibling compare to my willingness to give in to God and His will for me? What do you have to give up? What do you have to gain? If I told you that the most powerful omnipotent being in the universe wanted to take complete care of you in every aspect of your life, would you receive it fully or conditionally?

Billy Luesing

Monday, April 8

Going Fishin'

John 21:6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

I remember that day. Daddy told me the night before, "I'm going fishin' in the morning." My ears perked up and I asked, "Can I go?" Daddy gave me a stern look, not sure he wanted to spend a Saturday with his clumsy 8-year-old youngest daughter in a boat, early in the morning. But he relented and said, "Sure!"

I loved spending time with my Daddy, especially at the lake. We had a fishing boat that Daddy had built himself, but, although the boat was solid, the motor sometimes wasn't reliable and we found ourselves paddling back to shore. None of that mattered, though, as long as we were on the lake and the fish were biting.

Soon after we arrived and maneuvered our way to the "hidden spots" where Daddy and other family members had dumped last year's cedar Christmas trees, we began to cast our lines out into the deep lake waters, Daddy on one side, me on the other.

Throughout the day, I proved my father right. Five casts in, I caught Daddy on the back of his shirt. A few more casts later, I had lost several hooks, and miles of line due to the many Christmas trees littering the bottom of the cove. Daddy spent a great deal of time snapping line, pulling tangles, and rethreading my line.

Finally Daddy said, "Why don't you fish on the other side, away from the trees." "But Daddy," I replied, "The fish are hidden in the trees." "Maybe so," he said, "But they may just swim out if they see your bait." I trusted my father. So I threw my line on the other side. It wasn't more than twenty minutes later that I felt a tug on my line.. "I GOT ONE!" I exclaimed. So often in life we take our humanness and expect to work miracles. We are excited about the trip, but we think we can do it all on our own. And then we hear our Heavenly Father say, "Cast your net on the other side." Do we trust God enough to listen and follow, submitting to His will and not our own?

Prayer: Abba, Father, not my will but yours. Show me where to go, show me where to cast, show me who needs your love. Yes, Father, I will go! Send me! Amen.

Question: Can you imagine what you will catch if God tells you to cast your net on the other side? Me neither, but I sure am excited to find out! Will you go with me?
Rev. Robin Parr

Sunday, March 24

Never Stop

"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah." Acts 5:42

I was tired. That's one of the main reasons why I quit playing basketball after my sophomore year in high school. I had been playing that sport since I was eight years old. I loved it...really, I did. But, after putting a lot of time, effort, and sweat into practice and playing games, I guess I had had enough. I didn't have a coach to encourage me or push me to do better, either. The one that did encourage me left to go to another school after my freshman year. So when I grew weary, I decided to throw in the towel and stop playing the game I loved.

What if the disciples had grown weary and given up after Jesus died? What if they had just stopped believing in Jesus and never told anyone about Him? What would have happened? I, for one, am glad that they did not give up. After Jesus ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit came down, the disciples began preaching, teaching, healing, and doing mighty things in the power of the name of Jesus Christ. Many came to believe in Jesus because of the message they spread.

But, it wasn't always happy times for the disciples. They faced opposition from the Jewish leaders and the Sanhedrin. They were thrown in prison and even some were killed for their belief in Jesus. It was not an easy time for them. I can't even begin to imagine the hardships they faced as they preached and taught others about Jesus.

What's one thing the disciples didn't do during this trying time? Give up.

In Acts 5:42, it says that "they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that is Jesus the Messiah." Did you get that? They NEVER STOPPED. They didn't quit or give up when times got hard. They didn't stop preaching just because someone told them not to. They boldly went from house to house and in the temple courts speaking of the good news of Jesus. And they didn't just do it one time. They did it day after day.

