

LENT DEVOTIONAL 2025



First United Methodist Church of Mount Dora
www.mtdorafumc.org

Thank you to:

- All of our writers
- Meria Echiavaria for researching the photos
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Dear First United Methodist Church of Mount Dora,

Lent is traditionally a period of 40 days in the Christian year, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. It is a time for followers of Christ to reflect on their lives and to focus on their relationship with God. During Lent, many Christians choose to give up certain luxuries or to take on additional spiritual practices, such as daily prayer or acts of service. Lent is also a time for self-examination and repentance, as Christians prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. This period of reflection and sacrifice serves as a reminder of the sacrifices that Jesus made for us on the cross, and it helps us to grow in our faith and to become more like Him.

I hope that this guide will be a valuable tool for you as you navigate the Lenten season and grow in your relationship with God. It is a collection of reflections and prayers written by members of our church community. It is designed to provide inspiration and guidance for your spiritual journey during this Lenten season. Each day, you will find a reflection from one of your fellow congregants, sharing their personal insights and experiences on the themes in Lent such as fasting, repentance, and spiritual growth. Most reflections will include a prayer or Bible verses that you can use to deepen your own spiritual practice.

Moreover, I want to take the opportunity to thank those that wrote reflections and devotions for this guide. For this reason, the guide is not only a resource for personal reflection and growth but also a way for us as a community to come together and support each other in our spiritual journey.

With Joy on the Journey,
Pastor David



Wednesday, March 5

Jesus in the wilderness

Reading: Matthew 4:1-17

Matthew 4:1: *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Why not provide overwhelming proof of God's provision, protection, and power? "The Grand Inquisitor," a parable from Dostoevsky's novel Brothers Karamazov begs this question of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

In the "Grand Inquisitor" (as a work of imaginative fiction), Jesus returns to 15th century Spain during the beginning of the Inquisition. He begins healing people and drawing crowds. He essentially picks up his earthly ministry where it left off 15 centuries before.

He is arrested. The Grand Inquisitor interrogates him. Essentially, the interrogation becomes a castigation of Jesus' rejections of the three temptations in the wilderness we read about in Matthew 4.

First, the Inquisitor says Jesus should have turned the stones into bread because people should have freedom from hunger instead of freedom of choice.

Secondly, he continues that Jesus should have thrown himself off the Temple to demonstrate the miracles of God for all to see, choosing freedom from doubt for all people over freedom to believe for each person.

Finally, the Grand Inquisitor excoriates Jesus for not bowing to the devil to receive power over all earthly kingdoms.

He reasons Jesus could create a secure and prosperous world under one ruler. The Inquisitor thinks security is better than free will. He tells Jesus to go away and never return. Jesus departs, but not before kissing the Grand Inquisitor (an ironic twist on Judas' kiss of betrayal).

Many Lenten devotions like this one begin with a Gospel reading concerning Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Symbolically, akin to Jesus' time in the wilderness, our Lenten journey will last 40 days (excluding Sundays, which are considered a reprieve from the fasting and penitence customary during the season of Lent).

Today's reading in Matthew makes me think about how each of us have thoughts (if we are honest with ourselves) like the diabolical cardinal of Dostoevsky's imagination — that we know better than the Lord Jesus Christ.

If only the world had this or that, then everything would be better. If only we had more food or material wealth. If only we had more certainty or command over nature. If only we had more security or less choices to make mistakes. If only...

It should be our greatest temptation to resist this kind of hubris and idolatry. After all, even the devil can quote scripture for his own schemes and purposes (v. 4:6). But the devil and the forces of evil desire to control us and take away our freedom to respond to God's call at the lakeshore.

In contrast, Jesus desires to love us, and share good news and healing with us. Each of us may have to wrestle with choice, faith, and humility in seeking God. Ultimately, we are better for seeking love that lasts for an eternity instead of security that withers within a lifespan.

In closing, a hymn that expresses Jesus' call to humble obedience is "Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" by Cesáreo Gabaráin (UM Hymnal, No. 344):

"Lord, you have come to the lakeshore
looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones;
you only asked me to follow humbly.

O Lord, with your eyes you have searched me,
and while smiling have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas."

Amen.

Rev. David Averill

Image: "Christ in the Desert", oil on canvas
by Ivan Kramskoi, 1872



Thursday, March 6

Tragic events

When asked to prepare a meditation for this Lent Season, I thought I would write on the book of Samuel and Hannah...After all, through the blessing of my son, David I related to Hannah! When David was a 3-year-old, we rushed him to Miami Children's Hospital for an undisclosed stomach issue. The doctors planned to do exploratory surgery the next day. I prayed as never before and said to God that if he would help my son, I would dedicate him to God. (Foolishly, I did not acknowledge he was already His! I was desperate and had failed to acknowledge God does not make bargains...He knows the plans He has for us!). The next day David was thriving and the tests in preparation for surgery came back and no surgery was required. Clearly, God had a plan for him.

However, I want to speak to the recent crash in the Potomac where 67 people lost their lives. It brought back memories I had locked away for some time. On January 13, 1982, Air Florida crashed into the icy Potomac. There were 78 fatalities—including passengers, crew, and people on the ground. Only 4 passengers and 1 crew member survived. I had arrived home from my honeymoon that day and my phone was ringing off the hook. Crew Scheduling was calling me telling me to get on a flight that night and report to Washington. As the Director of Inflight Training, I was to be our company representative on the NTSB Human Factors Committee investigating the accident.

The next morning, and with a broken heart, I stood on the river's edge looking at my partially submerged aircraft, knowing 4 of my crew members and the precious lives of so many were lost. I brought home their belongings for their devastated families. I cried out to God asking why. I felt lost and the next 4 months were a blur; I left management and returned to flying while stumbling through my life.

It took a bit of time to come out of that devastating fog. I read my Bible...sometimes unable to concentrate... but I knew the comfort I sought was there. I am so grateful to God for seeing me through. Finally, I could absorb what I was reading, His Word gave me the grace and peace I so desperately needed. I finally understood God had never deserted me, it was I who was lost in the wilderness of despair. We must never lose sight of his promises! He is always holding us in the palm of his hand...if we will just let him!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus,

We come before you this day with tears of sadness, yet we know only you can give us the comfort and peace we so desire. We ask you to surround the families of those who have lost their precious family members and friends with your grace, peace, and loving arms. We know it is a long journey they have embarked on... filled with fear, doubt, anger, and sadness. Father, please grant them peace of heart and mind...Help them to

know their loved ones are no longer suffering or in pain. Help them to know they are with you and awaiting a glorious reunion someday. In your name, we pray Amen. Not only do we pray for those families and friends we also pray for the lives and families of those lost in North Carolina, Los Angeles, Ukraine, Rwanda, and the DRC.

Revelation 21:4 – *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Psalms 46:1 – *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."*

Karen Averill



Friday, March 7

Command + Promise = Comfort

Romans 12:2: *Do not conform any longer 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.*

In God's written Word we frequently see the pattern of a command followed by a promise in both the Old and New Testaments.

God knows we can never measure up to His perfect standard on our own, but he is gracious. He gave His only Son to pay the price for our sin, the many ways we miss the mark and fall short of His glory. (Romans 3:23)

We cannot put God in a box and tie it up with a ribbon. Nor can we reduce Him, or our relationship with Him, to a formula. On the other hand, He is our Creator. He loves us and wants us to spend eternity with Him. For that to happen we must be covered in righteousness through Christ Jesus. We are so easily distracted and led astray. That's why He gave us His written word, to keep us focused on our relationship with Him. There is great comfort in His promise never to leave us, nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5)

Do you have a scripture that you might call your "life verse"? Do you recall it often? Have you memorized it? How does it help you in your daily life?

Loving, Heavenly Father, thank you for drawing us near to you by your Word, your Spirit, and your people. Amen.

Judy Bell

Saturday, March 8

Give, and it will be given to you

2 Corinthians 6:4: *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* (NIV)

I chose this scripture because I see it attached to the grocery bag each time we have a Lake Cares food drive, and I have great respect for the Apostle Paul. He says giving is an opportunity for believers to participate with God in meeting the needs of the poor. God increases the ability of believers who give generously to give even more. This results in increasing His righteousness on earth, and He will be glorified by those who receive the gift and pray for those who give.

It is important for us to give to the church so that God's work can be accomplished. After all, we owe God for everything we have. It is part of God's plan for our offerings to the church to be used to fund mission work locally, nationally, and throughout the world. Our giving should show our desire to show God's mercy and demonstrate we love Him more than our money.

As well as donating money, we should also donate our time and prayers. There are many opportunities for us to serve on committees in church, participate in local charities, and lift people up with our prayers.

It is important to help those who have experienced disasters. I recently saw Reverend Franklin Graham interviewed about helping the people affected by the floods in North Carolina. He said while donations of money are welcomed and vitally needed, it is just as important for us to pray for those people who have been affected by natural disasters.

