



LENTEN
Devotions

*Written by members and friends of
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church,
Hastings, MN
for
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ASH WEDNESDAY

by Gordon Gathright

These words come from James Howell, a United Methodist pastor writing in *Working Preacher*. He says: "On Ash Wednesday. I always tell myself and fellow clergy that they do not come for the homily. They come for the ashes. With coronavirus, will they come at all? Self-administration of ashes? If they come, or if we are virtual somehow, I still love the great reflection Martin Sheen offered when he was interviewed by Krista Tippett: 'How can we understand these great mysteries of the church? I don't have a clue. I just stand in line and say, Here I am, I'm with them, the community of faith. This explains the mystery, all the love. Sometimes I'm just overwhelmed, just watching people in line. It's the most profound thing. You just surrender yourself to it.'"

In many ways Lent is a time for surrender. It is a time when we come to Jesus and we surrender as much of ourselves to him to as much of him as we understand. Sometimes that is hard to do because surrender is not part of our daily thinking.

One of my favorite hymns is I Surrender All. Here are the words of the first verse:

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.
I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

A difficult word in this verse is a little three letter word all. It says I surrender all! In this Lenten season what part of all is difficult? What do we need to do to give all to Jesus? When will we do it? Blessings as we travel together through Lent.

PASS IT ON

by Cathy Shores

Over the years, it has been customary to 'give up' something for lent. People eagerly compare the level of difficulty in their choice with their friends and family, unsure if they would be able to make it to Easter, stating that they will give it their best shot, after all, if Jesus could do what he did, and endure what he endured, I can CERTAINLY pass on chocolate for a few weeks, right? While I have never been the kind to deprive myself of things I love, I do understand the process and the reasoning. However, after a very tumultuous and oh-so challenging 2020, I feel that we have all sacrificed greatly in some way, shape, or form. I would like to turn to 2021 and ask that it be a year of healing, and work through Lent to spend those 40 days 'doing good'. We know that Lent is the 40 days before the celebration of Jesus' resurrection, the most magnificent event. We also know that those 40 days are filled with many big moments. Some celebratory, some stressful, some absolutely horrific. While still acknowledging all of the trials (literally and figuratively) that Jesus went through, I tend to gravitate towards the positive, and crave the end result. I challenge you to take 40 days to do 40 random acts of kindness. These acts don't have to cost a penny. Simply holding the door for someone, or complimenting them on their shoes will suffice. When they thank you (and they will) simply smile, maybe throw them a wink and tell them to pass it on. Hopefully this will cause a long chain reaction of acts of kindness. Isn't this what Jesus wanted for humanity? Doesn't he want us to love our neighbor? We have been commanded by God, and reminded by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39, as it is written: Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Use this time to do good. Take this time to honor God and honor the sacrifices of our Lord. Also...eat some chocolate. God Bless.

Grey Days

by Dar Myers

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

My mother had a plaque on the wall with this verse. It was the first verse I memorized as a child and one of my favorite ones that has helped me get through “grey days” in my life. It is the one that reminds me Jesus is with me always and will give me the strength that I need to get through whatever is happening in my life, such as several surgeries, my daughter in a coma for five months and died, my husband’s health problems and his death, and now the pandemic and not being able to be with family and friends. I know it was Jesus’ words and being by my side always that got me through my “grey days.” I think of Jesus (especially at this time of year, Easter), of His “Grey Days.” I think of Him entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, washing His disciples’ feet for the last time, His time in Gethsemane, being judged, despised, crucified, and buried. My “grey days” do not compare to His. I need His help in keeping my “grey days” in perspective and keeping me mindful of all He left behind in order to bring me forward into new life and helping me know that “sunny days” do come after the “grey days.”

PRAYER: Thank you Lord for giving me the strength I need to get through “grey days.” I cannot comprehend the magnitude of your sacrifice. Thank you for defeating death for me, loving me and considering me worth it. AMEN

TRUST AND THANKFULNESS

Colossians 2: 6-7 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him. Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Psalm 141:8 But mine eyes are unto Thee, O God the Lord; in Thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.

I Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.

Devotional and Prayer

Trust and Thankfulness will get us safely through these days. Trust protects us from worrying and obsessing. Thankfulness keeps us from criticizing and complaining: those “sister sins” that so easily entangle us. Keeping our eyes upon Jesus is the same thing as trusting Him. It is a free choice that we must make daily. The more we choose to trust Him, the easier it becomes. Trust patterns become etched in our brains. We must get into the habit of sending troubles to the edge of our brains, so that He can be central to our thoughts. Thus, we focus on Him, entrusting our concerns into His care.

Dear Lord, please help us to quit trying to do everything ourselves and turn worries over to you. You will never give us more than we can handle and we know you will walk with us through our journeys. Help us to stop trying to write the chapters of our Life Book without you. Help us trust you and thank you as we travel through. Amen.

Submitted by: Denise Atkinson – Trevor and Heidi Lund’s Aunt

PATIENT: WHO, ME??

by Dennis Griffis

Lesson: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

We've all heard the saying, "Patience is a virtue." In this pandemic, it's hard to feel virtuous sometimes. It seems that we're wanting instant gratification on the few things we can do.

So, what does Paul tell us in today's lesson? He tells us to "wait it out", or "endure." What God wants for our life does not mean the "easy road", even if we do it with Him. It's not OUR work, it's GOD's work.

When Paul talks about grace (verses 1-3) we are reminded that grace wasn't given to us because of anything we did. It's given to encourage working with God.

Verses 4 and 5 describe what Paul endured in his ministry. Granted, most of us have not been beaten or imprisoned for our faith. But we are still called to be patient. That's not the same as passive. We are encouraged to be an active participant with God. We'd say; "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade".