Friends, we have much to learn from these first disciples. We should make it our goal to speak the name of Jesus to others every single day. We shouldn't give up because it's too hard, or because we're tired, or because we don't want to offend anyone. We should boldly go and tell others about our risen Savior. **Don't give up. And most importantly, never stop. Someone needs to hear about Jesus today.**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son to die for us so that we could live forever with you. Thank you for the example of your disciples. Help us to live our lives as they did, never stopping and never giving up living a life sold out for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Question: Think about times you have wanted to give up. How does knowing Jesus change how you walk through difficult times?

Vanessa Myers, Director of Children's Ministry, DUMC

Monday, March 25

Giving In

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, But a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.” Hebrews 10:5-6

I have always been horrified, and somewhat mystified by the concept of animal sacrifice. I can only imagine the horrendous noise of bleeding animals, the horrifying stench and sickening gory mess, as rivers of blood poured from the altar, splashing the priests and flooding the Temple floor. I picture the blood running down from thousands of innocent animals, dying in what seems a brutal and senseless waste of precious resources. And God’s chosen people had to sacrifice again and again and again. In all transparency, I confess that I have struggled with this notion of atonement granted through the blood of an animal.

And then we read in Hebrews, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” (Hebrews 10:4)

From the time of the first sin in the garden, God used the blood of animals to cover sin. The Creator of all life himself killed animals to make clothing to “cover” Adam and Eve. And thereafter man kept sinning and animals kept dying; because we could not escape the sin that had been unleashed in the world. What a blessed relief for you and me that Jesus opened a new and permanent way! God’s plan is, and always has been, complete redemption through Jesus, not just a temporary covering of sin.

And so I am confronted with this question: How often have I negated Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for me by failing to be his living sacrifice here on earth? When he went away, so that he could send his spirit, he imbued believers with the power to live the sacrificial life in this fleshly body. But do I take up my own cross daily to sacrifice my needs to the needs of others? Do I sacrifice my need to be right, to control my circumstances or the behavior of others? Do I sacrifice my temptation to use harsh words, when words of affirmation would better serve? In other words, am I living my life in a way that testifies that his once-and-for-all sacrifice covers me? Do I believe in my inner being that all that shed blood was worth the price, and does the way I live my life reflect that belief?

Prayer: God of all life, Thank you that you knew all along how weak we humans would be, and that you had a plan to redeem us. Thank you that we can accept through faith the miraculous mystery of life in the Spirit. And thank you that you give us the power to live that sacrificial life, if we simply take you at your Word. We bless your name and give you all the praise!

In your life-giving name, AMEN

Thought to Ponder: Once, when I was having trouble recruiting donors for a Red Cross blood drive, I off-handedly quipped that we should make a poster stating, “Jesus gave it all; surely you can give a pint!” My pastor/boss thought not. All insensitive joking aside, knowing that Jesus willingly went to the Cross and suffered and died for your sins, how often do take his sacrifice into account when making decisions in your daily life? Do you willingly sacrifice self in grateful response to his gift?

Marilou Bordonaro

Sunday, April 7

The End of the Rope

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.” –Matthew 5:3 (The Message)

There are times in our lives when we feel we are at the end of our rope; whether that’s in a job, a marriage, friendships, financially, sickness, or even our spiritual life. We feel as if we are hanging on by a thread and at any minute everything could unravel. In these moments it seems silly to consider ourselves blessed. However, Jesus opens up the Sermon on the Mount telling those who feel at the end of their rope that they are blessed.

Out of everything Jesus could have said to the thousands of people there, he decided to open up by exclaiming the blessed state of those who feel that they are barely hanging on, that life seems to be crumbling in on itself. How can this be so?

It can be quite difficult for humans to recognize their need for God when not in need. Pride starts to creep in and if not careful we can easily forget how much we truly need God. In our moments of desperation we typically react in two ways. We can both curse God and turn away or we can deepen our trust in God. Job could have easily cursed God after everything was taken from him. Joseph could have cursed God when he was sold into slavery by his brothers and spent years in prison. However, both men renewed their faith in God.

Jesus tells us that when we are at the end of our rope that it is in those moments that we are blessed. Our pride is out the window and our humanity is fully realized. In those moments we recognize our need for something bigger than ourselves. We are emptied of ourselves and with ourselves emptied there is now room for God.