Thought for the Day: For Christians, giving should be a gift that is voluntary and from the heart. Helping others should bring joy to us as it does to God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to give freely from the heart not merely because you command us to, but because it pleases us to do so in your name. Teach us to give without expecting anything in return, knowing we will be rewarded by you in heaven.

Jean Cahill



Sunday, March 9

Please pray today for our sister church in Calixto, Cuba.



The congregation is currently renovating their sanctuary with funds we have sent.

They will soon receive a water filtration unit that will help the entire community.

Pastor Luis and his family appreciate our prayers and our support.



This is the new outdoor shelter they built since they partnered with us. It is currently used for worship and then reset for meals and Bible studies.

Monday, March 10

Mirror Image

Matthew 22:37-39: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

It is sometimes easier to see the sins of others than it is to notice them in myself. After all, I've hardly broken any of the 10 Commandments, or have I?

I honor God by remembering the Sabbath and not using his name in vain. I don't worship any false gods. But do I sometimes put other things ahead of time with God, like TV, hobbies, Facebook, etc. I honored my parents and avoided adultery!



I don't covet anything that I can think of since God has provided all I need or want...most of the time!

Certainly, I haven't murdered anyone, and I am not a liar or thief. But what about when I gossip or belittle someone or disregard them because they are not like me? Am I not murdering their souls and their spirits and stealing their dignity and self-worth? Do I not kill their passion for life or discourage them or cause them grief or suffering or anger?

God gave us each a soul and created us in his image. I am sinning if I try to steal it or diminish it in any way. So, I guess I am a sinner who needs to ask God's forgiveness every day and thank him for his mercy and grace. When

I look in the mirror, I need to see myself through God's eyes and treat others accordingly. I should love others as I love myself as Matthew 22 tells us. Thank you, God, for creating each of us in your image.

Thought for the day: Treat others as you want to be treated.

Prayer: Dear God, our Creator and Lord, forgive me when I sin against you by sinning against others with my thoughts, words, or deeds. Thank you for your grace and mercy on me a sinner. Amen.

Linda Carris

Tuesday, March 11

My Hope is in the Lord

Jeremiah 29:11-13: *'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'*

I had an idyllic childhood. I loved Jesus and Jesus loved me. Simple!

During my teenage years I was involved in school leadership and church youth activities, including a traveling Christian rock band. Fun! Life was certainly not as simple as before. But even when I made bad choices, I knew I was loved by my parents and my Lord. In fact, many times when I talked to the Lord I would ask "why am I so lucky God? Why do I have such a good life? What are you preparing me for?"

As an adult, my career was challenging but satisfying. I led many kinds of retirement communities and cared for residents, staff, and families of the communities.

In time I married Tom whom I had known since junior high school. Our family included his two young daughters from his first marriage. Eventually, we had our daughter, Rachel, who completed our family.

Unfortunately, our daughters inherited mental and personality disorders which affected them in significant ways. It was difficult to cope with our new marriage, demanding careers, full-time step-parenting, and a new baby. I didn't always do very well.

Eventually, through a Bible study the Lord regifted me Jeremiah 29:11-13. I realized I had been prepared for now! The Lord was with me in my difficulties. These verses continue to reassure me with trust and hope through life's uneven journey.

Prayer: Lord your abiding love has carried us through difficult experiences, and we thank you for the hope and future you continue to give us; especially when we rely on you.

Becky Carter



Wednesday, March 12

Perfect Shalom, Perfect Rest

Matthew 11:28-30: *Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.'* (NRSV)

I have several different health related issues these days – which require that I get enough regular good sleep and rest - in order to remain healthy and moving. Without good rest I am compromised when it comes to some of my general functions. In this passage Jesus makes clear that He alone can provide us all with true peace and rest. This passage has anchored me on the concept of sabbath and getting worthwhile rest during the sabbath for years now. It encourages me to believe that God will provide perfect rest and perfect peace in due time, one way or another.

Jesus is telling those who are tired and burdened (like us) that he has provided a simpler way to get through the difficulties in life and to find rest. What a novel concept!? Rest for the weary! Notice that he also invites *ALL* who are weary and burdened. Not just the Jews, not just the Christians, or the Muslims, or the Buddhists, or the Hindus, the Sikhs, the atheists, agnostics and so on and so forth. *NO!* He says, "Come to me, *ALL* you that are weary..." Quite an infinitely diverse concept. Non-exclusive, just like Jesus.

In verses 29 and 30 – one major idea is made clear: Jesus is doing the heavy lifting for us. We may be in the yoke, but we're in the yoke *WITH HIM!* He declares that He is gentle and kind to those such as ourselves. He will not be harsh with us. He will help us in bearing our heavy loads. This Lenten season we ought to be keeping the sabbath sacred, seeking peace and finding rest. I sometimes think of my health issues; and how one day we all won't have to worry about sickness and health scares. One day we will have perfect rest in Him, and our health will not be based on our current earthly bodies, but rather – the promises of eternal life with which God has richly blessed us.

Reflection questions:

- Why is rest so important for my well-being?
- What does the best, good, rest look like for me?
- Why might Jesus be taking the time here to focus on resting?
- What might help me to trust God more in dealing with my burdens?

PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER WHILE CONSIDERING GOD'S PERFECT REST

Josh Collins

Thursday, March 13

Be Strong and Courageous

Deuteronomy 31:6: *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*

What does my dog Annie know about me? She knows that I rescued her from a scary place and no matter how many other dogs we meet, she will always be the one to go home with me because she is mine. She knows that I will always feed her without being asked. I will take her out when she needs to go out and always let her back in when she wants to come in.

When she gives into temptation and rolls on a dead squirrel or eats my food when I'm not looking, even if I get mad, I will still love her and not give her away. What else is true? She may not know that even as she grows older and more confused, I will never abandon her and will always protect her. Because of all we have walked through together over the years, our love and trust have grown. And yet there are still moments of panic, of wondering where I am or will I ever come home or will she be abandoned in some strange place.

What do we know about God? What do we really believe about Him? Did he rescue us only to later leave us to fend for ourselves? In spite of all we have seen as we have walked the hills and valleys of life with Him, are there still moments of panic, of thinking we must face our problems alone? Of wondering if God is real? Of wondering if we can be forgiven? Or has our trust grown as we have experienced His love and faithfulness over the years?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember all you have done for us in the past, so that we can have peace in trusting you with the future.

Linda Criswell



Friday, March 14

Ministry Through Music

Psalm 95:1,2: O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!

Singing in the choir at First United Methodist Church of Mount Dora has become my favorite way to praise God. The lyrics of each song tell a story, and the melodies keep those stories with me throughout the days. What a blessing to begin each week worshipping the Lord together in our beautiful sanctuary, singing hymns of praise, accompanied by the majestic pipe organ!

2024 was a challenging year for the Celebration Choir, as it felt like we were going through a revolving door of music directors. Thanks to many prayers and the diligent work of the search committee, Bob McLeary has joined FUMC as our new Music Director. Now we can rejoice with the following scripture, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things!" (Psalm 98:1). Bob is an extremely capable, enthusiastic, and friendly music director. If you have not attended a church service in person recently, please join us in person on a Sunday morning as we "Sing to the Lord, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day." (Psalm 96:2)

This fall I was invited to join the Singing Saints, a group from our congregation and other local churches, that shares our music ministry with residents of area senior assisted living facilities. I have to admit that I was a little nervous on my initial Monday with the group; however, everyone welcomed me warmly as we gathered for lunch before heading to Alto Tavares (also known as Osprey Lodge). What really sealed the deal for me was seeing the smiles on the faces of the residents as we began singing. Many of the residents sang along with us or swayed to the rhythm of the music. They were so happy to "Make a joyful noise to the Lord!" (Psalm 100:1) with us! Being able to share familiar hymns with others is a true blessing!

If you enjoy singing or play a musical instrument, please consider joining one of the musical ministries at FUMC!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the gift of music to share with others as we sing your praises. Amen

Thought for the day: *"For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20)

Beth Fleahman

Saturday, March 15

It's a Small World

Ephesians 2:13-15: *¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.*

"It's a Small World" is one of my least favorite songs – ever. I am not sure exactly why, but it just gets under my skin. However, I have learned to tolerate it though. Going to Disney World when our children were young, the ride was a place I would take them when I needed a break. It was dark, cool, and the kids were contained inside a boat so I could actually catch a cat nap while we were inside!



The ride and the song give the depiction of the wonderful diversity that is humanity. Though we are many people, with many sizes, shapes, cultures, and customs, we are part of one humanity. All that diversity distinguishes us from one another, yet it need not divide us from

one another. We are, each one and all together, the human race.