So how can we do that? Verses 6 and 7 describe Paul's encouragement to the folks at Corinth—and to us—to have endurance to reach our goal, and he goes on to say how endurance will get us to our goal, by contrasting in verses 8 through 10 how the world sees us and how God sees us.

I hope to see God's view when my work is done.

Prayer: Father, please give us the strength to endure these times we're living in. Help us keep the focus on doing the work that You would have us do. Open our hearts to receive Your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Submitted Annonymously

Psalm 46:10. “Be still, and know that I am God!”

She left the physician’s office with her loved ones after hearing the devastating news. The cancer was rare and the treatment success rate was low. She sat silently in the car for a few minutes and then said, “Be still and know that I am God.” And then the tears came. Her faith, courage, and hope remained strong for the next 10 months until she left this earth to be with her Lord.

Our world is full of unrest—Covid-19, terrorism within our country, high unemployment, tension between family members/ friends, sickness, grief and more. Our lives from time to time may be filled with fear, stress, or confusion. Our lives and our world seem to be spinning around. In the first verse of Psalm 46 we are told “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Take a moment to be silent and reflect, for God repeatedly has told us and shown us that we are loved by him. It is with faith and confidence we too can say his words “Be still and know that I am God.”

Dear Lord,

Thank you for your love. Please walk with me today and every day. When at times my faith may falter please be with me, stay with me. May I too say your words, “Be still and know that I am God.” Amen

TRUST

by Don Kramlinger

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don’t depend on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5

Since my retirement I find myself spending more time reading the Bible and attending OSEL’s Mens Bible study Thursday mornings. With our Pastors’ guidance I’ve begun to understand more deeply what the “WORD” means. I have to confess I don’t understand some of the parables and other parts of the Bible. There are still confusing scriptures, contradictions and mysteries in the Bible. But through our Pastors knowledge and patience I’ve come to understand more than before, *and* if I don’t understand, that’s okay. GOD wants me to trust in Him and my faith will continue to grow.

As we pass through this Lenten season let us take time to reflect upon Jesus and his ministry and the meaning of this season. According to Pastor Joel, “Lent is simply the time that has been created for reflection and preparation for Holy Week and especially the joy of Easter Sunday. Of course to really celebrate Easter though, we need to walk through Holy Week, Jesus’ betrayal, his suffering and death,” and ultimately his resurrection. We are asked to believe, to trust in the WORD, that Jesus died for our sins, that our sins are forgiven, we have been redeemed and salvation is ours. “Thanks be to God.”

Prayer: “Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever.” (Psalm 106:1). Amen

WHAT IS LENT?

by Gary Benson

Lent is traditionally observed by many Christian churches in the world as a time for spiritual renewal and strengthening our relationship with God. It is reminiscent of the forty days and nights that Jesus spent alone in the desert after his baptism. During this time he fasted and spent his time in continual prayer with his heavenly Father. He was preparing for the next three years of his earthly ministry.

Many Christians observe this time of Lent by giving up something in remembrance of the sacrificial life and death of our Lord and Savior. This may include abstaining from gossip, social media, coffee, deserts, alcohol, soda pop, snacking, etc. The list goes on and on. However worthwhile these abstentions may be, it is also worth considering the inclusion of a “to do” list which may be as long and varied as the number of readers of this devotional. But let me suggest something that I am doing during Lent and want to continue for the rest of the year. I have decided to ask God every morning to bring somebody to my attention who I can assist or help in some way no matter how trivial or difficult the task may be. It may be simply to offer to shovel a neighbor’s walk, or get their groceries, or pray for them. It may be to give a call to a “shut in”, or a person in a nursing home or hospital. I truly believe that God will provide the list of people in need and we have to listen to whatever God is directing us to do. All we have to do is answer like the writer of Isaiah did when called to service as recorded in Isaiah 6:8.

Prayer: Dear Lord, “Here am I. Send me!”

WAITING

by Heidi Lund

Isaiah 40:28-31 (NRSV)

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Reflection:

Lent often seems like a marathon in many ways, seasonally and faithfully.

For us in the Midwest, Lent occurs during some of the coldest weeks of the year, some of the shortest days with the least daylight, when we're covered in snow and ice; it feels like winter will never end and spring will never arrive.

In our faith lives, we're also in somewhat of a holding pattern . . . waiting on God, waiting through Lent with each other, praying together, praying for patience, waiting for Holy week.

This year, like last year, Lent is additionally colored by the lens of a global pandemic. However, unlike a year ago, the majority of us are likely awaiting our turns at getting a vaccine. This year it feels even harder to wait during Lent. But we are given blessings every day, and we would be remiss to gloss over them.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, please help us to be patient in waiting for you. The season and this pandemic make waiting even harder than usual; we need you to help us find the joy in waiting. Help us to find the joy in each day and not waste it. Help us to share our love, our waiting, our patience with each other in meaningful ways. Show us to enjoy the waiting, even after such a long year, how to embrace the ways we spend time or pass time together or alone, and know that you are here, with us, always. Waiting.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU GIVING UP FOR LENT?

By Ellen McCullough

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

As much as we have sacrificed over the past year, I am still looking forward to following a Lenten discipline. One of the things I like most about the Lutheran faith is the centuries old structure and symbolism that is observed throughout the Church worldwide. Growing up in a faith that did not observe Lenten practices, I was always intrigued by my friends who would "give up something for Lent" but never questioned why. It amazes me that Christians all over the world will follow this same practice and now, due to the global pandemic, we will feel even more united than ever.