We may feel like we are at the end of our rope. If you are there, know that you are blessed! God is with you! Let this desperation lead us to fervent prayer; desperation for God like none other in our lives! God moves when we are truly desperate for Him!

Prayer: Father, we repent because we know we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We have allowed our pride and self-sufficiency to become our god. Lord, forgive us. We are in desperate need of you! We are at the end of our rope and we know we need you in our lives more than anything else. God we need you to move in our lives, the lives of our families, and in our communities. God let us never forget our need of you in the bad and in the good. Amen.

Question: Do you recognize your need for God?

Nathan Dickens, Wesley Director, UNG

Saturday, April 6

I'm Tired!

"They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." -Mark 6:51b-52

Ministry to and with students can be tiring and perplexing. Having been working with students for some time now and realizing it's a calling and not a season for me, I have experienced the fatigue that at a time or two went past exhaustion to burnout and disillusionment. If we are not careful we can be so burned through that it affects our loved ones as much, if not more, than us. In the moment of the frustrations and wanting to give up, it was easy to blame people and environments around me, so I did. But something "funny" happens when you are at the end of your rope with God: Jesus shows up even if you are not looking for Him, or not wanting to see Him.

I love the stories we have of the first followers of Jesus, it points me to why ministry can be so exhausting, because Jesus was, well, exhausting to follow. The people following Him also got frustrated with Jesus, I bet they even griped about Him in conversation with each other. There is a story in the sixth chapter of Mark that capture this reality, "The feeding of the five thousand." For the disciples, this starts out promising enough. Jesus tells them to rest, but that plan got nixed pretty quickly when some unexpected needs arise (sound familiar?). Instead thousands of people are in front of them and Jesus has compassion for those gathered. They needed a Shepherd and according to Jesus... food. So often we focus on the miraculous in this story and rightfully so, however to focus only on that is like crediting only the preaching when a dynamic healthy ministry emerges. Yes, loaves and fishes multiplying is spectacular. But twelve guys delivered food to thousands of people, probably hungry, impatient and ungrateful (middle schoolers?) people.

I think sometimes we miss the human element of the disciples in the Gospels. They really are not all that different than us. Asked to do all sorts of crazy, tiring and ridiculous tasks, with little recognition, or maybe even over critiqued.

I'm going to assume that I'm not alone when I say, there have been times when I have been so broken hearted, stressed and worn down from doing Christ's work with great people that I can't recognize Jesus when He's right in front of me. I will assume that Jesus is all together something else when he presents himself. I completely miss him.

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." Mark 6:51-52

I hate missing Jesus and I've learned that always, I mean always Jesus is there. In the moments of fatigue, conflict, dry seasons or the incredibly fruitful but fast paced seasons where we run on empty and my heart gets hard. I don't understand. And Jesus is there.

So take courage, don't be afraid, don't give up, it is Jesus right there with you. Christ is at times severe in calling us past where we think we can go, yet always tender in giving mercy and calming the wind.

Prayer: Jesus please open my eyes to you. I don't want to miss you, especially while you are standing right beside me! Amen

Tuesday, March 26

"Giving In: Surrender"

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27..... "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

In the fall of 2015 Jean and I were in the early stages of our relationship planning our wedding and future. On a Sunday morning in the very early hours of the night Jean received an alarming phone call from me that a severe thunderstorm with a loud clap of thunder and lightening stuck a very large 100ft tall 3 ft wide Hickory tree that came crashing down on my house 6 feet from my bed. As this giant tree splintered at the base and fell it tore through power poles and blowing up a transformer with another loud terrifying explosion then followed by the frightening sounds of my house being crushed. We prayed that morning on the phone thanking God for sparing my life. This happened just days before I was to put the house on the market for sale as part of our future, and suddenly a wrench was thrown into our plans.