There is no need for a different savior for every person or people group. There is one Savior – Jesus Christ – who makes us one with our Triune God and one with each other. The Apostle Paul spoke of Jesus as the One "who breaks down the dividing wall of hostility" – both between God and humanity, as well as between the differing people and groups. Paul further wrote, that because of Jesus, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. We are *united* in Jesus Christ. Human diversity remains but no longer divides. The saving power of faith through Jesus Christ is to be the strongest bond among us. No matter what our differences may be, our common faith in and through Jesus Christ is greater.

Reflection Question: As one who has received Jesus as Savior and Lord, how will I, in a tangible way, live out today our belief that we are all one in Christ?

Prayer: Jesus, Savior and Lord, as your followers, help us to walk in your footsteps of peace and reconciliation; for your glory. Amen.

Rev. Gary Upleger

Sunday, March 16

Please pray for the Forward Paths foundation.

Forward Paths' mission is to positively influence at-risk youth and forever revolutionize their path to independence. They are improving the lives of Lake County's homeless unaccompanied youth and youth aging out of foster care.



There is a need for people who are willing to be a mentor, to form a one-on-one relationship with a young person, to be someone who can spend some time with them, be available to answer questions or give guidance when needed or even just go out to lunch together or include them in a family event. They receive training in budgeting and help with the life skills that they never had a chance to learn.

A constant need for these students is housing. In Eustis, they have built a group of tiny homes behind the First Methodist Church where these young men and women can live safely while going to school, working, and learning how to survive on their own. Our congregation is on the *Founding Donors* sign through the efforts of the Fifth Avenue Thrift Shoppe.



Monday, March 17

The Prayer of St. Patrick

St. Patrick was born in 387. At age 16, he was taken as a slave to Ireland. After 6 years, he secured his freedom and went to France. Many years later, he was called by God to return to Ireland as a missionary. Legend states that he taught about the Trinity by using the three leaves of a single shamrock.



Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

Tuesday, March 18

Are we ready for God's plans for us?

Jeremiah 29:11: *'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'*

A plaque rests on my fireplace mantle, given to me by a sweet neighbor & friend. She also invited me to attend church with her when I wasn't active in church. With her encouragement I felt welcome & comfortable. Each time I read this passage & think of Nancy & her persistence; how she helped put motion in my journey. Little did I know then what plans God intended.

Each of us needs that encouragement in our lives at some time; God has a plan for each of us. It's up to us to listen, respond & follow His.

The more I opened my heart & mind to follow where God intended the more spiritual opportunities came my way. For instance, I never expected to be serving as a Liturgist! That was way beyond my expectations; I am privileged & grateful to serve him in this capacity.

But with time & involvement we are all called in different manners. Your call may be different than mine; clearly my calling wasn't to be in the choir!

Some of us may be called to share our skills in baking cookies for the Art Festivals. Many are called to work with the youth & Sunday School. Wherever you're called, be sure this is part of God's great plan for your life. Open your heart & embrace it!

Gwen Fox



Wednesday, March 19

Our Best Friend

John 15:13-14: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

We all have friends. Some are very close to us, and we can trust and confide in them. Do they really know you? Do you really know them? Our best friend is Jesus. He knows all about us and is asking us all to be his friend. He is a friend that loves us and will never leave us, no matter what. He will be with us when we are full of joy, and also in our deepest sorrows. We can talk to him at any time through prayer. He will give us peace that passes all understanding. He is Love. He is the way, the truth, and the life. This is an awesome opportunity for us all. He is calling us to be his friend.

During this time of year, let us work on improving our friendship with him. Let us become more like him by learning his ways, so that we can fulfill his commandment to love one another as he has loved us. Without him we can do nothing. With him all things are possible.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to become even better friends with you by learning of your ways, by reading your Word, and by doing the fruits of your spirit. We thank you, Jesus, for loving us and allowing us to be your friend. In your name we pray, Jesus. Amen.

Tom Gay



Thursday, March 20

God loves me anyway....

John 15:12: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

I often think about how I must be difficult to love. We are all our harshest critics. Thoughts like, "Why do I sound stupid? Should I have stood up for that person?, Why can't I let it go?, Should I have helped that person?" fill my twisty noodle brain every day. These thoughts lead me to wonder.... how does God love me anyway? How does He love me despite my shortcomings? This unconditional love is overwhelming and often brings me to tears. God knows the deepest parts of my heart, both physically and emotionally, and still, He loves me.



It is so hard to fathom this type of unconditional love. Parenting is probably the closest experience that we can have in understanding this concept. When my kids make a bad choice, I love them anyway. I'm disappointed, but it will never change the love I have for them. I feel so grateful that our heavenly Father loves us like this and offers His grace daily.

This profound love calls us to look at others and love them as God loves us. While it isn't always easy; we are human after all. But He calls us to do it anyway, as it is how we best reflect His love. When we love others, despite their flaws and our own, we embody the love that God has for us.

Let God's love fill your heart and overflow to those around you. Remember, loving others as God loves us is not just a command; it is a reflection of His grace and mercy. It is through this love that we can truly honor Him and make a difference in the lives of those we encounter.

Sunny Grothaus



Friday, March 21

Favorite verses are our strength

Romans 8:38-39: *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*)

Paul was speaking to his followers about life through the Spirit and that we know that in all things *God works for the good of those who love him* (Rom 8:28).

Then, Paul asks, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rom. 8-31).

The powerful answer: *Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It is almost unfathomable to accept how this could be possible. But I accept and thank the Lord for those words that have been tucked into my memory. I am strengthened each time we recite the Affirmation from Romans 8:35, 37-39 in our hymnal in a worship service.

My son, David, made his career with Orlando Police Department and retired this past June after 30 years. I recall his being accepted to join the SWAT team with 'motherly' apprehension. The team members acquired medals which carry the SWAT insignia. I wanted to cover David with a scripture to strengthen and protect him for whatever trials he would encounter. Romans 8:38-39 was engraved on the medal. That was 25 years ago.



In writing this devotional, I asked my son if he remembered the scripture and immediately, he recited it. What a blessing that was to me that these words have been with him all these years.

Thought for the day: When faced with trials, choices, decisions and even dangers, remember the promises contained in the written words of scripture.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the ability to capture your words into our memory and retrieve them for strength. Amen

Patt Haddock

Reprinted from the 2023 Lent devotional

Saturday, March 22

See the Positive

Romans 8:28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

You know those days when everything just goes awry from the start... like you slept through your alarm, you stub your toe, you spill your coffee on the way to work... Although I try not to let a rocky morning set the tone for the whole day.... sometimes the troubles just continue and so many times we share about the struggle. But what if we share the GOOD, like... you wake up before your alarm goes off, your slippers keep you from stubbing your toe, or you got a new coffee creamer.... Yes, God!!!

The other day, things just sort of worked out. No winning lotto numbers or anything, but small stuff... found a supply that makes drawing blood a lot easier. I WAS SO THANKFUL to find that little thing deep in my BIG box of nursing supplies!! I didn't think I had one, but sure enough I found it in the very bottom. THANKS, GOD!

Then later that day, me being me, I still needed an outfit for a costume. I went to Goodwill, and it was like someone set the dressing room up just for me. The clothes someone else didn't want were just what I needed. There God goes again! It doesn't have to be a big thing... those small things in the everyday... I'm reminded he's always there.



Why is it that it's easier to get stuck on the negative stuff even though there is SO MUCH good?!

Got me thinking, we need to look at the good moments. And even when there is annoying stuff in between, let's do our best to choose to look at the POSITIVE.

Prayer: God, help me to fix my thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Guide me to think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8)

Thought for the day: When life gets you down, make time to refocus on the good.

Prayer focus: Those who need help to see the positive

Hilary Harman
Reprinted from our 2022 Lent Devotional

Sunday, March 23

Please pray for Lake Cares and our mobile food distribution at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Mount Dora. Over 40 volunteers help 75 households on the third Friday of every month.



Lake Cares's new building will open this spring allowing them to streamline operations, stop paying rent, and help even more households in north Lake County.



Feeding the Body, Educating the Mind, & Lifting the Spirit of All Individuals.

Monday, March 24

Hope Through Hymns

Philippians 4:13: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

A number of years ago my family home and everything in it burned to the ground. Even though we had the rubble carted away and put down new topsoil, for a long time after I would occasionally find buried a broken piece of china or glassware, a bed spring, or sometimes just a charred piece of wood.

Whenever we face a trauma such as the loss of a home, our health, a job, a relationship, or a loved one, we are left to "pick up the pieces", literally or figuratively. Most commonly we turn to scripture, prayer, or pastoral counseling, but we have yet another resource in hymns. Think of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" or "No one Understands Like Jesus".

Whether we're "picking up the pieces" or just need to find comfort or to bolster our faith, there are many hymns in which we can find hope and reassurance by singing, listening to or reading the words. That in turn reinforces the belief that we can indeed endure all things with Jesus by our side. Try it! It helps!