To have that daily reminder (often multiple times a day depending on my choice of discipline for the year) of how Christ was able to avoid temptation and trust God to see him through is even more poignant this year. Each time we are 'tempted' by our chosen discipline, may we be humbled compared to the sacrifices of Christ and also humbled by God's continued grace to see us through.

Dear Lord,

Help me during this Lenten season to remember the significance of my discipline whenever tempted and keep me ever humble.

Amen

UNWORTHY?

by Arnold "Arne" Kvam

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved.)

The Lenten season is a time when we search the depths of our souls. Our thoughts center around the suffering and death of Christ as He travels the road that leads to the cross. As we stand before the throne of grace, we need to admit that we have sinned and do not deserve forgiveness. But the cross of Christ humbles us and also lifts us up, as it proclaims this message of hope. It is not what we have done, but what Christ has done for us. This is the miracle of salvation.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we pray for your grace to strengthen our faith to believe this message of hope. We give thanks to you for counting us always precious in your sight. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

GRANDPA, HOW DO I PRAY?

by Jake Bohlken

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

A few years ago, my grandpa reminded me of a question I asked him many years prior, while I was in confirmation and he was my prayer mentor. “Grandpa,” I had asked meekly, “how do I pray like the other kids? I don’t know how to do it or what to say — I’m worried that I’m going to say the wrong thing.” My grandpa thought for a moment, and responded, “God wants to have a relationship with us, and loves us no matter what. Just talk to God like you’d talk to me, and tell him what’s on your mind. Tell him what you’re thankful for, ask him to light your path, and He will hear you.”

Our God is a loving and all-knowing God who knows what is in our hearts and minds. Even if the words come out a little mixed up, or what you say isn’t as formal or as “perfect” as you want it to be, He hears our prayers and responds as He sees fit — there’s nothing to worry about!

Hey God, it’s me. Thanks for always being there to hear my prayers, whether they come out just like I want them or if they are a mess. Help me, through your wisdom and grace, be a guiding light for those who don’t feel like they know how to talk to you. Please continue to bring me your peace. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE

by Jerry Wiegrefe

Romans 6:23 (NIV 2nd Edition): For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 1:7 (NIV 2nd Edition): In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

1 Peter 2:16 (NIV 2nd Edition): Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

My reflection on these Bible verses:

God isn't a referee who gives us a foul when we fail to follow his commandments. He's a God of grace. His GRACE means God's Riches At Christ's Expense. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world, to die for us on the cross to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. He purchased our freedom with the blood of His son and forgave our sins.

This does not mean we have a permission slip from God to sin all we want in this world. We don't sin so grace abounds. Because of His grace, we are enabled to be free from the burden of our sin so we can live as free people without using our freedom for wickedness, but as servants of God. We can be so thankful that we are able to receive God's grace through our faith in Jesus and be free to live as God's servants.

My Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for Your AMAZING GRACE, which has given us freedom from our burden of sin and the ability to be fee to live as the hands, feet, and heart of Christ in this world. Amen

LOVE

by Karin Grossman

A word that makes me think about romance. But, love really means action. "Actions speak louder than words."

In Matthew 22:39, we are told by Jesus that the second greatest commandment is "to love our neighbors as ourselves." God, in His love for us, sent Jesus to show us how to do that. Jesus helped the sick, fed the hungry and engaged in conversation with a foreigner...the Samaritan woman at the well.

We, too, can show our love to others by writing a letter, making a phone call, visiting or physically helping someone. As the song says "they will know we are Christians by our love."

In 1 Corinthians 13, we are told, "love is patient and kind and love never fails." We can have "faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love." In chapter 4 of 1st John we are reminded that "God is Love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them."

Many times in the Bible we are told how important "love" is in our life as we daily connect with others. With God's help, may we be His servants showing love to others every day. Yes, love is a necessary ingredient in romance and in all our relationships.

Prayer: Heavenly Father...thank you for showing your love to us in so many ways. Help us to share this love with others every day.
Amen

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

by Kathleen O'Connor

Isaiah 40:3

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

How many times do we refuse to prepare the way of the Lord because we feel that we are unworthy?

Every time I read that verse, I hear in my mind the opening line of the musical *Godspell* that opens with a clear voice singing “Pre--pare ye the way of the Lord.” Our High School put on the musical *Godspell* and the best baritone and best actor in the school almost did not participate. His family was very religious belonging to an evangelical church that had people that spoke in tongues during the services. He did not feel it was appropriate to “be Christ” the role he was offered. His father was tutoring me in Chemistry. I stayed for dinner the night this young man was struggling with his love of the theatre and his love of the Lord. His father read the musical and they discussed the evangelism possibilities of others hearing the story and that he was simply being a conduit for God to reach those in attendance. In the end that clear baritone sang Prepare ye the way of the Lord and many people heard the gospel.

Prayer

This Lenten season as we prepare our hearts and minds for the passion of our Lord, help us to prepare the way of the Lord for others too. Amen

THE BEAUTY AROUND US

by Kathy Hardy

“Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.” *1 Chronicles 28:20a NLT*

Let's face it. Life is not easy. Each day we face our own personal demons that can bring us down if we dwell on them too much. Add the stress that the past year has brought, and one must often dig deep within oneself to find strength to face a normal day. Yes, there are good things happening, but it seems like it's so much easier to dwell on the bad things. How do we pick ourselves up and muster the courage to try to be positive and see good? Maybe by starting to see the beauty that is all around us that we have no control over, but that just “happens” because God created this world. Snowflakes, brilliant blue sky, eye squinting sunshine, a bright, clear, frosty starlit night. See and feel the wonders that we have no control over, and then let God help you be strong and courageous to face each and every day.