Thankfully I had insurance, but the company was slow to respond and as the next week began there seemed no solution in sight for repairs. What we needed to do was stop and understand that it was not insurance we needed and that we needed to reach out for assurance...which comes only from trusting God and as scripture states have our "Foundation on the rock"...Jesus Christ.

We were not including God and surrendering all to him as we tried to work things out ourselves in utter frustration and turmoil leading us to have disagreements damaging our relationship. We finally came to a point that we could not do this on our own and we finally surrendered realizing we had to turn our eyes and hearts to the Lord; and let me tell you the relief was indescribable and with God in control all was repaired quickly. Allowing God to guide our lives using this situation taught us a lesson in trust, faith and love we will carry forever in our marriage building a strong foundation for our new life together.

Prayer: "Lord I thank you for your grace, love, and guidance in all situations and when storms come in our way that we look to you and place our faith and foundation on the rock, The Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Question: Are you letting go and letting God be your foundation?
Jean and Greg Thomas

Wednesday, March 27

Giving In to Sanctification

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus tells us “You, therefore, must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

Sanctification should be thought of as efforts to become holy. Is there is difference between holiness and striving for Christian perfection? John Wesley in his sermon on Christian perfection tells us that holiness and Christian perfection is the same thing. There is little doubt that all our striving for Christian perfection will leave us short. With the exception of our Lord, there has never been a perfect person. Even the people we read about in the bible had their shortcomings, and some were obviously very short.

John Wesley acknowledges that the word perfect may be off-putting for many reasons, but mainly because it cannot be attained in this life. Does that mean we should not strive for Christian perfection?

We certainly strive for perfection in everyday pursuits. In school we strive for a perfect score; on the golf course we strive for a perfect shot; we look for the perfect job or the perfect place to live. We do not find perfection in most of these pursuits, but it doesn't prevent us from trying nor dampen our enthusiasm. So, given that following the Lord should be primary in our life, why does the thought of striving for Christian perfection make it something we are not comfortable with and give up on?

Could it be that we really don't want to pursue it? We all have things we can easily identify that we do or don't do that keep us from this pursuit. Could it be that we just don't want to give up such and such because we enjoy it too much or don't do such and such that we know we should because it requires too much effort? Are we afraid of failure, or maybe of success? Such questions sound simplistic, but maybe it is that simple. Answering them can be the first step in giving in to sanctification.

Prayer: Dear Lord, There are things right in front of me that prevent me from being more like You. Help me to remove these things and do what I should do. Amen

Questions: Are we afraid of failure, or maybe of success?

Anthony and Susan Lancaster

Friday, April 5

Active Faith

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. - Colossians 3:1

I love to exercise. No, let me rephrase that: I love how exercise makes me feel. I love the flush of energy as the endorphins flood my bloodstream, the feeling of euphoria I get from using my muscles. Oftentimes, though, the hard part is getting started. It can be difficult to fight the inertia that makes it more appealing to sit on the sofa with a good book than to lace up my walking shoes or pick up a dumbbell.

In the same way, I can experience a sort of spiritual inertia - a spiritual laziness if you will. Paul tells us here in Colossians to **actively** pursue our faith - to **seek** the things above. The Amplified version says to “set your mind and keep focused habitually.” The bottom line is this: faith is active. It is not something that just happens to you. It is a striving, but in a good way.

In ***Renovation of the Heart***, Christian philosopher Dallas Willard wrote that “the substance of our selves was formed in a world against God.” And therein lies the rub: It is not in my human nature to actively seek the things above, to take up my cross daily and to live as Christ. It does not come naturally for me to sacrifice my human wants, desires and drives. Just as I am sometimes lazy when it comes to physical exercise, so I can become lethargic when it comes to seeking righteousness. There are times in my walk with Jesus when I must consciously choose to put aside the things of this world and take an eternal perspective; in other words, to pick up my spiritual kettlebell. There are times when I must sacrifice my human need to be right, my need to be in control of my time or resources. Indeed, there are times when I just need to sacrifice my will to His. And the time to do those things is all the time!