Prayer: Father God, thank you for sending us Jesus and for providing many avenues to help us know that we can always rely on Him. In His name we pray. Amen.

Thought for the day: Music can have healing power.

Prayer focus: Those who have lost their homes in wildfires

Jessie Harvey

Reprinted from our 2022 Lent Devotional



Tuesday, March 25

God's will for us

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

As I read these verses, I am reminded of many things:

- I am so grateful that God is always with me!
- Being joyful is a feeling that comes from within.
- Praying continually is to be aware of all that is around you.
- Giving thanks in all things is sometimes difficult, but we must remember that God is always with us.

This is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.

Thought for the Day: God is with us in the little things and the big things.

Prayer Focus: Be aware of your surroundings. Let go and let God direct you.

Cathy Henderson



Wednesday, March 26

The Ultimate Sacrifice

John 15:13: *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

On January 29, 1988, my dear friend and fellow firefighter, Deputy Fire Chief James G. Yvorra was killed in the line of duty at the age of 36. Jim Yvorra loved being a firefighter. We saw him in action many times giving his time, love, and life-saving care to complete strangers.

The untimely loss of Jim mid-career, when he was doing his best work, was deeply painful for me, but God showed me a pathway forward that changed my life. Soon after his death, we decided to turn tragedy into positive work. We formed the Yvorra Leadership Development Foundation in Jim's honor. Over the last three decades over 200 firefighters have received scholarships from the Foundation. Many have moved into key leadership roles at the national level.

In John 15:13 Jesus states, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." In saying this, Jesus prepares his disciples for his crucifixion and shows them what he meant when he told them to "love each other as I have loved you" (verse 12). All true love comes with sacrifice.

Mike Hildebrand



Thursday, March 27

Anxiety & Stress

1 Peter 5:6-8: *Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*

This past summer I was carefully planning the numerous events associated with the final cemetery service and "celebration of life" event at the family home for my wife, who passed away the previous December. There was much to organize and coordinate in the preceding weeks leading up to the actual event, such as establishing the service agenda with the local pastor, determining scripture readings, planning with the cemetery, securing a location for the post-service celebration, collaborating with a caterer, etc. I felt that I was managing all of this well, however, I was conducting this work and effort all by myself, as I did not want to burden others with the details.

The day before and the day of the event, I became more & more stressed and anxious about everything..... overwhelmed. In spite of being surrounded by family and friends, I was determined to 'plow' through this myself, which heightened my anxiety and stress further. As I dressed for the service that day, I turned to God to help me calm down and thought of the passage found in 1 Peter 5:7: *Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*, which provided me with a greater sense of calm. From that I was able to go through the rest of the day knowing that all was going to be OK. I was able to calmly deal with everything that was associated with the celebration of my wife's life.

God is able to carry our burdens because he knows all and has a plan to prosper us in any stressful situation. He knows what you will do and knows your fears and failures. He will not only bear our anxiety, but he will send the Holy Spirit to strengthen you and bring you peace. An effective way to let go of anxiety and stress is to meditate & pray on what Scripture has detailed concerning God's love for us and his way of bringing us peace.

Thought for the Day: Do Not Worry, as God Cares for You!

Prayer: Dear God, give me the strength to release my stress & worries and embrace Your knowledge and peace. Help me to trust in Your divine plan, knowing that You hold my future in Your hands, and fill my heart with calmness, as I surrender all to You. Amen.

Don Howard



Friday, March 28

Peace

John 14:27: Peace I leave with you.; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Do you ever have a problem finding peace? All my life I have lived struggling to find peace, true peace. It wasn't until after my son died that I discovered true peace, true peace that only the Holy Spirit can give. I lost my son 4 years ago. Since that time, the Holy Spirit has entered my life, and I call on Him both day and night.

Do you think that you could face a certain death with peace? I didn't think that I could. Recently, I was told that my kidney that I received in a transplant 27 years ago was pooping out. I had a decision to make. Go on dialysis or go on a transplant list. I was on dialysis for a year and a half before I got this kidney. I will never do that again without the hope of a transplant. I do not qualify for a new transplant because of a heart condition. I was terrified after the doctor told me.

The truth was that I just didn't want to face death, and it looked like it was right around the corner. No dialysis, no new kidney. I cried for two days. I started planning my funeral. The thought of dying was on my mind constantly. There was no peace in my life. I knew that my kidney wouldn't last forever, but I never stopped to think that I would be facing death in the near future. I sought counseling. I talked to my ministers. It was during the Christmas season, so I didn't tell my friends and family. I didn't want to spoil their Christmas. I took everything on my shoulders. I was worried about Jerry, my husband. I was worried about leaving my pups, they are so attached to me.

We all get settled in our daily routines and they become comfortable to us. We find a certain amount of security in them. I imagined how would I die? Would it be quick and painless or full of suffering and not knowing? My life became miserable because I was so focused on my death. Since then, I have been to see another doctor. He had a

different opinion. He told me that death was not imminent. He said that my kidney would last a little longer. He didn't say how much longer, but he did emphasize that we should concentrate on making this kidney last as long as possible. He gave me hope. I was able to enjoy Christmas with my family. The nightmare has gone away, if only temporarily.

During this time, I have collected my thoughts. Why was I so anxious? Where was the peace from the Holy Spirit? The answer is that I tried to take the burden on myself. I looked in the Bible for scriptures to be quoted at my funeral. I didn't look for scriptures to comfort me. I wasn't looking for peace. I was looking for a way out. I didn't turn it all over to Jesus. I have learned that when the time does come, I will rest. I will not struggle. God has got this. He is in control. Not me. I know now that trusting in Him is the only way. I was looking for peace in the world. It doesn't exist there, but only in the grace of God. I know that now, so I am ready to face my upcoming death with the peace that God will give to me at just the right time.

Prayer: Father, God, when we have times of anxiety and stress, may we be filled with the Holy Spirit. Fill us with the hope and security that can only be found through your merciful grace, Amen

Karen Hunsucker



Saturday, March 29

Commending Yourself

Scripture: Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:10

2 Corinthians 6:3-4a: *³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way...*

A few weeks ago, Mary Jo and I were driving down US-441 and passed a restaurant that had placed a new sign in front of their building. It read, "Good Food." Now, I have been to the place of business. The food wasn't bad, it was just "alright." Because of my experience, my immediate reaction upon reading the sign was to say, "When you have to tell me it's good, it makes me skeptical."

You know, the same argument could easily be made about us as Christians. It is okay to tell people we are Christians. But how do we effectively "commend" ourselves and our faith to others?

As you read the Scripture passage for today, you will see how the Apostle Paul answered that question. Typical to his style, Paul gives a very long list of noticeable, visual ways in which he and his missionary traveling companions demonstrate the core of their faith and the truth of their faith.

The key is to not rush through that list. Go back and read or re-read that passage slowly. Consider the context in which Paul places this list. See the pairings he uses. This will help you grasp the deeper meaning. It is not just a list. It is not just bragging or showing off. Rather, it is a plea for everyone hearing and reading his letter to live out their faith with equal calling and passion.

Paul begins this passage by describing he and his companions as “ambassadors for Christ.” An ambassador is supposed to be more than a mere representative. An ambassador is supposed to be an embodiment of the person or country whom they represent. They are supposed to demonstrate the highest ideals and beliefs of the one(s) they represent. That should be true while things are going well and should be especially true when things are going poorly.

To be an ambassador is more than just an office to hold. It is not commending oneself. Being an ambassador is a high calling – especially when that calling comes from God. That is who we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are supposed to be – ambassadors, demonstrating the high ideals of our faith and commending faith in Jesus Christ to others through the demonstration of our lives.

Reflection Questions:

- Who or what is my life commending?
- Am I living out the highest ideals of our Christian faith on a day-to-day basis?
- Does the demonstration of my life commend faith in Jesus Christ to others?

Prayer: Gracious God, what a great work you have done for us through Your Son, Jesus. Help us, through His saving grace, to live as genuine ambassadors for the sake of Your glory. May the power of Your Holy Spirit fill us so that our lives become a living demonstration of Your way, truth, and life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev. Gary Upleger



Sunday, March 30

Please pray today for the Open Door in Eustis.

The OPEN DOOR

A program of *Lifestream* in partnership with 

115 E. Citrus Avenue

The Open Door day shelter in Eustis provides help for an average of 53 people every day. The Open Door provides hot meals, laundry facilities, showers, computer access, phone, and a mailing address. They link clients with federal benefits sites, veterans' services, housing resources, medical and mental house care, and transportation. In 2024, they provided 22,000 services.

One of their success stories is a veteran who was homeless. The staff was able to restart his veterans' benefits which included a sizable amount of back pay. They also helped him receive his railroad benefits. He was able to use the back pay for a house down payment. He reunited with his daughters and met his grandchildren for the first time.