Heavenly Father, guide me through this day, that I may see the beauty of life around me. Amen.

LESSONS I HAVE LEARNED

by Lori Mikel

As a teacher, I have learned a few lessons that have really stuck with me.

#1 “Do NOT judge a book by its cover.” I always tried to NOT make a judgement about my students before I met them. I wanted to build my own relationship without using other’s perceptions and opinions.

Luke 6:37 - Do not Judge... do not condemn... forgive and you will be forgiven.

#2 You choose how you react to people. I tried to forgive certain behaviors and decided not to add to it, because I would not always know what else is going on in that student’s life.

Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Matthew 18:21-22 - You cannot control what others do, but you can control how you respond to what others do.

Each of us can be a “Day Maker” for someone we either know or don’t know. Greet each day with love, and not judgement, be quick to forgive.

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other as in Christ God forgave you.

1 John 3:18 – Let us not love with only words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

We have two ways in which we can respond to people as they are brought to us in this life.

1. We can judge. Judgement stops the flow of love and the initiative to grow relationships.

2. We can forgive people and be kind and understanding for we do not know what struggles others are going through.

What in your life could you change about how you react? React with forgiveness and understanding and not judgement.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Help us daily to be a better person to those we love and to those acquaintances we meet every day. Amen

One of my favorite hymns, a great reminder!

*What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O, what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

AM I CRAZY?

by Mark Sanstead

I have had a very good year. Despite a background of epidemic, political upheaval and climate change. Am I crazy?

Well, I like to take a big picture perspective. I prefer to look at long-term implications and try to consider how things will eventually turn out. In the meantime, I try to live each day in the moment and with gratitude.

During Lent, let's turn to scripture.

1 Peter 1: 3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

You see, the Bible explains that as Christians we are born again to a living hope. Lent is a time we can reflect on how the resurrection of Christ changes everything. This living hope involves having faith that God has an ultimate plan for us to be with him.

We have faith that Jesus was resurrected, and God has offered us an inheritance that is imperishable and kept in heaven for us. I remember as my father was dying with cancer he pronounced "I know where I am going!" Dad was ready to go and at peace—ready to receive this inheritance.

So, we all know our time will come to depart this earth. For now let us embrace Philippians 4:6-7 which says "do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

I am ready to have another very good year.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gift of Jesus and our eternal inheritance. Help us to live each day with thanksgiving and free of worry knowing you guard our hearts and minds.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

by Michael Swanson

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Lent is a season of repentance, renewal, and reflection. For many of us, it is an opportunity to be intentional about our faith, taking time evaluate our relationship with God and those around us. This Lenten season comes as our world continues to seem so divided everywhere we turn. We are quick to judge, prompt to anger, and rapid to critique. We easily fall prey to the dramas of our broken world.

However, Lent offers us a time to “reset” our attitude and views. Have we been a contributor to the division our world faces? What ripple effects are our actions and thoughts creating in the world? In this verse, we are challenged to love our enemies. It is easy to love those who think like us. Who look like us. Who act like us. But do we show love to those with different opinions? Different experiences? Different views? How would your view of a person or situation change if you humbled yourself enough to pray rather than judge. We are called to love our enemies, those who we disagree with, those who see the world different than us.

A few weeks ago, my mother in law, who does in home daycare, and where my kids go during the day, was scammed by someone who called telling her that her credit card was compromised and

someone was able to hack into her Amazon account. It turned into a mess, she was of course upset, and she told the kids it was a bad person who was wanting to steal her money. A couple weeks went by and the phone rang again, Grandma didn't answer it. Vivy asked Grandma why she didn't answer the phone. Grandma explained it was another one of those bad people wanting to steal her money. Vivyann looked back and said, "Grandma, let's say a prayer for that person so they don't want to take your money anymore. Did you know I pray for Lucifer to become a good angel again?"

So at the kitchen counter, they closed their eyes, and together said a prayer for the caller to be a good person.

From the mouths of babes...The lessons we adults can learn.

During this Lenten season, let us reflect on this lesson from Matthew. How different would our world be if our first reaction was to pray for those we disagreed with, instead of anger?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks for this season of Lent. Help us to grow in our faith during this time, to continue to become more like you. Help us become your ambassadors for our world. Amen.

PREPARE

by Pat O'Connor

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but will have everlasting life.

Matthew 3:3

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, PREPARE ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

“Lent” comes from the Old English word “Lengten” or the common word “lengthen” or the season of “spring” when the days grow longer and, in nature, new flora and fauna flourish.

For most of life’s big events: graduations, weddings, the birth of a child, there is a period to PREPARE and anticipate. Lent is the season between Ash Wednesday and Easter, a season to PREPARE and anticipate the death of Jesus on the cross and celebrate His resurrection from the grave.

John 3:16 does not only promise salvation to the privileged but to “whoever believes in him.” He came because “God so loved the world.”

In this Lenten season, as we PREPARE and anticipate the death and resurrection of our Lord, it is my prayer that we remember our broken humanity and that Christ died for the World.

But, the season is not only for reflection on the brokenness of the world but also to prepare that just as the days grow longer and, in nature, new life springs forth we recall that we are renewed because of Jesus’ death on the cross.

IN THE DUST, THERE IS HOPE

by Dave & Rachel Warg

Ecclesiastes 3:20

All go unto one place; all are of dust, and all turn to dust again.

Because man has eternity set in his heart, we have a unique purpose in God's plan. Yet, we cannot discover God's purpose for our lives by our own efforts – only through building a relationship with Christ and seeking His guidance. In doing so, sometimes we need to be prepared to hear, "No, or not at this time." Are you truly living as God wants? Do you see life as a gift from Him?