St. Francis of Assisi said to, “Wear the world as a loose garment, which touches us in a few places and there lightly.” Unfortunately, the world most often fits me like a glove. My heart's desire is that I would learn to sacrifice the comfort of what fits me so well, for the grace to actively seek His kingdom.

Prayer Dear Righteous God, You and you alone are worthy. And yet you have planted in me a desire to seek your kingdom and your righteousness. You have made me an heir to the kingdom, along with Christ. Give me the power and discernment to overcome the forces that would have me be spiritually lazy. Equip me through your Spirit to view this world with an eternal perspective, so that your will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Your Mighty Name, Amen

Ponder: How are you intentional in actively pursuing your faith? How do you view the things you face each day in the light of eternity?
Marilou Bordonaro

Thursday, April 4

How Do We Do?

Jesus says in Luke 21:13-15. *And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.*

Many read this and forget that Jesus fought temptation for 40 days in the desert.

Luke 4:1-13 NIV *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.' "* The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is not think for ourselves, but to allow Christ, and the Holy Spirit to speak through us. We don't want to give up that earthly control.

During His struggles, He quoted God's Word, recognized the enemy's tricks, and emphasized worshiping God.

This is an important lesson, but we can also learn from Jesus by simply recognizing that he spent 40 days alone with God, preparing for the next phase of his ministry.

Prayer: Lord, help me to prepare myself for Easter by turning my mind, thoughts, words, deeds, and heart to you. I submit myself to you. In Jesus Name, Amen

Question: Over the next days, before we arrive at Easter morning, how will you spend this time with God? And what is God preparing you for? Dig into the Word. Spend time in prayer. Listen to what God has to say.

Frank Zimmerman

Thursday, March 28

Held in the Arms of God

He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart
Is. 40:11

My late husband, Rick, was a 'force of nature,' seemingly 'bigger than life.' At 6'6" with curly hair and beard, he appeared to be a 'giant,' especially to children. He was a gifted scholar and leader, clearly headed toward law school, and then politics. His life and future changed the night he joined with the thousands as Billy Graham gave the invitation, to give himself fully to Christ and to answer the call to ministry. After Seminary, his first full-time church was Mossy Creek UMC, south of Cleveland.

Tiffany was only three. Her parents were in the midst of a divorce, so her life was filled with confusion, chaos and wondering where she belonged. Her grandmother always brought her to church on Sunday, it gave her order and support when she was too young to understand. Tiffany always sat in front of the altar where Rick was seated on the floor, to hear the Children's Sermon. As he was keenly aware of her circumstance, he always made time after church to pick her up, hold her and talk with her about things she loved and letting her know how important she was to him. That had been the situation for a number of months, then we took a Sunday vacation day. Someone else preached, and a woman in the church did the children's sermon.

On the way home, Tiffany asked her grandmother: "where was God today?" "God is always here, wherever we are." Tiffany looked very confused and confounded. Her grandmother tried to assure her of God's constant presence. Tiffany finally explained: "God wasn't at church today. Some *lady* told us the story."

That child was convinced that every time God saw her, he picked her up, held her in his arms and talked with her about the things that were important to her. Rick tried to hold back tears as he realized Tiffany believed he was God: the one who held her, comforted her, loved her, and always had time for her.

"Prayer: O God, as we walk through this day, please empower us to do so in such a way, that someone will feel that they have been in Your Presence."

Question: Who will you see today who will feel they have been in the presence of the Living God?

Rev. Gayle Hubbard

Friday, March 29

Giving In

Matthew 11: 28-30 *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

About thirty years ago an unusual set of circumstances, brought my wife and I face to face with a baby girl whose father had asked for assistance in finding her a home. As a result of the perfect timing of this meeting, my wife immediately felt this was a calling from God.

We already had two boys, ages 16 and 11, and “my plan was to be getting closer to the end of child rearing. This struggle between her calling and “my plan” went on for weeks. The longer it went, the more burdened I became from resisting God’s will. The Holy Spirit continued to work on me!