Monday, March 31

There's Nothing I Can Do About It Now

Living under the disguise of a country singer, Willie Nelson has in many ways become America's philosopher on life with songs on almost every topic. One of his better-known songs is "There's Nothing I Can Do About It Now." After saying he's got a real long list of the things he's done, describing the good, the bad, the ugly, things treasured and things regretted, he says "there's nothing I can about it now." Really? Nothing you can do about it?

In Romans chapters 7 and 8, Paul talks about his life, and it sounds very much like Willie Nelson's song. In part he says:
I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom 7:15-81 (ESV)

Compare the endings: "There's nothing I can do about it now" – "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

During this Lenten season we remember that Jesus came not only to die for our sins but in his dying and resurrection he won for us the ability to have something to do about them every day.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all you did for us on the cross and all you began to do for us daily by winning over the cross.

Rev. Denman Jones



Tuesday, April 1

Praying Attention

Luke 11:1: *Once when Jesus had been out praying, one of his disciples came to him as he finished and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

Jesus sure made it easy for me to pray when he handed me the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) on a silver platter. I learned to pray this prayer as part of my nightly tucking-in ritual when I was a child, and it has become, over the years, my final prayer of the day. It has also been my go-to prayer whenever God drops little hints that say to me, "We need to talk!"

However, I have a problem, at times, as I imagine most Christians do, not with the prayer itself but with my often lackadaisical attitude when I pray it. I guess because of its familiarity, I too often simply recite it without truly considering the magnitude of this little prayer when what I really need to be paying attention to is its significance in my life. After all, the Lord's Prayer has me offering praise and glory to God, acknowledging His holiness, and recognizing the expectations He has of me in my relationships with Him.

Jesus tells me to ask for what I need to feed and sustain my physical, emotional, and spiritual strength; to seek God's forgiveness for my sins against God but to expect it only to the extent that I forgive my neighbors' transgressions against me; and to help me resist the temptations of this world so that I may avoid the evils of this world and beyond.

Regardless of how I pray His prayer, whether simply by rote or with sincere contemplation, I am a child of God, our Father, and I enjoy His love, His peace, and His presence.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, please forever listen to my prayers. In spite of my not always sending them to you in an appropriate prayerful attitude, they are sent with sincere love and humility. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Thought for the day: No matter your frame of mind when you need to pray, Just pray!

Prayer focus: Children as they learn to pray

Bill Kennedy

Reprinted from our 2022 Lent Devotional

Wednesday, April 2

Adversity vs. the Power of Death

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Adversity will come upon us all at some time in our lives. It can take many different forms. Betrayal by those you had trusted, sickness in yourself or others, death of loved ones, depression, addictions, sexual, physical, or verbal abuse. The list is very long. Our adversities can leave us feeling alone and hopeless, or worse yet cause us to seek revenge.

God in speaking with the prophet Ezekiel brought him to a valley full of dead, dry bones. This brought forth images of the holocaust in my mind. A bunch of dry bones seemed to be a situation without hope, but God told Ezekiel to speak out loud in order to prophesy that He could and would bring life to the dry, lifeless bones. Ezekiel did as he was told, and the bones came alive with the breath of God's Spirit in them forming a great army. This was the will of God expressed for the house of Israel, those who are called to belong to God.

We of the Christian faith belong to God as well. As Paul tells us in Romans 11 we have been grafted into the olive tree of God's life, and in all His promises God will remain true to His people whether they be the renewed dry bones of the House of Israel, or the Gentiles who have received and accepted the Good News of the Son of God.

No adversity is powerful enough to separate us from the Love of God. Let your faith in God's Son generate hope in your daily life. A hope that allows you to overcome and further share the Good News of God's Love for us. If you feel like you are nothing but some dry bones, pray to God for the renewal that comes when we draw closer to his powerful love. Pray for the power that overcomes death.

Paul Camp Lane



Grace Unknown

Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

While leading congregational singing one Sunday, I caught a glimpse of myself in the brass cross on the altar table, just in front of the pulpit from where I was standing. And that quick reflection got me thinking, "I wonder if Christ sees Himself in me?"

Later that afternoon, my mind began to ponder this question again as past hindrances began flooding back, moments of not-so-Christ-like occurrences, and experiences which I could have handled with more compassion and kindness. And I remembered a phrase we had often used, "if you can't say it in front of your Mom and Dad, then you don't need to be saying it." The only words I could utter now were "forgive me." And you know what the good thing is?

Our Lord and Savior offers forgiveness, and offers understanding, and offers grace, and offers compassion, kindness, and love. In this season of spiritual preparation, repentance, and prayer, let us consider how Christ can better see Himself in us, how we can become a better reflection of His love and offer our complete self for Him in our families, communities, and times of fellowship.

An Isaac Watts hymn brings it all together in just one lyric, "*Was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree! (Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed, words by Isaac Watts, 1707; music by Hugh Wilson, 1827.)*

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank You for guidance and direction. We strive to be a better reflection of Your love and kindness throughout our journey in this world. May we join together to offer Your grace to all we meet. Amen.

Bob McLeary



Friday, April 4

Waiting

James 1:19-21: My brothers and sisters take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness GOD desires. Therefore, get rid of the filth and evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. DO WHAT IT SAYS. (NIV)

I am reminded of the followers of Jesus who deserted him at a critical time for him. They had listened to his teachings, seen him do marvelous miracles, ate with him, and yet left him on his own, despised, and lonely, when he needed them to believe in his being. It was better for them to accept their human condition and be safe than submit to the will of GOD.

We all, including myself, listen but don't act. We look at the crucifixion as something wrong and yet turn our backs on the event throughout the year.

Each day of the Lenten season gives us a chance to reflect on James' admonition: be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. In our walk during this season and always, by keeping our eyes on the cross. We need to open our hearts to all that GOD is doing for us and live grateful lives for the release of sin because of GOD'S great gift through the crucifixion.

Our prayer, dear Lord, is that we will live lives worthy of your great sacrifice for each of us. Amen

Dan Patterson



Saturday, April 5

You've Got Your Troubles, So Do I!

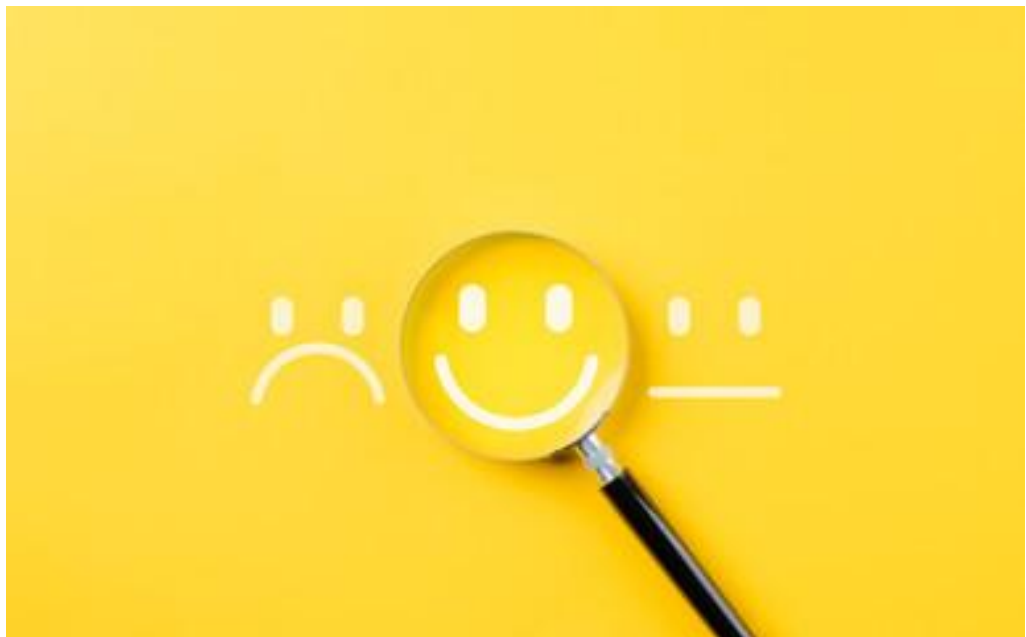
John 16:33: *I have told you these things so that you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

There are certain rites of passage that many of us experience throughout our lives. For example: turning 13 and finally being a teenager, 16 and getting your drivers' license, 18 and graduating from high school. How about 21 and legally ordering an alcoholic beverage? Getting engaged and married. Having your first child. Getting that promotion at work. Turning 65 and having Medicare!

All these things should bring excitement and joy to us, and many times they do. However, each one brings its own special pain. Being a teenager brings acne and awkwardness, a drivers' license accompanies your first fender bender, and don't get me started on turning 21. Those of you who have been or are married know the challenges that come with marital bliss. Kids are great, but your life is changed forever. That new promotion probably means more hours away from family and having Medicare means you are probably going to need it soon!