We are living in tumultuous times. There have been dark days in our families, our churches, our communities, our states, and our country. We may look different on the outside. We may have differing opinions and passions. But, we are *all* cut from the same cloth, saved by the same loving Father. Now more than ever, we need this Lenten season as a time to restore our unity. Through *reflection* and *reverence* we need to come together; to *renew* our strength, to *repair* relationships with one another and with God, to *release* the pain and sorrow, and to *restore* our faith! We are called as Children of God, to be the hands, and feet of Christ! It is through our calling we are given life and hope. It is there; it has been all along, we simply need to lay down our burdens, rest, pray, and let the dust of despair settle.

There is hope there. I hear it in the voices of my students. I feel it in the arms of my daughter, as we were able to hug for the first time in months after her vaccinations. I see it in the eyes of my husband and the way he watches our son as he gazes in amazement at *his* newborn son. *Hope is there.* It is the most gracious gift we were all promised through the crucifixion.

And it will rise from the dust for all on Easter Morning ~ God willing.

Please pray with us.

Lord, Thank you for the gift of hope. Help us to remember that despite our differences, we are all Your children and You are always with us in the midst of the difficulties we face. We renew our focus to You on this day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LONG AND WINDING ROAD

by Ann Traeder

“I am the Lord your God. I am holding your hand, so don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.” Isaiah 41:13

This past year has been an amazing year for my family. Our experiences have taken us from joyous celebrations to deep sorrow. I’ve always said my faith is like the song from John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “The Long and Winding Road.” The verse from Isaiah gives me great comfort knowing that while I’m traveling on that long and winding road I am not alone. That road will have many ups and downs, left and right turns, potholes and smooth pavement but in all those experiences God is there. He is walking with me and holding my hand.

Let us pray the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy
with Him forever in the next.

Amen

THE LEAF

by Reba Johnson

Ephesians 6:10

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”(KJV)

In my childhood home hung a plaque shaped like a large, brown oak leaf. Engraved on the leaf was this passage from the Bible; “Be Strong In The Lord”. (Eph. 6:10). It wasn’t until both of my parents had died that the plaque was passed on to me. The words “Be strong in the Lord” are now a part of our home.

My mother was a fine model of these words to our family. She demonstrated what it meant to “be strong in the Lord.” She lived it out in her daily life by caring diligently for her family, having a strong relationship with my father, and by being active in her church. What impressed me the most was that she knew she needed Christ in her life. I would find her beginning many mornings or ending her evenings reading her Bible or devotional. These memories are not forgotten, and have brought to me a strong sense of my own spirituality ...a spirituality rooted in gratefulness, love, and respect for God.

To “be strong in the Lord” means to embody humility and a sense of surrender; knowing God is in control and that Christ is always there with me.

Dear Lord,

We come to you with humble hearts, asking for your forgiveness. Fill us up with your love and strengthen us to do the work that lies ahead. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

BE THE LIGHT

by Sheri Fox

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV)

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

When I think of lent, I think of the transition from darkness into light, both literally and spiritually. During the forty days of lent the light of day increases gradually until we have more light than darkness. Similarly, the journey of Jesus through the darkest day of his crucifixion to the glorious light of his resurrection brings the greatest light to Christians everywhere. It is only through the darkness of Jesus laying down his life for us that we are able to be born to eternal life and light.

This year more than any, it seems the imagery of darkness into light is both powerful and fitting. As a world, as a nation and individually we have seen and experienced much darkness. There has been civil unrest, widespread financial devastation, pervasive food insecurity, enormous death and a global pandemic, all of which are tied together. Through all of this we have seen unprecedented examples of people helping each other. The pandemic has kept us separated and in some cases isolated, but has also pushed us to find new ways to connect and be in fellowship with one another. The vaccine brings light and a promise of a gradual return to some semblance of normal, although it will likely be a new normal for most.

During this time of lent, as we prepare for the darkness of the crucifixion and the light of the resurrection of Jesus, reflect on how you can bring light to the darkness. In the words of Amanda Gorman, "For there is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it." Use the light shining in your heart to find places in which you may glorify God by bringing light to others. Send a card or call someone who may be alone,

bake someone a batch of cookies, donate to a food shelf or run errands for someone who can't get out.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for bringing the light of your son, Jesus to me. Help me to find the light of knowledge you have shined in my heart. Help me to see places before me where that light can drive out darkness for others. Let your light shine around and through me to glorify you. Amen.

GOD'S GRACE

by Kathy Casperson

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Like many people, I have very good intentions about spending time, throughout the day, in prayer and meditation. I'm retired; I have lots of time. So why is it so hard to sit down in a quiet place and have a chat with Jesus? Within seconds, my mind is wandering all over.

But Jesus surely understands our motives, our distractions, our feelings of failure. And like any good teacher, Jesus surely notices our progress. So I will keep plugging away, knowing that there is always abundant grace waiting for me.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your unending gift of grace.
Amen

Jesus Gives Life

by Pastor Joel Rova-Hegener

“Jesus said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’” – John 11:34-36

In many English translations of the Bible, verse 35 is the shortest verse in the Bible and reads, “Jesus wept.” In many confirmation classes throughout the years, this verse was chosen as the memorization verse of numerous students!

I have not chosen to write a devotion upon this verse because it is succinct, but because it allows us to look deeply into Jesus’ soul. In these verses, Jesus had just arrived in the town of Bethany, the home of his good friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus, all of whom he loved. Lazarus had died four days before and his sisters were deeply grieving their loss, both sisters having proclaimed, “If you had been here Lord, our brother would not have died.”

We believe that Jesus’ plan all along was to call Lazarus from death back to life. Yet, even with the foreknowledge of what he was going to do, the death of his friend Lazarus and the overwhelming grief of Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary troubles him. Their grief moves Jesus to tears. Why did Jesus weep, when he knew that Lazarus would live again, and soon? Jesus wept, because his love for his friends was so deep, that it troubled him to see their hurt, and their anguish.

Isn’t it comforting to know that Jesus loves his friends, and his disciples so deeply that even their grief can cause him to weep with sympathy? It is comforting to me that Jesus knows what it is to be human. It is comforting to me to that Jesus knows from personal experience how loss, grief, loneliness, and despair feel. For it makes it easy to share those emotions with him in my prayers, and from that I gain strength and comfort.

The opposite then is true as well! Jesus knows the wonderful feelings of happiness, camaraderie, contentedness and joy, too. In other words, Jesus understands human life. He knows what makes up our lives, and so knows what we need each day. In our faith in Jesus, we discover all that we need, and all that we want for a full, purposeful and joy-filled life, as we encounter grief and happiness, loneliness and friendship, despair and joy. As he did for Lazarus, Jesus gives us life!

Dear Jesus, I am grateful that you understand the ins-and-outs of life. I am thankful for your presence. Your gracious gift of forgiveness and salvation fills me with joy, and reminds me of your deep love. Lead me today in my faith, O Lord. Amen.

PRAYER AND FORGIVENESS

by Russ Sylie

Matthew 6:14-15

Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive others, he will not forgive you.

We honor God whose very name is holy, whose kingdom is not just in a far off heaven but takes form on earth among us. God's will is done and our needs are met by God, but God does so through us. We are called to share necessities with others so no one goes without. The forgiveness we exchange with others is granted by God and is crucial in our relationship with God. We ask him to save us from trials and temptations. God does do so and for this we give thanks and praise.

Prayer

God, help me forgive others just as you forgive me. In Jesus' name.
Amen

77 Times and Counting

By Amy Hanson

²¹“ Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy seven times.” -- Matthew 18:21-22

Have you ever found it difficult to forgive someone? Maybe it was that one person on the playground that used to tease you relentlessly in 3rd grade. Maybe it was your spouse and that awful thing they said while you needed comfort not confrontation. Maybe it was your child and their embarrassing behavior at the grocery store last week that caused you to leave your cart in Aisle 5. As humans, we oftentimes find ourselves saying things like “I’ll forgive you this time, but not the next,” or “I forgive, but I won’t forget.” I know I have. But is that really forgiving?

I don’t know about you, but in the past few months, I have reached my limit on some things. From missing out on major milestones with loved ones and spending a little too much quality family time in small spaces, I have certainly felt my limitations – and, my attitude has been less than stellar some days. In Matthew, Chapter 18 we read a few sentences of a conversation between Peter and Jesus regarding forgiveness. As only Jesus can do, these simple statements end up having a profound impact on how we can understand forgiveness. Peter is genuinely asking Jesus about the limit or number of times we should forgive someone for their wrongs against us. He is human, and just like us, he has his limit. When Peter offers seven times, he is thinking he is being overly generous in his offer. (Remember, at that time people could be stoned to death for one small infraction of the law.) Yet, Jesus’ answer tells us that forgiveness is not to be limited. Jesus also does not acknowledge Peter’s feelings about it. He does not say “I understand it is difficult to forgive, but you should forgive 77 times.” Coming from a man who knew the humans around him

would cause Him suffering and death, we can say that it is not for lack of understanding. What I think Jesus is trying to convey is that forgiveness is not to be put into our human box, to be a judgment of our emotional state, or set on our own timeline; it is a gift that is not ours to own but rather an action to take. Over and over and over. Just like our God does for us.

May you be blessed with the strength to take action in whatever place you are holding back forgiveness, and sense the peace of the Lord as you let go. Your cart in Aisle 5 can wait.

IS YOUR EASTER BASKET FULL?

by Paula Davick

As the season of lent is upon us, what do we do to prepare and fill our baskets? A new dress, or maybe a hat, black patent leather shoes, a fuzzy bunny, jelly beans?

At the time of Christ's crucifixion the disciples and other Christians did not have this time of preparation which we call Lent. Although Jesus spent his last days with them teaching and comforting them with a new commandment and a promise. John 13:34 is the commandment. "I give to you: Love one another as I have loved you so men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The promise is John 14:1-3, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God; trust in me; in my father's house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me that you also will be where I am."

Fill your heart and Easter basket with love and kindness as we prepare for Easter morning and Christ's resurrection.

Only one chocolate bunny per person, please!!!

AT ALL TIMES?

by Sherri Lohmann

2 Thessalonians 3:16

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.”

Some words are easy to gloss over without really taking them to heart. The words “peace at all times and in every way” sound so appealing. If life is going well, peace is easier to imagine. But life doesn’t always go well. We experience loss, pain, sickness and death. The pandemic. That playground or office bully. Violence. Fear. Brokenness. When our hearts ache, peace feels unreachable. Can any of us really feel peace at all times and in every way as the Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians? Paul knew that the peace Jesus promised (John 14:27 “my peace I give you”) was different than the world’s view of peace. Paul wrote three of his 13 letters (books) of the New Testament, while he was in prison. Despite being bound in prison chains, he thought of others and wrote encouragement to them by hand. Many of us in a similar situation would have a hard time seeing beyond our own circumstance. Does peace from the Lord mean we don’t have the physical and emotional pains of life? Well, the Lord told us we will have pain and suffering here on earth. However, he also told us he gives us His peace...beyond what the world gives. Think about that! If Paul could step away from his situation to show his care for others, we also can look beyond the prison of our situation to care about others. As we extend peace and caring to others, we feel peace.

Prayer: Lord help us see beyond the prisons of our life situations. Guide us to extend peace and caring to others. Thank you for the promise of your peace, at all times and in every way.

THANKFUL FOR GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

by Wally Obinger

John 3:17, " God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

When I was a boy some of my favorite days were spent on my grandfather's farm. My Uncle John who took over the farm loves to tell a story about the day some of us nephews caused him some trouble! One afternoon he took about 5 of us into the little nearby town of Kingston, MN. After doing his business and buying us treats at the general store, we boys climbed back into the bed of the farm truck and started back to the farm. Boys being boys, we decided it would be fun to throw some of the corn cobs at passing cars. I was a baseball pitcher so I was enjoying using my arm until an unmarked Sheriff's car turned his lights on and pulled my Uncle over. His first question to my Uncle was, "Are these your boys?" My Uncle's response, "No, they're not my boys!" left the deputy dumbfounded, and he let us off with a stern warning!

Boys and girls, men and women, sometimes do some really thoughtless things. God knows our sinful human nature, but unlike my Uncle he claims all of us as his own! In these days of Lent we reflect on God's gift of his Son for our salvation. Repentance leads to God's forgiveness and a new start every day. May we learn from our human mistakes and grow as faithful followers of God's Son.

Prayer: Gracious God, we give thanks for your love and forgiveness. Help us to learn from our mistakes and celebrate our life as forgiven members of your family. Use us to help others know of your great love for the world and all people. Amen.

HOPE, PATIENCE, AND PRAYER

by Jarl Olson

Psalm 62:5

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from Him.

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant
in prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circum-
stances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

As we prepare and reflect on the suffering, death, and resurrec-
tion of Jesus during this Lenten Season, we are reminded how of-
ten He turned to prayer. Jesus would pray in praise of His Father in
Heaven. He would also pray for others and for Himself. He prayed
with abundant hope. We, too, need to pray with acclamation and
thankfulness, with concerns for others as well as ourselves, and
with anticipation and trust knowing we will share in His amazing
promise after the cross.

Prayer

Thank you for sending your Son to show us how to live and for be-
ing a presence in our lives. During these difficult times, we pray for
those who provide care for others. We ask you Lord to watch over
us daily, knowing our every need. Give us patience during trying
times to see Your light of hope shine through.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

THY KINGDOM COME

by Dave McCook

*“O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim
your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.”*

Psalm 71: 17-18 (NRSV)

In the season of Lent, we reflect intently on Jesus’ journey to the cross and what it means: His loving and freely given gift of salvation for who are His. From this idea, the psalmist’s prayer above caught my attention early in the pandemic which was in its full form during last year’s Lenten season. Our lives have been disrupted in numerous major ways over the past year. We are in very trying times. When worldly cares during this time have caused me to be distracted away from things eternal, God’s Word, and especially prayerful passages like v. 17-18 above have been very helpful in getting me back on course. I pray the same effect for you!

Our prayer for God’s Kingdom to “come” is an earnest request for our personal faith-hope to increase and for those outside The Kingdom to become Christian believers. In spite of life’s present challenges, and because of them, I know we must, more than ever, exercise our primary vocation in this earthly journey, in being God’s hands and feet and heart to fulfill the calling of “The Great Commission,” heart by heart.
(Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18, Acts 1:8)

Heavenly Father: I am grateful that in this time and place you gave me life. I ask that you continue to enable me by your Spirit to effectively use what you have taught me so I may help in the growth of your Kingdom in the present and for the generations to come....for all time.
In your name, Jesus, I pray, Amen

SEND ME YOUR LIGHT

by Theresa Chatelle

Psalm 43 (NIV):

¹ *Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.*

² *You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?*

³ *Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.*

I know I am not alone when I share that lately I have struggled with feelings of doubt and discouragement. At times, it seems as though dishonesty and unfairness are widespread and just keep getting worse. Our nation claims to fear God, but behind all the speeches exist actions and decisions that contradict the teachings of God by choosing a path that looks more like control and unfaithfulness.

This country is still my home, and yet my heart mourns over how far we have wandered from God. As the psalmist says, there is always hope and a way back. "Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell." God is faithful and that is what truly matters. God will not fail, and I believe God's love is still stronger than all the evil in the universe. God's unconditional love can move the stars, change the world, and heal the human heart.

During this Lenten season, I pray we will choose to look up to God and ask the Spirit to live within us to help us believe the world can change. Take heart, God is still on his throne, and his kingdom will not fail. Peace be yours.

FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL

by Tom Walt

James 1:20-22 NIV

²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Is anger ever justified? Human anger is not. “Bobber” Bill Abeler said something that shook loose the root of my anger in February 2007. “How can you tell a man is afraid?” he asked the AWANA’s weekend group as Camp Lebanon’s Director up north of St. Francis, MN. “You can tell a man’s afraid... because he’s angry.” Anger is a product of fear. Anger cares only about itself.

You can tell a man’s afraid because he’s angry. Your irate boss, co-worker, neighbor, or family member(s)? Understand them as the scared men they really are. So it goes for my brother who seethes in anger; he is basically terrified. I recognize I am scared when I react in anger because I’ve focused on the irrational False Evidence Appearing Real (FEAR). Fear tries to justify itself in anger.

FEAR is doubt and worry that has been ruminated on to the point of believing what isn’t there or really happened. Any parent who has a child late to arrive home by their curfew has a fleeting thought that their child has been in a terrible accident and is in the hospital. The question is, what am I going to listen to more? FEAR or acceptance? Negatives or positives?

I’m not afraid to die. I know that Jesus Christ died to pay for all my wrongs. I accept Him. Accepting Jesus as your hope shakes loose those other beliefs we’ve filled the truth holes with. Stand on the Rock of your salvation, not the fear of all the possible things that could go wrong. Humbly accept His words to believe in Him. You can handle the truth! He can save you from all fears.

When we know the cause of anger, we can choose to make changes. Choose Hell? No, don’t go there. We can choose love over anger, God over sin. We won’t be perfect here among the sin and fearful. My hope’s in eternal living near God where there will be love and no more fear.

Purge Me!

by Pastor Lloyd Menke

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7 NRSV)

King David is attributed with writing Psalm 51. The Psalm is a plea to God for forgiveness. He doesn't have to be convinced that he has done something wrong. He is painfully aware of his transgressions when he says, "My sin is ever before me."

Have you found yourself lying awake at night, going over past mistakes? Or found yourself ruminating on past failures? Are there times when your mind seems stuck in an endless loop of recrimination? If so, then you know how King David felt. Unable to break free of his shame and guilt on his own, David, turns to God and begs, "purge me ... wash me!"

David trusts that God has both the power and the will to do that. The imagery is interesting here. We who live in Minnesota do not need to be told about the whiteness of snow. If you can get past the cold, there is something very beautiful about a layer of new fallen snow as it turns everything white and then clings to the branches of the trees as the sun causes it to glisten.

You may not be as familiar with hyssop. The hyssop referred to in this Psalm is an aromatic perennial herb in the mint family. It is a preferred primary ingredient in the spice mixture za'atar. Za'atar is a mixture of dried herbs, sesame and sumac for flavoring and garnish. This herb was very precious. Arabs will send out foraging parties to gather it. What David is saying is, your forgiveness, your presence, is very precious. It can restore spice and flavoring to my life. It can make me useful again.

Prayer: Yes, Lord! Purge me with the hyssop! Cleanse me from my sin. Help me to believe that there is nothing that is irredeemable. Restore the zest to my life that I may savor your living as your precious child. Amen.

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

by Diane Pearson

When I was in about fifth or sixth grade, I discovered a hymn in my Baptist hymnal that immediately became a favorite of mine. I don't remember ever singing it in church but I had progressed enough in my piano lessons that I could play it. Later in my life, I would learn that both the text and melody were written by Martin Luther in about 1530. "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" speaks of a God that is our fortress, a bulwark, a safe stronghold and our trusty shield. A God that fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit even if we lose all that is important to us. God tells us that evil cannot win and God's kingdom is ours forever. Whenever I play or sing this hymn, I imagine being surrounded by "a great cloud of witnesses." Almost 500 years of Christians singing this hymn when faith is hard to find, when life is difficult and when we need reassurance that God is with us. I look forward to the day we can stand together and sing "A mighty fortress is our God, the kingdom's ours forever!"

Psalm 46:1, 10 and 11

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us,
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

by Jason Craft

Psalm 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

As a musician, a song that I've been playing on piano weekly as a form of meditation and reflection during this lengthy pandemic is "It is Well With My Soul." The composer was a once successful lawyer, who endured the death of his 4-year-old son and lost his fortune in the Chicago Fire of 1871. After 2 more years of continued economic downturn, he had planned to travel to Europe with his wife and four daughters, but due to a last minute change of plans, he stayed back while his family left. The ship that carried his family collided with another ship and sank in the Atlantic Ocean. His wife survived, but all four of his daughters did not.

Yet in spite of these continued traumatic and painful events, he wrote a beautiful song, with the lyrics "When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know It is well, it is well, with my soul."

I often think about the amount of faith that it takes to be able to say "It is well" in the midst of unthinkable loss, hardship, and sadness. To be able to rely on God for strength and help in times of trouble is something I try to do, but it is easy to get caught up in the ever mounting fears, uncertainty, loss, conflict, and struggle of today's world. While my struggles are nowhere near as agonizing as the composer's, it can often be easy to dwell on the many things that this pandemic has taken away. But there are so many things that it has given us that I remain continuously thankful for. For example, more time with my wife and precious children, more presence with their school work, more time to cook good meals, and even a yard-full of chickens. Focusing on these things that I am thankful for helps bring peace where there is fear, strength where there is weakness, and praise where there is doubt.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for all you have given us this last year. I pray that you continue to grant us the will to lean on you for strength, and remember that whatever our lot, it is well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WOULD YOU RECOGNIZE JESUS?

by Joyce Nelson

John 20: 11-18 “But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher).”

After Jesus’ horrible death on the cross, his body was laid in a tomb where the women went three days later. Mary Magdalene was the first woman there, but Jesus’ body was gone. This is the culmination of the Easter story—the resurrection of Jesus into new life.

When Jesus appeared to her, Mary didn’t recognize him at first. I wonder if I would recognize Jesus if he appeared to me. Do we recognize Jesus in others as they do good works in the community, work to spread the good news of the bible or try to bring others to Jesus? Do we think those people are “goody two shoes” or religious zealots and brush them aside with a roll of the eyes? Or do we think that is normal behavior and that everyone should strive to live like Jesus?

The mission statement of Our Saviour’s urges us to live as “the hands, feet and heart of Christ.” To me, this is a call to action and should be a way of life. I think most people don’t have to think too hard about doing the right thing.

If we look around at all the good things happening in the world, maybe we will recognize Jesus, not just in one body but everywhere.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sacrificing your son for us on that first Easter. Help us to recognize Jesus in others and to live the life you want for us. Amen