Finally, as we went to church on Sunday, I was so burdened that I felt like I had an anvil on my shoulders. The message from the pastor was “lay your burdens at the foot of the cross”. I prayed for God to take this burden from me and set me free. When the service was over, I felt such overwhelming joy that this burden had been lifted and I said to my wife “let’s go get this baby girl”. All of my fears and anxiety were gone, and for the first time in my life, I knew that I was following God’s will for me and our family,

The best part of this story is how God continually blessed us as a family. Our daughter was an immeasurable source of joy to each of us and a constant reminder that God knew “exactly” what was best for our entire family. I thank Him everyday for this wonderful gift which we received through “Faith”.

Prayer: *Dear God, Please give me the opportunity to be challenged with Your will, the wisdom to recognize your will for what it is, and the courage to accept the challenge.*

Question: Are you willing to give your burdens to God knowing that He will bless you in joyful ways, so unexpectant?

Wednesday, April 3

Baby Steps

Heb 10:10 *By which we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for All*

2 Cor 5:17 *therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are becoming new*

Everything in life it seems, comes in baby steps. Even as young Christian who have just accepted Jesus into their hearts say ok, now what? I’ll read my bible, I’ll love more, I’ll try to be nicer to people, we try to be perfect. I don’t know about you but sometimes I struggle with trying to be a perfect Christian. I do believe however that when God looks at a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, God sees a person (us) completely justified or perfect as if they(we)have never sinned. Heb 10:10

Jesus was perfect but still grew through the Holy Spirit. Even a baby is not perfect unless it grows. The Bible speaks about How God was filled with the Holy Spirit before he went into the wilderness but when he came out of the wilderness he was empowered by the Holy Spirit . God wants us to grow spiritually by reading our bibles and spending time with him in prayer. When we read and study his words we are fed and become strong spiritually. We are not and we will never be perfect but we can strive to be more Christ like. Paul guides us in Chapter 6 of Romans to try to live as mature, holy people and make time for the Lord daily. When we do this, we become new 2 Cor 5:17and realize that God makes us perfect in his eyes...

Prayer: Dear Father God, I thank you for your son Jesus Christ who paid the ultimate price for me to justified. I pray Lord that you forgive me of my sins. Father we are not perfect people-but you make us so much better the more we try to be more like Jesus. Give us your love for others and continue to guide us through this world on our not so perfect days. 2 Peter 3:18 grow us in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever, Amen

Question: What struggles do you have that Jesus could give you peace about?

Maggie Moers

Tuesday, April 2

Follow Me

Matthew 4:19-22 Then He said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

"Sacrifice" means giving something up for the benefit of someone else or a greater cause. Each of these men in this scripture made a sacrifice in their life when Jesus invited them to follow Him. Notice, with each one it says immediately they left. I think that sometimes when Jesus calls us, the more time we take to think things over the more time you give the enemy to tempt you and cause doubt and fear in your mind. We should use these men as an example the next time you hear Jesus calling you, don't take too long thinking about it, immediately say, "Yes Lord". Can you imagine how difficult it must have been to walk away from their boats, their families and all that they have known? Not to mention, what must their father have said to them? Are you going to leave me all alone to mend these nets by myself? They each saw something in Jesus that helped them to see what He had to offer was much greater than anything they have ever known. Jesus is calling you.

Lets pray: Father God, help me to live a life of sacrifice, being willing to give up the things that would hinder my walk with You, and help me to respond immediately without hesitation! Thank You Lord, In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen

Questions: What kind of sacrifices might you need to make in order to follow Him? Giving up some bad habits?, leaving some friends behind that are a bad influence?, giving up some of your personal time to spend in God's Word or attending a Sunday school class? Whatever the sacrifice might be, are you willing to make it?

Jennifer Waters

Saturday, March 30

Giving In: Sanctified

2 Corinthians 3: (NLT)

17 For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

Devotion:

When I accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, I received the Holy Spirit, as was promised. But my primary motivation at the time was fire insurance. After I died. In the (at the time) distant future. I had arrived!