Jesus never promised us a trouble-free life. As a matter of fact, just the opposite. We are promised trouble throughout our lives. But He also promises us peace, the kind of peace that passes understanding, and He tells us that He has overcome the world. As you pass through the stages of your life remember that the most important relationship you can have is with the One who can guide you every step of the way, the One who loves you, the One who gave His life for you. Will you ask Him for His guidance today?

Rosemary Plummer



Sunday, April 6

Please pray today for Residing Hope.



The Florida United Methodist Children’s Home was first established in 1908 as the Florida Methodist Orphanage. Since that time, it has grown into a multi-faceted organization serving abused, abandoned, and neglected children from across the state of Florida.

In addition to providing a higher level of therapeutic residential care in two locations, we also provide foster care and outpatient counseling in multiple counties, independent living assistance, and a Montessori education for the community.

We realized that we had outgrown the Children’s Home name, and needed something that better represented the purpose we serve and the care we provide. That new name is:



Monday, April 7

What does this mean to you?

John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

What are YOU looking for during this Lenten season? We all know that Christ died to save us from our sins and that we would have eternal life with our Heavenly Father. Just what does that mean to you?

Will we be reunited with our loved ones who have predeceased us? Will we recognize them? Or will we meet new people, ones we always wanted to know but never got the chance?

If you loved chocolate in this life, will we have an unlimited supply of our favorite chocolate candy?

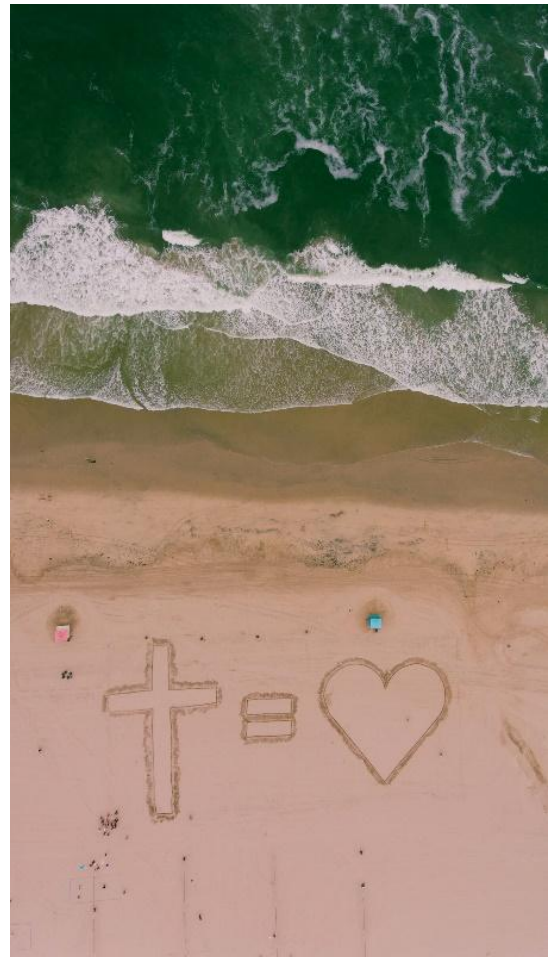
If you love dogs (or cats, or fish, or horses) as pets, will we have as many pets as we want?

Will it be like Christmas every day? Will we be like little children who will get our wishes answered perfectly.

No one knows exactly what heaven is like, but we do know that it will be perfect. Christ promised the thief on the cross beside him that he would be in Heaven that very day!

And all we have to do is rely on God's Grace and accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. It really is that simple!

Marti Poe



Tuesday, April 8

The Mirror

James 1:22-24: *Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*

How is this person looking into God's word? The world tries to tell you that God's rules are restricting. But, obeying God, rather than being a slave to sin, is actually freeing. Have you ever experienced it? When we turn from sin towards Christ, we have a joy and peace beyond description.

James does not play around. He tells these believers plain and simple what he wants from them: Obey God's Word! Do not read or listen to it and feel great about yourself. Actually do what it says. Did people read God's Word? Did most Christians have a copy of the Old Testament?

You will not be surprised to hear me say that time spent studying the Bible is never wasted. However, when we leave without heeding the advice from James 1, we are fooling ourselves into thinking we did something noble to grow our faith.



It is impossible to interact with God's Word and walk away unchanged. Quality time with God refreshes the soul.

Having already warned them not to be prideful about their earthly wealth, James now addresses their attitude of anger and calls on these believers to get rid of all moral filth and evil by humbly accepting the Christian teachings and warnings to follow.

I have always liked James 1-2 for how he teaches and trains people. It is easy to be kind to others who treat us fairly. It is harder to be kind to those who treat us unfairly. Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for you. For when your FAITH is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

Prayer: God, every night it is a relaxing time to talk with you and fall asleep dreaming of you. This helps reassure us that all will be well in the morning. Amen.

Marty Roberts

Wednesday, April 9

Love before you respond

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

I have found that the love quote from the scripture has helped me in my everyday activities and conversations. One could count to 10 before you respond to criticism, arguments, or angst.

That could work for some, but I think that reflecting on the things that Love is and is not can help shape our responses to everyday conversations. Love is kind, patient, and always hopeful. Love is NOT irritable, jealous, boastful, or proud.

I have also recited this scripture in family weddings, and it has always left the attendees with good memories.

Using this rule may result in more meaningful, helpful, communications for you.

Dear Lord, let this Bible verse help me have more meaningful and positive conversations.

Dean Sasek



Thursday, April 10

Pray... Learn... Love

Matthew 4:18: As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers; Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once, they left their nets and followed him.

As a kid growing up in Florida, I have fond memories of fishing off my dad's boat. Waiting for the fish to bite was a challenge but the snacks were great! Soda pop and chips were normally off limits, but when we were on the boat fishing, a cold Coke and a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos really hit the spot! I remember my dad asking other boaters at the dock before we'd go out, "Where are the fish biting today?" Each one had advice, special bait, or little tricks. I always wondered, "How did they know?"

For us, fishing was fun, but for the fishermen who followed Jesus this was their job. When I read this story, I wondered why would fishermen drop their nets "at once" and follow him? Their nets were their only source of income! How would they live? Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* These men were certain that Jesus was the way, and they risked everything to follow him, not in a few minutes, not next week. They did so "at once"!

How do we become fishers of men?

Pray and ask God where the "fish" are in Mount Dora. In John 21:6, Jesus appears to his disciples after they had been unsuccessful at fishing, and he commands them, *"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."* And when they did, they couldn't haul in the net because it was overflowing! Jesus knows where the "fish" are. We just have to ask him.

Learn what "fish" eat. In other words, find out what our neighbors need. Are they sad? Are they scared? Are they angry? Hungry? Anxious? How can we compassionately meet those needs?

Love them. Let's listen to and really hear our neighbors. In John 13:34, Jesus said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."*

Prayer: Dear God, please help us be aware of the needs of the people in our lives and give us the courage to go "at once" and love our neighbors so unconditionally that they wholeheartedly know we are Christians by our love. Amen.

Thought for the Day: How can I be ready to go "at once" when Jesus calls me?

Prayer Focus: People who need courage to go when called.

Wendy Simpson

Reprinted from our 2022 Lent Devotional



Friday, April 11

You are treasured by God

Scripture reading: Daniel 1:3-7,17;9:23,10:11,19;12:13

Many of you may remember the song released in 1964, The Name Game. An upbeat, catchy tune that everyone could participate in. But I wonder how many are aware of the important "Name Game" that played out in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 1:3-7.

At the age of 17:

- Daniel's name (meaning God is my judge) was changed to Belteshazzar (principal god of Babylon).
- Hananiah's name (meaning Yahweh has been gracious) was changed to Shadrach (friend of the King).
- Mishael's name (meaning who is like Elohim) was changed to Meshack (Worshipper of Shach).
- Azariah's name (meaning Yahweh has helped) was changed to Abednego (Servant of Nego).

The new names reference Babylon's pagan gods.

It was believed that by changing the names of these young Jewish teenagers, they would forget their God and their heritage. And that SO didn't happen! How is that possible? These 17-year-old young men were taken away from their families, with attempts to indoctrinate them into Babylonian culture by offering education, food, wine, and accommodations in the palace!

How were all 4 teenagers able to resist and prosper? The Book of Daniel in verse 8 begins with Daniel determined that he would not.... Daniel 1:17 begins with God giving these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom.



All four teenagers prospered during their time in captivity. They spent their entire lives in captivity. It is believed Daniel was around 85 when he died. Because of their "determined" mindset to honor and follow the one true God, their faithfulness was rewarded by God while remaining in captivity. In Daniel 9:23 Daniel is told "*you are treasured by God.*" In Daniel 10:10 Daniel is told "*you are a man treasured by God.*" And a third time in Daniel 10:19, Daniel is told "*you who are treasured by God.*"

We look forward to hearing, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But I find it encouraging and worth striving for to hear the message now, throughout all our days, "You are treasured by God." Because we know that wherever our treasure is, our heart is also. Therefore, if you are treasured by God, you must have His heart also!

Thought for the Day: Treasure: meaning valuable masterpiece.

What does the name/term "Teenager" mean to you? Does it make you think the person is too young for many things including making wise decisions? The Book of Daniel proves otherwise. Perhaps we should use that term/name less. Perhaps we should refer to our young people as young men and young women. It may open all our eyes and begin to view our young people in a different way...treasured by God.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, Name above all Names, for your heart for your children. Use the example of these 4 teenage boys, no, these four young men to show us how to become determined to live and walk with You daily even in the midst of captivity, if necessary, that we might become Your treasure. Amen.

Kathy Tanner



Saturday, April 12

King of the Road

Matthew 21:8-10: ⁸A very large crowd* spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?'—

One morning recently I woke up and went for my usual walk. For some reason I had a song replaying in my mind and I couldn't get it out of my head. Normally when this happens, I can replace it with a hymn or praise song. But that day "King of the Road" kept coming into my mind.

I hadn't heard or thought of that song in decades. I heard it growing up, but it is not exactly a fan favorite on the radio today. Since I couldn't get it out of my mind, I just said, "Okay, God, this song is stuck in my head, and I can't get it out. What is it I should be thinking about in regard to the song."

At first, I couldn't even remember the artist who sang it, but after about a mile of walking it came to me – Roger Miller. I also started thinking about the limited lyrics I could remember and began to wonder why the song was popular back then.

The song has a certain "every man" type of quality about it. It seems to be a song about going through the struggles of life – a man who has almost nothing, just getting by, living all alone. Yet, he calls himself "King of the Road." What did he know that others did not? I think it had something to do with being free.

As I walked along and pondered the song, I couldn't help but think about Jesus coming into Jerusalem on the day we now call Palm Sunday. There He was – a poor, penniless man who had no home to call his own – and His disciples were a scraggly bunch of guys who didn't make the cut for rabbi education and training.

Yet, Jesus was hailed as King – King of the Jews. I'm sure the ruling religious authorities viewed the scene and shook their heads. Some may have spit on the ground in disgust. They thought they were all high-and-mighty because of their education, place, and privilege. They thought they were living at the pinnacle of religiosity. And likely, they were. But they were not free. Far from it, they were enslaved by the rules and missed the spirit (and the Spirit) of their faith. They worked so hard to gain approval and recognition by other people that they often forgot what it really meant to be rabbis, priests, scribes, and Levites.

Jesus, on the other hand, sought only the approval and glory of His Father in Heaven. Though He was to be treated as a rogue criminal, denigrated and dehumanized, mocked and tortured (at the hands of the Romans, yes, but with the full desire and approval of the Jewish religious leaders) – yet. He was truly free. He lived a life that was truly and completely pleasing to His Father. Jesus was the true "King of the Road" – the "Via Dolorosa," the Way of Suffering. It sounds odd to say but Jesus was free enough to suffer – not for His sake, but for ours.

Questions for Reflection:

- Am I living life thinking I am free when, in fact, I am still enslaved to the things of this world?
- Am I willing to fully follow Jesus, the true King of the Road, even if that leads down a road I would rather not travel?

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, help me to live a life that is, first and foremost, pleasing to you. I know I can only do that through the saving grace brought to us through Your Son, Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit living within me. Help me to follow in the footsteps of Jesus on whatever road it is You have for me. May all things work to Your glory, honor, and praise. Amen.

Rev. Gary Upleger

Sunday, April 13

We pray today for Vision India, a partnership that began in 2015.



Vision India provides educational opportunities to children in underprivileged villages.

Vision India supplies clean drinking water to tribal groups through the digging of wells in severely impoverished areas.



Vision India provides medical help each year by visiting tribal communities with a physician and dispensing medicines at no cost to villagers who are ill or injured.

Vision India makes adult vocational training available through sewing schools for girls to provide a meaningful skill by which they can earn wages for basic needs.



Vision India continues to spread the good news of the gospel of Christ by teaching and equipping tribal pastors to form house churches as they disciple new believers.



Monday, April 14

HELP!

Psalm 121....

*"I look up to the mountains, does my help come from there?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth!*

*He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber.
Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps.*

*The Lord himself watches over you!
The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.
The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night.*

*The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life.
The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever." (NLT)*

I am quite certain that each of us at some point in our lives have looked up to a majestic mountain and felt the awe and majesty of God's workmanship. Having grown up in New York City, looking up to mountains of concrete was more the norm for me, yet I always knew the Lord was with me and kept me safe. Where do you look for help?

Have you ever wondered when you offer your prayers to the Lord, is He really stopping to listen? Are you a good listener? Many years back...before email and cell phones...I was involved in our church's prayer chain. As most of the prayer requests came into my husband's office or our home, it was the easy way to get the requests passed along.

Ever recall playing "telephone" as a child? Well, it carries onto our adult lives too as our prayer requests quite often were tweaked before they went full circle, occasionally changing the illness or severity of the concern.

Blessedly we have a God who not only listens and watches over us as we come and go, but He also makes intercession for us when we do not know how to pray or possibly brought an altered request before His throne. (Romans 8:26)

Getting back to our prayer chain. As they were all given verbally and written down, I kept a journal of these requests. Every few months I would look through the requests and look heavenward and give praise for all the answered prayers. We too often move on to a new concern without stopping and realizing how God has watched over us.

We are in Lent. I would challenge each of you to write down your personal prayer requests and keep that journal through Christmas and then look back and see how often God has answered your prayers and kept you or a loved one from harm. He's answering our prayers while we sleep!

Praise God for the hope we have in Him! Praise God for His sacrifice for us!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you for protecting us. You keep us from stumbling, more often than we realize and when we do fall or fail, your love corrects, guides, and heals us. May we daily remember to look up and know where our help comes from. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Gail Williamson



Tuesday, April 15

Change

Romans 12:2: *Do 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 perfecting will.*

Isaiah 41:10: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

James 1:2-4: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*

Change can be difficult and can prove challenging. However, without change, we would become complacent, and we would not understand or experience new opportunities, new joys, new challenges, new hope, or new growth. The greatest lessons and the most growth I experienced occurred during and after times of change.

Divorce eventually brought me to an amazing marriage of 32 years. Unable to have a child brought us our amazing son. One airline after another failing made us resilient and taught us many lessons on a personal and professional basis. Those challenging times taught us a greater compassion for one another, our friends, and our colleagues.

Change taught us the need for a deeper self-reflection. We recognized and knew that our God brought us through it all and that HIS steadfast love gave us a deeper understanding of our faith, the need to look outside ourselves, and to be more patient, knowing God has a plan for us and the lessons we need to learn.

Prayer:

Father, I come to you and ask that in these difficult and confusing times, you surround us with your love and comfort and grant us the peace needed to see the positives of change. Grant us the patience and grace needed to manage the change in our lives, our country, and our world. Help us to walk this rocky and sometimes rugged path. Help us to recognize the opportunities for growth and joy that change can bring. Please guide and direct us Father and in the end, save us. In Jesus' name, we pray...Amen.

Karen Averill



Wednesday, April 16

Worship Cannot Be Contained

Scripture Verses: John 4:22, Matt. 28:18-20, Psalm 63:4, Psalm 136, Psalm 150:6, Psalm 71:8, Psalm 22:3, Psalm 23:3, Gal 5:22-23, 1John 4:7-21

Worship, like God, cannot be contained to one space. Worship is meant to be spread and communicated. Much like the "Great Commission" is about multiplying disciples - worship is about exponentially and eternally magnifying and multiplying God's praise. It is, literally, where God resides during those sacred moments when His people are praising Him.



Authentic worship actually BRINGS GOD JOY! It brings memory, hope, restoration, happiness, faithfulness, but most importantly – it communicates God's infinite love when done correctly.

Prayer:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,
and kindle in them the fire of your Love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
Grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise,
and ever enjoy your consolations.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

(Prayer before Walk to Emmaus/ Via De Cristo worship services)

Josh Collins



Thursday, April 17

Gethsemane's Agony: A Testament of Love

Scriptures: Matthew 26:36-50; Romans 8:26

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced profound sorrow, praying with deep anguish, "*O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.*" His sweat became like drops of blood as He anticipated the immense suffering ahead. Jesus bore the full depth of human anguish, delving into the darkest realms of our souls. At this moment, He reached the point of no return. This prayer reveals His profound love and willing sacrifice, showing what He would endure to understand our deepest pains.

There will be times when the Scriptures seem to mock everything believed and taught, times when your soul feels amputated, when words fail, and pain overwhelms. When the heavens seem closed, and you don't know what or how to pray, and the feeling of aloneness envelops you, remember Jesus' prayer. Remember what He endured to save, redeem, and understand. His prayer lives on, and He continues to pray for you. He embraced the cup of suffering so He could share in our turn to drink. His love assures us that everything will work together for good.



Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for your unwavering sacrifice, boundless understanding, and infinite love – our eternal Advocate. We are never alone. You provide strength when ours is depleted and understand the deepest groans of our souls when all we can say is, "Jesus." You are present in moments of indescribable suffering, when miracles seem distant, almost like a fable, when strength is but a whisper, and hope feels lost. You cradle our hurting hearts in Your tender embrace. In Your presence alone can we find true comfort and understanding. Amen.

Meria Echavaria

**Join us tonight in the sanctuary at 7:00 pm for a
Maundy Thursday service of Holy Communion**



Friday, April 18

The Prophecy of Jesus' Crucifixion

There are over 300 prophecies concerning Jesus and some prophecies of a looming cross. The crucifixion of a person was a horrible death. Even the Romans said it was the most despicable way a person could die. The Romans would never crucify a Roman citizen. Only slaves, criminals and foreigners were killed in this way.

John 3:14-15: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. That whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" This was given as an example so long ago of the type of death Jesus would experience. A center post of salvation set up by God and executed by Moses. Jesus was to be lifted up for everyone to see.

John 12:32 – The supreme exultation of Jesus. John does not go into many details about the cross. His gospel portrays the deity of Jesus rather than the nature of sinful man.

John 17:1-15 – In these verses Jesus says his hour has now come. John's view is to show the deity of Jesus. The fulfillment of what is written in the majesty of death and how these things were predicted hundreds of years before the fact.

John 19:16 – Pilate delivered him to be crucified.

Luke 23:25 – Also says the same thing. Pay attention to the word "delivered."

Romans 8:32 – God delivered him up.

So, who delivered Jesus up? The answer is both. God's plan was on schedule no matter what evil men wanted to do. God is always in control. God delivered Jesus through his vessel called Pilate.

Let's look at some fulfillment of prophecies.

Isaiah 53:7 – He was led away. So horrible was the death on a cross that a man had to be whipped, beaten, or dragged to the cross screaming and begging for his life to be spared. Jesus went willingly to the cross saying nothing like a lamb to the slaughter.

Isaiah 53:8 – Roman law said there was a two-day interval: prison-judgement-prison-death was the normal practice. Jesus had about two hours between his illegal trial and being taken away. The Jewish priests saw Jesus as a threat to their power and authority and wanted him dead and wanted him dead now. They did not wait for the customary two days.

Genesis 22 – The story of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac is always referred to in this story as a type of Christ. The story tells us that Abraham was to sacrifice his one and only son on Mount Moriah. They carried their own wood. Notice in John 19:16 Jesus carried his own wood (cross). The author of Chronicles identifies this area (Mount Moriah) as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

A common practice of that time was placing a sign on the cross stating what the crime was. Pilate wrote on Jesus' sign KING OF THE JEWS in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, the official language of Rome for all to see.

They went out of the city because Roman law said no crucifixion was to be held within the city.

Exodus 29:14, Leviticus 4:12 and 16:27 – A sin offering had to be outside the city.

Hebrews 13:12 – Jesus died outside the city gates as required by law. Thus, fulfilling Biblical prophecy.

Jesus was taken to Golgotha, which is also on Mount Moriah where he was crucified according to Roman law and prophecy. The Jews normally killed people by stoning them.

Numbers 21:6 – Moses raised the serpent up in the wilderness. The serpent and the wilderness represented sin and death.



John 19:18 was predicted in Isaiah 53:12 that he would be numbered with his transgressors one on each side. This was all in God's plan.

Psalms 22:14-15 – "poured out like water" is an indication of death by crucifixion.

John 19:23-24 – This is predicted in Psalm 22:18 – A man normally wore four pieces of clothing: headgear – sandals – belt – garment. However, Jesus also wore an undergarment called a *vesture*. It was a one piece, seamless finely woven linen item. His garments were divided, and lots were cast for his vesture. The vesture was a required garment only worn by a high priest. This is in Exodus 28. The vesture represents a oneness between man and God.

Jesus was and is our High Priest. The word "Priest" means "Pontifex," which means "bridge builder." We have only one bridge builder between humans and God and that is Jesus Christ. The fact that they gambled at the foot of the cross makes it a very dastardly crime. These people were so indifferent they only cared about gambling and what they could get.

Psalm 22:1 – *"My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?"* Written a thousand years before the cross. God did not abandon Jesus on that cross because God cannot abandon God. I believe God abandoned the sins of humankind that Jesus brought to the cross when he drank the cup of God's wrath.

Let's review: Jesus was delivered – they led him away – immediate crucifixion – he bore his cross – killed outside the city – crucified between two thieves – they gambled for his garments – and what he said on the cross. This was the majesty of Jesus working out God's plan that was predicted hundreds of years in advance.

In conclusion, I would quote to you Ezekiel 18:4 – *"All souls belong to God and the soul that sins shall die."* Also, Matthew 10:28 – *"Fear not those which kill the body but rather fear him which is able to destroy both the soul and body in hell."*

When you come to the cross and you see Jesus high and lifted up, you must appreciate what he did for you. Take him as your personal savior. Accept him and believe in him so that you may have eternal life. He is the only one who can reconcile you with God. By accepting him and believing in him you can cross that bridge over the river of sin and death and forever live in the presence of God. If you don't accept him you will drown in that river of sin and death and be forever separated from God with no hope.

Prayer: Jesus, I believe in what you did for us on the cross. Forgive my sin and allow me to live forever with you. I love you. Amen.

Jim Dodsworth

**Join us tonight in the sanctuary at 7:00 pm for
*Who is Jesus?, a Good Friday service***
featuring our Celebration Choir, the Barron String Quarter
from Stetson University and Alecia Devereaux, Liturgical Dancer
from Grace Studio in Merritt Island. Childcare provided.



Saturday, April 19

Holy Saturday

Scripture: Genesis 28:10-17

I hope you have enjoyed this devotion. In doing this devotion together, we have a wonderful opportunity to commune with God that has lasting, eternal significance. Through the Holy Spirit, God has made His power and presence available to us.

Never forget, that asking for help is just a prayer away. God's help may not always come in the way we want it, especially in an era of instant gratification and 2-day shipping, but if we are patient and have faith, it will come in the way we need.

For example, Jacob labored 7 years for the hand of Leah (thinking she was Rachael); another 7 years for the hand of Rachael; and six years after that for his flocks. After 20 years, Jacob sought to return to ancestral homelands in the land of the Chaldeans to escape his father-in-law's tyranny. On the way out of Canaan, Jacob reconciled with his estranged twin brother Esau and made peace with Laban. In a last-ditch effort, Jacob stops at Bethel (meaning "The House of God").

Years before, Bethel was where Jacob had seen a vision of angels descending and ascending a ladder to heaven. Bethel was also where Jacob had wrestled with God. Twenty years later, God renewed his covenant with Jacob, and Jacob recommitted to remaining in Canaan, the land promised by God to Jacob's ancestors and descendants. I admire the patience and faith of Jacob. Even more, it is a sign that God does not forget His promises to His children.

Holy Saturday is often called "Silent Saturday". As Christians, we remember that Jesus' body was in the tomb on the 2nd day, and it was a day of waiting patiently for the Resurrection.

Will you have the patience and faith to claim God's promises to you in your life and the life to come?

Prayer: O God, Creator of heaven and earth:

Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

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Rev. David Averill

Sunday, April 20



We pray today for our Umuhuza "Mediator" empowerment group in Mukindo, Rwanda. In 2024, we made a three-year commitment to praying for and helping 25 households consisting of 90 total young people as they make the journey to self-sufficiency.

In June 2025, Ginny and Hank Glaspey are traveling to Rwanda to serve as our ambassadors to our empowerment group. They will take cards and letters from our congregation to the young people and bring their stories back to us.

Zoe Empowers began as a relief organization in 2004, as a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe. In 2007, Zoe was redesigned by Epiphany Mujawimana with a group of Rwandan social workers responding to the 800,000 orphaned children created over 100 days during the 1994 genocide. They created a three-year, community-based, indigenous-led empowerment program, where the participants take the lead in their own journey out of poverty and provide their basic needs themselves.

Since 2007, *Zoe Empowers* has impacted over 218,938 vulnerable children, across 11 countries: Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Liberia, Tanzania, Mozambique, India, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zambia. Each program within the Zoe network is locally owned and operated, with support from a nimble U.S.-based team.

Join us today:

6:30 am for a Sunrise service on the front lawn

8:00 am for a traditional Easter Celebration

9:30 am for a contemporary Easter Celebration

11:00 am for a traditional Easter Celebration