I was a real Christian, But because I took no further action the Spirit within me was not allowed to grow and change my life. As I grew into adulthood I allowed fear, ego, and self-centered behavior to drive me. As I progressed into more self-destructive behavior, I still felt a yearning for God, but it was not the most important thing in my life. I spiraled ever downward into a pit of hopeless despair. Then I said the most honest prayer of my life: God help me. I don't know what to do.

That was when God sent me men who could disciple me to become the man God would have me be. I was told to pray at least twice a day. I became involved in the lives of other believers and went to church regularly. I learned to trust. As a result, the Holy Spirit within me grew in power and influence. I became willing to be quiet and listen. I read scripture and became involved in Bible studies. My faith continued to increase. Anger and fear left me, and I began to be useful to God and others.

I don't think Jesus cares that I came for the fire insurance. I think He welcomed the opportunity to sanctify me over time.

Prayer: Father, Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do your will. Remove from me every defect of character which stands between me and my usefulness to you and others. Give me knowledge of your will for me and the power to carry that out. May I do your will always, not mine.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen

A Question to Ponder:

Am I nurturing the Holy Spirit within me?

Chris Buice

Sunday, March 31

Hello and Good Day

I have a tendency to do things in one of three ways. My way, your way, or His Way. I have been sitting here at my desk for about an hour staring at my computer screen and the 4 different versions of the Bible scattered about. I even have a teacher's commentary close by. I spent a little time in prayer away from my computer, phone, and my own thoughts and here we go. Now that I am passed my way of wanting to entertain you, and I'm passed worrying about what you think of my grammar, writing, and fear of how you may perceive my writing, here I am at HIS WAY.

Knowing that if I allow God to be at the center of my heart, soul, mind, and strength, then God can move to do great things. It has nothing to do with me or you, but rather a willingness to simply get out of the way.

My go-to scripture comes from Psalm 37:4-6 *"Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this; He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."*

On a daily basis in my life I try to live simply without trying to complicate things. That is why I love the Simple Gospel so much. So as you move through Lent and this time of sacrifice I encourage you to: Love God, Love People, and pass it on. I know we live in complicated times, but the love of God Almighty is the greatest thing we have.

Prayer: Heavenly Father thank you for today and the opportunity to worship you freely. Lord may you set us free from anything in our life that has us bound up. May we empty our plate of all things and then get a main course of Love. So then we can move through life first loving and being loved by you. Then help us to love others the way you do. Amen

Question: Today, right now, do you trust God? If not, why? And how can you move from doubt to trust?

Chris Davis

DUMYouth Director

Monday, April 1

Giving In: Sanctified

II Corinthians 3:16-18 I have heard it said that there are two halves of the Gospel. The first half takes place when we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and we are justified by God through faith. The second half is the lifelong process that comes afterwards; the process called sanctification. Many believers never experience this work of the Spirit.

"Giving in" means allowing the Holy Spirit to continue God's work in you after we have "given up" our rights to ourselves. We have already been justified, made righteous by God! We are "born again".

At that very moment sanctification begins. John Wesley said, *"From the time of our being born again, the gradual work of sanctification takes place."* If we have the faith to believe that the Spirit's work in us makes us holy, then sanctification is a process that continues throughout our entire lives. We "give in" so that the Spirit can do His work.

Sanctification takes place in us through time spent reading the word of God, through time spent in intimate prayer, and through acts of service. We are active participants. We must welcome the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, seek to know the heart of God, find out where He is already working in our communities and join Him in His redeeming work. Only then can we experience the second half of the gospel.

Prayer: "Heavenly Father, help us to have the faith and the courage to "give in" and allow Your Holy Spirit to continue Your redeeming work in us! Amen

Question: What do you think about the idea that sanctification is the "second half" of the Gospel? What does that look like in your current relationship with God?

Dave Stubblefield

John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation"