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Our Mission: To share the love
Of Jesus Christ, one life at a time

Our Vision: To serve all people
As a growing source of God's grace

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LENT
ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2026

Dying upon a cross in agony
Giving His life for all—for you, for me.

The
gift
Is
free
Yet
not
my
own
till
I
accept
The
gift,
receive
the
Giver.

He
bore
our
sins
alone



**ASBURY UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH**

2026 Lenten devotional

Dear Friends:

In these pages you'll find the hearts and minds of folks you know, myself included. I have written for all the Sundays, Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. I hope this will give you an opportunity to get to know me better. I love projects like this; they help us get to know each other better, too. It is an opportunity for me to learn about the folks who are and have been Asbury Church. I hope you'll take the time to read each day as part of your Lenten devotion this year.

Lent is a good time to consider again all the ways in which we depend upon God. We depend upon God for our salvation. We also depend upon God for all the blessing of our lives – home, family, food, clothing, and an abundance more! It is my hope that this Lent you'll come to appreciate all the different ways God is blessing your life. Perhaps you'll recognize new ways in which God is blessing you! Yet, God's blessing in your life is not just for you: We are blessed that we might be a blessing to others.

During Lent, I'll be focused on the Letter to the Galatians in our Bible Study. I'll be leading a study of Bishop Job's book *Three Simple Rules* on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in Holy Grounds, and preaching on Spiritual Gifts and Fruits. Those gifts and fruits are part of the blessing we receive with which we can bless others to God's honor and glory. You'll have an opportunity for service on March 14th, too. Come help fill the meal bags for Midwest Mission Center in Parish Hall that morning. I hope you'll take advantage of the many opportunities for spiritual growth and enrichment being offered this Lent – from this daily devotional to opportunities for fellowship, learning, growth, and service.

Finally, my sincere thanks to all the contributors for this booklet and to our editor-in-chief for the project, Carolyn, and her many assistants who have helped put this booklet together. This is another gift of service which is a blessing given to the rest of us. Thank you.

May this Lent fill your heart with gratitude and your tongue with praise, in Jesus' name.

Peace, *Dr. Daniel F. Diss*

Editor—Carolyn Neal
Typist and printer—Lynn Cunningham
Cover: "The Gift" by Carolyn Neal

I would like to give a special thank you to the two additional typists, Mike Klen and Janet Sheppard.



EASTER

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The great acclamation of Easter is my favorite part of the Christian year. When I was younger, I loved Christmas. As I have matured, Easter is far more my favorite part of Christian worship. I love how this acclamation can be a bold confident expression, nearly yelled from the house tops. It can be proclaimed as a breathless messenger carrying news too good to contain. It can be proclaimed in quiet dignity or rowdy joy. The proclamation, "Christ is risen," can be made any way at all. It is a proclamation which cuts across all the parts of our life.

As we have journeyed through Lent, the work of the Holy Spirit has been highlighted in many ways. It is the Holy Spirit which teaches us to know and trust God in Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit which gives our hearts confidence to trust the promises of God so that we say "yes" to Jesus' invitation to "come, follow me." It is the work of the Holy Spirit which animates our hearts in the pursuit of faith and expression of faith. In short, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, we celebrate Easter each time we encounter the risen Christ. Do you expect to meet Jesus when you start your day?

Each day can be a "little Easter" if we'll let it be. Each day through the work of the Holy Spirit we can meet the risen Jesus in the people on the street, the friends around the table, or the family gathered in prayer. We can meet the risen Jesus in the silence of our "prayer closet." We can meet the risen Jesus in the chaos of traffic in downtown Chicago. Any place we are, there also is God. It doesn't matter where or when; God is with us always. The Holy Spirit is always active and working in our lives.

As we celebrate Easter, do our lives proclaim Jesus Christ crucified and risen or do they testify to something else? Easter is reason for great celebration. It is the celebration of God's saving work in all of creation. It is God standing with us and making a place for us with God. What do you celebrate this Easter?

Prayer: O God, help me to celebrate Easter every day not just one day a year. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss

**Kankakee Area Methodist Cluster
Lent Services**



Date	Time	Location	Minister
Ash Wednesday February 18	7:00 pm	Manteno UMC, Manteno	Rev. Dr. Daniel Diss
Sunday February 22	6:30pm	Momence UMC, Momence	Pastor Steve Hudspath
Sunday March 1	6:30 pm	Trinity Kankakee	Pastor Amy Smith
Sunday March 8	6:30pm	Aroma Park UMC, Aroma Park	Pastor Alberto Ramirez- Salazar
Sunday March 15	6:30 pm	Grace UMC, Bourbonnais	Pastor Lana Robyne
Sunday March 22	6:30pm	Asbury UMC, Kankakee	Pastor Lori Holmes
Sunday March 29	6:30pm	Caldwell Chapel AME Zion, Kankakee	Pastor Rico Esguerra
Maundy Thursday April 2	7:00pm	Bradley Wesley UMC, Bradley	Pastor Valerie Mezger- Wengstrom
Good Friday April 3	7:00pm	St. Mark UMC Kankakee	TBA

This year's theme is "The Means of Grace/Holiness for Lent in the Wesleyan Tradition." This promises to be a powerful and meaningful series of services. The Lenten Offering from the cluster services is to support a meal packing session through our Midwest Mission Center.

LENTEN SERVICES AT ASBURY UMC

Ash Wednesday, February 18-12:15pm in Beckman Chapel
 Good Friday, April 3-12:15pm in Beckman Chapel
 Easter Sunday, April 5-8:00am in Beckman Chapel

ASH WEDNESDAY

One of the readings for Ash Wednesday comes from Joel 2. At verses 12 & 13, the prophet says, "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow, tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive." This is the invitation which begins our Lenten journey. It is an invitation to repentance and renewal.

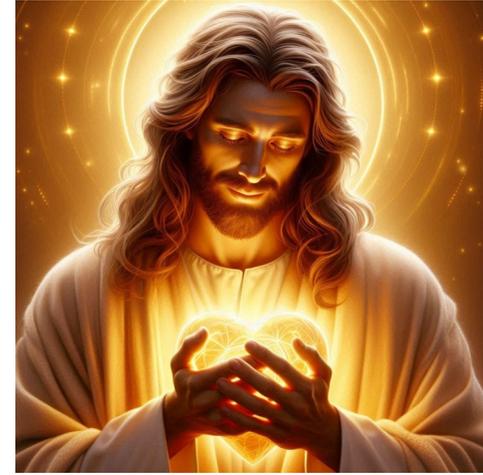
When the prophet proclaims that God tells us to "rend our heart and not our clothing," he is telling us that God hopes that what will change in the world, and in our lives, is our heart. The heart is not merely the physical organ of the heart. Rather, "the heart" in the Bible is the central core of human existence, encompassing the mind, emotions, will, conscience, and spiritual life. It is the source of thoughts, desires, decisions, and actions—often described as the "wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The heart is where love, faith, obedience, and sin originate. The heart determines a person's relationship with God. The invitation is from God asking us to look at all the parts of our life, and to amend our own hearts not another's heart or actions. This is a key understanding for Lenten devotion. God's invitation is to self-examination and the amending of our hearts to more closely match what it is God asks of us. Micah 6 gives us a simple summary of God's expectations of us: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and to walk humbly alongside God.

Lent is an invitation by God, and the church, to pause and take account of how we are living in comparison with what we know to be God's expectations, God's hoped, for behavior, from us. Micah 6 summarizes it well. Jesus summarizes it this way: Love the Lord your God with all your hearts, all your mind, and all your strength; love your neighbor as yourself. This is what God asks of us. Knowing that we will fall short, God doesn't expect perfection just that we'll keep seeking the renewal of life and heart which life with God promises. May this Ash Wednesday mark not just our foreheads with ashes but that it will make our hearts as open for God's renewing Spirit to guide and lead in the days ahead.

Prayer: O God, open my heart to your renewing Holy Spirit that I may move a little closer to the hope you have for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss

Written with assistance from the Bravo search engine AI model



EYES OF LOVE

Read: Luke 23:39-42

In Luke 23:42, a thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus turned to Him and said "Lord, remember me when you come into our kingdom." We can well imagine the look of kindness, understanding and love he returned to the thief when Jesus answered: "Assuredly, I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise."

The ultimate act of love that Jesus gave to us was redeeming us from sin and giving us eternal life by going to the cross for us.

As our Lord taught, healed, shared, and came to humanity with compassion and love, we seek His power to live and care for others in that same way. As our church is encouraging us to read through our Bible this year, we will lean many ways to emulate His look of love.

A favorite hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," tells us to "Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

Our living Lord, so fill us with Your compassion and care for each person we meet that we see each one also as one of God's Beloved children.
In Jesus name, Amen.

By Jinny Gordon(2012)

GOOD FRIDAY

We're told the sky turned black on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. The day in my own life on which that actually happened was in the April 1974. I was in 3rd grade. A super outbreak of tornados hit Illinois that day. I was at school when the sky went from blue to greenish black. It was very scary. When I got home from school, there were lots of cars around the farm. It was odd; just an hour and a half earlier the sky had turned black. What was happening? Tornados.

The sky turning black on the day our farm was hit by a tornado will forever be etched in my memory. The eerie "green black" of the sky that day is a color I'll never forget. The sky going from bright and sunny to dark as night at 2:45 p.m. is something I won't forget either. When I read the story of Jesus' passion and death, I can't help but think of that day in 1974. The timing and everything were too eerily similar to the biblical story, even in the time of day things happened.

That was a scary day for all of us and life-altering for many. The farm just a quarter mile north lost all their outbuildings with the house being lifted off its' foundation. We sustained damage too. But the important part for me is to recognize the events on that Friday all those years ago weren't that different from what I experienced – at least in my imagination of the events. Lives were up ended. Physical events changed people's lives. God was present through all of that to everyone present. The story of Jesus' passion contains a subtle reminder to us: Jesus' mother and friends watched these events happen and were helpless to change or stop it just as we could not stop a tornado. Yet, it is in that place and position of helplessness that God acts. God acted in Jesus' passion and death to give us the gift of salvation.

When the world is overwhelming and we feel helpless against it, do we look to God for salvation, or do we expect God to "make it right" by our own standard? God is still active and engaged in our world through the work of the Holy Spirit. Do we rely on the Holy Spirit or our own strength?

Prayer: God of Hope, fill my heart with a resolve to know and serve You even when the days are beyond challenging. Work in and through me to make You will known in our world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss

SOME LENTEN FACTS

We say that Lent is forty days long, but there are more than forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. How is that possible? It's because we don't count the Sundays of Lent. Every Sunday is like a "little Easter" so that makes Lent sort of like a tithe, about one tenth of a year. What is "Mardi Gras"? It is French for "Fat Tuesday". At one time Lent was observed with quite strict dietary restrictions. Since Lent always begins on Wednesday, It became traditional to use the day before that, Fat Tuesday, to have rich food and celebrations.

Why do we talk about ashes? In both Jewish and Christian traditions, ashes are a sign of repentance and morality. In Numbers 19:9-17 ashes are mentioned in connection with sacrifice and, in Isaiah 58:5 and Jonah 3:6, ashes are connected with mourning and fasting. Other biblical references connect ashes with grief for the dead and national humiliation. In the New Testament (MT. 11:21, LK. 10:13 and He 9:13) mourning and purification rites used ashes.

I would like to quote some thoughts from Sarah Parsons who has written for the Upper Room.

"Lent is a time to search out the blocks in our lives – the habits, thoughts or patterns that weigh us down and deaden our hearts. In that sense, Lent is a heavy season. But it is also a time to choose one of those deadening blocks and to clear it gently away, allowing natural love to flow back and forth again between ourselves and God. Lent is an invitation to self-examination, not as an end in itself, but as a means to fuller life.

So take this long time, these forty days, and be gentle with yourself. Quietly survey your inner landscape and seek out a part that needs tending. It may mean taking thirty minutes of rest each day; time with the phone and computer turned off, the door closed, reading a novel or doing anything that seems like fun.

You won't be able to do everything you need to do in forty days. That's okay. Lent will be back again next year. Just begin to come back to life."

May your Lent be blessed and followed by a wonderful Easter.

Kavin Sampson
(Friday, March 1, 2013)

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

We turned our faces away and esteemed him not.

But he took upon himself all our pain.

He was wounded for our transgression; he was bruised for our iniquities;

And with his stripes we are healed.

He was scourged, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth;

Like a lamb that was led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth.

From Isaiah 53

As we enter the season of Lent, we are reminded of the Passion of Christ-how the death of our Lord was an inevitable outcome of his ministry, one that was predicted by Old Testament prophets like Isaiah. Chapter 53 of Isaiah describes God's "Suffering Servant", whose identity is not entirely clear to modern Bible scholars. There is no question that the early Christian church applied this passage to the Messiah. The first specific use of this text in the New Testament applied this passage to the Messiah. The first specific use of this text in the New Testament occurs in Acts 8:26-40, when Philip discussed this passage with the Ethiopian eunuch.

The spirit said to Philip, "Go and join yourself to this chariot." So, Philip ran up and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He said, "How could I do that unless someone were to guide me?" He invited Philip to get up and to sit with him. The passage of scripture which he was reading was this: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he received no justice. Who will recount his lineage because his life is taken from the earth? The eunuch said to Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet speaking about? Is it about himself? Or about someone else?" Philip opened his mouth, and, taking his start from this passage of scripture, told him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road they came to some water. "Look," said the eunuch, "here is water. What is to stop me from being baptized?"

As we listen to the Passion section of Handel's "Messiah," as we worship during this Lenten season, let us be reminded not only of Christ's sacrifice for us, but of our responsibility to share this good news with those around us.

By *Phil Hays* (1997)



MAUNDY THURSDAY

The night on which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, what we have come to call Holy Communion, he was at a Passover meal. As part of a Passover meal, the chief celebrant (eldest male, generally) in the household, has the option and opportunity to make commentary on the events which the meal celebrates. Jesus does that exact thing in his instituting the Lord's Supper. He makes commentary about the meal.

When Jesus takes break and blesses it, this is a normal part of the Passover meal. His reinterpreting the blessing and sharing of the broken bread as "my body broken for you" reinterprets the whole Passover meal. Instead of giving thanks and blessing God for the gift of bread, even unleavened bread, it is a reminder of our dependence upon God. God provides our bread; God provides our salvation. It is God who is inviting us to share this "bread of salvation." God is host of this holy meal.

At the end of the Passover meal, there is one last cup of wine shared. It is the "Cup of Blessing." Again, Jesus reinterprets this for us. Instead of us blessing God, this is God's blessing poured out for us. When Jesus says, "my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin," he's reminding us that it is God, not we who make our salvation real. It is God who has first moved toward us inviting us to come and follow, come and see for ourselves, this one named Jesus. Will we accept God's invitation to "come and see"?

Prayer: Loving God, help me to accept your invitation to follow, even when it is hard. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Pastor Daniel Diss



FOLLOW ME

"Take up your cross and follow Me,
 Wherever I may lead,
 Your back will ache, your feet grow tired,
 And Yes, your heart will bleed.
 But we shall walk together,
 And I will share your lot,
 For I am always with you,
 And will forget you not"
 "Take up your cross and follow Me,
 And I will fill your days
 With joy and only I can give,
 In many precious ways.
 So learn to know Me better,
 For there are miles to go,
 And rest your head upon My heart,
 ...For I have loved you so."
 "The light grows dim, the dusk descends,
 The sunlight turns to shade,
 I give my angels charge of you,
 So do not be afraid.
 But trust in Me and do not grieve
 For what has come and gone,
 I will provide for all your needs,
 ...Because you are My own."
 "My yoke is sweet, My burden light,
 No matter where you roam,
 Remember earth will pass away,
 But heaven is your home.
 How very brief a time man walks
 Upon this earthly sod,
 So love Me as I first loved you,
 ...And know that I am God."

Grace E. Easley
 Submitted by an Asbury Member



FASTING

Lent is a time for fasting. Fasting for spiritual growth is a practice that involves abstaining from food or other comforts to focus on prayer, devotion, and spiritual development. It is a practice of humility, refocusing our hearts on God, and a tool to quiet distractions.

Pope Francis gave these simple tips on fasting:

- fast from hurting words, and say kind words;
- fast from sadness, and be filled with gratitude;
- fast from anger and be filled with patience;
- fast from pessimism, and be filled with hope;
- fast from worries and trust in God;
- fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity;
- fast from pressures and be prayerful;
- fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy;
- fast from selfishness, and be compassionate to others;
- fast from grudges, and be reconciled;
- fast from words, and be silent so you can listen.

Here's practical and biblical advice from Arthur Lichtenberger, a former presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church:

- fast from criticism, and feast on praise;
- fast from self pity, and feast on joy;
- fast from ill-temper, and feast on peace;
- fast from resentment, and feast on contentment;
- fast from jealousy, and feast on love;
- fast from pride, and feast on humility;
- fast from selfishness, and feast on service;
- fast from fear, and feast on FAITH.

Submitted by *Miría Chicke*

METHODISM HELPED PEOPLE LEARN TO READ

As Methodism grew across England and the whole British countryside, Methodism came to Cornwall. Cornwall is an English county in the southwest of the country, just south of Wales. It was considered its own nation at one point long ago, just like Wales. Again, just like Wales, Cornwall has its own language. In the 18th Century as Methodism spread across the Land, in Cornwall piracy became the norm. With the United Kingdom having fought a costly war 3,000 miles away in the American colonies, taxes were increased again on daily goods. There wasn't an income tax as we would know it. Rather, the government placed an import duty on all goods from tea to silk. These taxes were so high, the people of Cornwall found they could be more prosperous through smuggling.

While the American colonies were a drain on the government because of the American Revolution, so too was the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. The nation had to raise capital to fund an army to defend against Napoleon's rise and the military expansion of the French empire. The smugglers of Cornwall would sail (or row) to the Guernsey Islands, trade with the traders who were venturing to France for goods, then bring back goods like tea, cloth, silk, salt, and sugar to sell at a large profit all the while not paying the duty imposed by the UK government. This pattern went on for many decades. Instrumental in ending the piracy and smuggling in Cornwall was the rise of the Methodist chapels.

Methodism gave folks a chance at education (at first, Sunday School). They could learn to read and write. This changed the fortunes and values of many. Because of the rise of the Methodist chapels in Cornwall, piracy and smuggling ended. It was no longer seen as either moral or acceptable. The Methodists help change a lawless and mostly illiterate population to a population which wanted to abide by the law and were able to do the one thing which fundamentally changes a person's future: they learned to read. This was in large part a result of the Methodist Chapels. Something so simple as learning to read, and then reading the Bible for ones' self, changed people and society. Doing something simple, like reading the Scriptures, can be life changing not just for an individual but for a whole society. Do you read and study Scriptures regularly?

Prayer: O Lord, open the Scriptures to me that I might understand You and love You more fully and completely in Jesus' name. Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss



... 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.
ISAIAH 41:10

"When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire, you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you, for I am the Lord your God,...your Savior." -Isaiah 43:2

I WILL BE WITH YOU

I finished my 38 years of teaching high Spanish and English before guns were a threat in classrooms, but there were scary times then, too. One was at the time of the Kent State riots. Eastridge was locked down, but someone opened a back door and let the rioters in.

They started down the hall from room to room, trying to pull siblings or friends out to join them. The younger siblings in my room were hiding in the corner where they couldn't be seen from the door. I was holding the door shut, trying to protect them. Just as one of the rioters threw a rock through the window beside the door, I turned my head sideways toward my class. The window shattered onto me. The noise brought other teachers and the rioters ran on down the hall.

I was able to go to the restroom to see if I was hurt. I had splinters in my hair, on my face, even in my eyelashes, and down the neck of my dress. My eyes could have been damaged, but I was not even scratched! My Lord was with me!!

Lord God, I thank You for all the times You have been with me, both those I knew about and those I was unaware of. Be with today's teachers and students in these frightening times. Send their guardian angels to protect them from the evil in their attacker's hearts and whatever weapon is in their hands.

In Jesus name, Amen

By Carolyn Neal



CONNECT WITH GOD

What do you do to foster a relationship with God during all the busyness of life? How do you connect with God?

As I have been reading in "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World", Joanna Weaver shares that our relationship with Jesus needs to be solid and secure.

The formula for intimacy with God has always and will always be the same: PRAYER + THE WORD + TIME = INTIMACY WITH GOD

Prayer is our heart asking God for wisdom for our own needs as well as others. The next step is listening to God's heart as He talks to us. The second part in our relationship with God is reading the Bible. Through the Bible, God is sharing with us His thoughts and the rules for our lives. God spells out throughout the Bible how He loves us! The last part of connection with God is giving Him our TIME.

As Joanna Weaver shares with us: "If I don't take time to pray, there will be no real communication in our relationship. If I don't take time to read God's word, I won't hear His loving call. And if I don't make time to be alone with Jesus, our relationship will suffer, because time is integral to any relationship."

During the Lenten season, I ask God to help me and you put this formula into practice. Through this process, I hope to know more of Jesus and focus less on me.

1 John 4:13 "This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us.; He has given us of His Spirit."

Submitted by *Sara Miller*



MUTTERINGS AND ANSWERED PRAYERS

You AGAIN! What part of "Ask and ye shall receive" didn't you get? I can imagine Jesus shaking His head and saying this when I express my frustrations through inaudible mutterings to the universe. My frustrations and muttering usually have something to do with self-pity, usually caused by the bus, the weather, and a very full cart of groceries or a combo of all of the above. They usually take the form of "If I had a car, I wouldn't have this problem", or simply "why me?" I never really thought of my frustrated mutterings as prayers, but was always amazed when a friend, neighbor, or even a perfect stranger shows up and says "get in! You shouldn't be walking. Let me take you home or wherever you need to go." Sometimes they might even say "something told me to go this direction!" That was You, Lord!

Another recent example happened Thanksgiving weekend when I had some free time after the cat show in Cincinnati and decided to drive down to Ark Encounter in Kentucky to see the Christmas magic of millions of lights and a laser show. The weather was good while I walked around, but I came out to head back to the bus at closing and it had started to sleet. I knew I was in trouble because it was a long walk back on a path that was either cobblestone or very slick. My mutterings then were short and audible..."help!!!" God sent me help almost immediately in the form of a nice young man who took my arm and walked me back to the bus and even back to where my rental van was parked in the parking lot! Thanks, Lord, for always providing what I need when I need it, even if I don't pray about it and mutter instead!

By *Jewel Ann Wiltfang*

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

March 29, 2026,

WORSHIP OR EMBODIMENT

Matthew 20:28 "...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This coming February, on 2-11-26, it will be 30 years since I answered the knock on my heart's door to follow Jesus. I was 28 years old with a 5 month old baby. Oh how I really needed Jesus to help me in those early days of motherhood!! Looking back over 30 years, I can see how my journey with Jesus has shaped me through many different seasons of learning and understanding the Good News! Early on, I exhibited religious zeal, mostly out of fear for myself, my friends and family. See, I lost my parents at ages 16 and 22. I was an orphan early. My early relationship with Jesus was to have hope that I would be with my parents again in heaven one day.

So, I wanted everyone to follow Jesus for that same promise, not realizing that everyone's journey with Jesus occurs in their own timeline throughout their own lives, not just because I said to follow Him! Then I remember learning everything I could about the Bible, memorizing scripture, filling my time with head knowledge. I participated in a Discipleship program to then be able to be trained to lead the same Discipleship program and help others "follow Jesus".

Then came the Christian concerts and participating in corporate worship and feeling all these emotions through songs and different trials I had come up against over the years. It still felt like I was doing things for God but I didn't feel much different on the inside or some of my circumstances hadn't really changed much, although I did see God moving on my behalf in many ways.

In the last 8 years however, as my spiritual disciplines have changed and matured, I realize now, more than ever, that Jesus doesn't so much want to be worshipped, as he is teaching us to embody Him. To become like Him. To impact our sphere of influence for Him and the Kingdom that we have here on earth. I hope that now, however much time I have left on this earth to continue being taught by Jesus, that as He speaks to my heart, I would serve Him and others well, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and embody His ways to spread hope and light in a seemingly increasingly dark world.

During this season of Lent, may you spend time in reflection to consider how you spend your time. Do you just preach to unsaved family members, do you just read and memorize the Word, do you just sing the songs and feel good about worshipping the King, or do you take time to hang out with Jesus, have quiet time with Him, read His words and go out and embody what He came to earth to accomplish?



Today we begin the final week of our Lenten journey. Today on Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on his journey to crucifixion. We hear again the story of Jesus' passion in worship. As we have journeyed together, I have been trying to point out the work of the Holy Spirit among us. The Holy Spirit is God's abiding presence in and among us in the days since Jesus' ascension into heaven and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we come to know the crucified and risen Jesus.

As we consider God's redeeming work in Jesus, let us also take time to consider God's work in our lives in our world. Last week, I wrote about the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5. In 1 Corinthians 12 & 13, Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit. Paul goes on at some length in these two chapters to remind us that not all gifts of the Spirit are the same. We are each gifted in our own ways. As Paul writes, "A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7, CEB). In other words, when we see either the fruits of the Spirit or gifts of the Spirit we witness the presence of the Holy Spirit, not some residual after effect of a visit. The gifts and fruits are present because the Holy Spirit is present.

In 1 Corinthians 13 we are told that the greatest of the spiritual gifts are faith, hope and love. Among those three, the greatest is love. Love is one way we witness the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit. In the coming week, find ways to share your faith, hope, and love without using words. How might you live out the presence of the Holy Spirit in your everyday life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, as we prepare to celebrate your passion, death, and resurrection, renew a commitment to live in love with one another, to nurture faith and hope in each other, and to turn our lives over to you little by little each day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

By Pastor Daniel F. Diss

(Holy Week continued)

Continued from February 24, 2026

Just six hours later, the awful deed was done.
Mere people had killed God's Holy Son.

But, Joseph of Arimathea would come later and ask
If he could do a burdensome, but loving task:

To take the Body of our Lord down from the Cross,
Where He had suffered, and people thought He had lost.

To the tomb He would go,
But on the third day, our salvation would flow!

Mary, on that dark morning, very still,
Would arrive at the tomb to anoint the One Who had been killed.

But the stone had been rolled away,
And now, it was a much brighter day!

He was no longer dead;
'He had risen, just as He said.

Jesus said Mary's name,
She no longer was the same.

She recognized Jesus as her Lord and Savior Who lives,
And now He freely gives

Salvation to all who ask.
This too shall be our task,

To tell everyone we see
About Jesus' Death and Resurrection which were meant to be.

So, Holy Week is not just a bunch of regular days.
It is something meant to change our ways.

So, let us live and love as He taught us to do,
And love everyone, starting with me and with you!

By *Wendellyn Shelquist*

Whatever your current disciplines are, Matthew 5 - The Sermon on the Mount, is a good place to start to remind us how to embody the qualities of our King. God bless you during this time of quiet reflection during the Lenten season

By *Jennifer Kravat*



Wednesday, February 25, 2026

OH, GIVE ME COURAGE...

Oh, give me courage, Lord, today
To face what comes along;
Give me the faith and love I need
To fill each day with song
Oh, give me courage, Lord, today
To follow in Thy way;
Help me to do what I should do,
And hear me when I pray...
Oh, give me courage, Lord, today,
And strength to do Thy will;
Lead me and guide me, precious Lord,
For I need Thy presence still...
Oh, give me courage, Lord, today,
Come wash away my pain;
Thou art my Master, Lord, and King,
And ever shall remain.

Hope C. Oberhelman

Submitted by An Asbury Member

FOSTERING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD



1 John 4:13 "This is how we know that we live in Him and he in us; He has given us of His Spirit."

What do you do to foster a relationship with God during all the busyness of life? How do you connect with?

As I have been reading in "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World," Joanna Weaver shares that our relationship with Jesus needs to be solid and secure.

The formula for intimacy with God has always and will always be the same: PRAYER + THE WORD + TIME = INTIMACY WITH GOD.

Prayer is our heart asking God for wisdom for our own needs as well as others. The next step is listening to God's heart as He talks to us. The second part in our relationship with God is reading the Bible. Through the Bible, God is sharing with us His thoughts and the rules for our lives. God spells out throughout the Bible how He loves us! The last part of connection with God is giving Him our TIME.

As Joanna Weaver shares with us: "If I don't take time to pray, there will be no real communication in our relationship. If I don't take time to read God's word, I won't hear His loving call. And if I don't make time to be alone with Jesus, our relationship will suffer, because time is integral to any relationship."

As we begin the Lenten season, I ask God to help me and you put this formula into practice. Through this process, I hope to know more of Jesus and focus less on me.

Submitted by *Sara Miller*

HOLY WEEK

Wasn't Palm Sunday just a few days ago?
But, still we could be all aglow!

The celebration of Jesus coming into town!
Everyone was so excited, no one wore a frown.

They thought that He should be their King.
Instead, at the end of the week, He would be suffering!

It was to be a week like no other.
He would die, so we would be saved and all united, like sisters and brothers.

Palm Sunday was a celebration
The following Sunday, we celebrated our salvation.

Maundy Thursday, He would gather His Friends in the Upper Room.
His Followers still did not suspect any gloom.

Later, He would pray with great drops of blood.
His followers still were oblivious where they stood.

Even though He had told them He would die,
They could not understand the when and the why.

After Peter's denial, Peter maybe began to understand
That what he was seeing was part of God's Plan?

The next few hours were agony for anyone to see
As our salvation was starting to come to be.

The "trial" after the beating,
Where everyone was meeting.

Then the crowd grew more hungry for Jesus' Death.
You would have thought they were all on meth.

They all yelled, "crucify!"
And then our beloved Jesus had to die.

The people led Him up to an awful place;
It was there by God, we would have Amazing Grace.

(continued on next page)



“Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”—Matt. 5:48

GOING ON TO PERFECTION

What does it mean? Can we ever be perfect? This question was asked of John Wesley. His answer is in a letter he wrote:

“I think that perfection is only another term for holiness, or the image of God in man. God made man perfect, I think, is just the same as He made him holy, or in His own image. Now, this perfection does certainly admit of degrees. Therefore I readily allow the propriety of that distinction, perfection of kinds and perfection of degrees.”

Or in more modern language, Paul writes in Hebrews 6:1 (NIV) “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity” (instead of perfection)

If we have been called apart by God and given a general sanctification, (1John 2:26) we have also been set apart from the world. (John 17:6) What is more, we are being purified and having God’s character and nature created in us. That is what we call “going on to perfection.” (Forerunner’s Commentary)

Dear Lord, Help each of us travel that path You call us to be on maturing in our Christian walk, becoming more like You every day as we endeavor to go on to perfection. Amen

By *Carolyn Neal*

THE BLOOM AND THE REBIRTH

“Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” John 12:24(NIV)

Each spring, the earth seems to awaken. What once appeared lifeless pushes forth tender green shoots; buds burst open; blossoms fill the air with fragrance and color. The cycle of growth feels like a miracle—a renewal after months of stillness.

But we know the rhythm well. As the warmth fades, those same blossoms wither. The vibrant greens turn gold, then brown. What once thrived falls into the soil, seeming to die. Yet within that death lies the seed of new life. Beneath the frozen surface, unseen but real, the essence of the plant remains alive, waiting for another spring.

This is the story that Lent invites us to dwell within—the rhythm of dying and rising. In Christ, we see that what the world calls “end” is never the end with God. Jesus Himself took on our fragile human life, entered fully into our dying, and transformed it. Out of His death came resurrection—a life that no season, no decay, no darkness can undo.

When we see flowers fade or leaves fall, we are reminded that death is not defeat but transformation. What seems lost in one season is preparing for glory in the next. Lent calls us to participate in that mystery: to surrender what must fade—our pride, our sin, our self-reliance—so that we might bloom again in Christ’s resurrection life.

Prayer: Creator of seasons and Savior of souls, teach me to trust your rhythm of grace—that dying gives way to living, and surrender becomes the soil of resurrection. Let the withering places in me fall away, so that new life in You may take root and flourish. Amen

Lenten Practice: This week, reflect on one area of your life that feels like it’s “in fall”—something fading or being let go. Offer it to God, trusting that from death, He brings new life.

By *Connie Kretchmer*
(Carolyn Neal’s niece)

Saturday, February 28, 2026



JESUS' 40 DAYS IN THE WILDERNESS

Read Luke 4:1-14

Then we learned of Jesus' Ways.
In the wilderness, He spent forty days.

The devil commanded Jesus to turn a stone into bread.
The devil wanted Jesus to be dead.

Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone."
Later Jesus for our sins, He would atone.

The devil showed Jesus all the world in a moment of time.
Jesus said to Himself, "It's already mine."

And of course, there is only one God
That we should serve on this sod.

Then the devil took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple, the Church.
The devil wanted Him to jump, and be left in the lurch!

Then Jesus put all that stuff to a rest,
When He said, "You shall not put the Lord God to a test."

Then the best was yet to be,
Jesus began His Ministry.

---by *Wendellyn Shelquist*

Thursday, March 26, 2026



WHEN THINGS START COLLAPSING

Out in South India a newly organized Church, consisting largely of recently converted Christians, was eagerly looking forward to the first official visit of their Bishop.

As the dignitary arrived, he was escorted to a special chair of honor in the chancel. However, very shortly thereafter the chair collapsed. Whether the mishap was due to the excessive weight of its occupant, or weakness of the chair, there is some uncertainty.

Instead of the excitement and disturbance which one would expect, the congregation remained calm. Not a person moved. Only the Pastor rushed to assistance of the hapless Bishop.

After the Service, the Bishop mildly complained to the Pastor, "Why didn't some of the men rush up to help me?"

Replied the cleric, "They are new Christians, your Grace, and they all thought it was part of the ceremony!"

Does life sometimes seem to be collapsing in our own personal circumstances? In the world around us? There are the ever-present threats of ill health, economic insecurity, bereavement, loneliness, deteriorating moral value in our society, crime, and international armed conflict.

Some of these threats are real, others become exaggerated by our fears. Through it all, let us do the best we can, "each person sweeping in front of his own door, and trusting God for the rest."

"Change and decay in all around I see;

O, Thou who changest not abide with me!"

What I can't do alone, my Church and its members and other friends can help, by God's power, mightily to accomplish.

Submitted by
Rev. Herb Thompson



A PRAYER FOR PEACE

O God our help in ages past,
Our hope in years to be,
Look down upon this troubled world
And see our need of Thee.
For in this age of unrest,
With violence all round,
We need Thy hand to lead us
To higher, safer ground.
Without Thy help and council
We are helpless to restore
Safety and security
In our hearts and homes once more.
And give us strength and courage
To be honorable and true
And to place our trust implicitly
In unseen things and You.
And keep us kind and humble
And fill our hearts with love,
Which in this selfish, greedy world
Man has so Little of.
Forgive us our transgressions
And help us find the way
To a better world for everyone
Where man walks in peace each day.

by *Helen Steiner Rice*
Submitted by An Ashbury Member

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

In Galatians 3 Paul asks if we who have received the Spirit are now turning away from that Spirit. I find that for a lot of Christians, especially those of us in "mainline" traditions, are nervous when talk of "the Spirit" comes up. Yet, Christians talk about the Holy Spirit and "the Spirit of God" often. What does it mean to say we receive the Holy Spirit?

"Receiving the Holy Spirit" or being "overcome" by the Spirit is often portrayed by folks manifesting some type of physical reaction to the arrival of the Holy Spirit. In one congregation I served there was a large charismatic group within the congregation. Once a month they hosted a "healing" service in the evening. On these particular days, we'd have some guest speakers, host special musical guests, and similar types of things each month. One of the things we had to arrange was for some fairly large men who could be there to help "catch" those who would be "slain in the Spirit." Literally, some of the women of the congregation always seemed to fall over when they experienced the Holy Spirit. We had to make sure they were safe and did not harm themselves when they collapsed under the weight of the Spirit. This expression of the Holy Spirit is, I think, an expression of the Holy Spirit which most mainline traditions accept but only at arm's length. We tend to get nervous with so much of the uncontrolled and unknown in that type of situation. Yet, that is not the only experience of the Holy Spirit available to us.

Any number of times, others have shared and I have experienced, a sense of "oneness" in nature. I believe that is an experience of the Holy Spirit. Walking through the redwoods of Big Basin State Park after the fires destroyed many of the giant trees became a humbling and awe-inspiring moment for me. The trees though burnt and damaged by the fire were rebounding. Green branches and leaves were again growing on these trees which were covered in burns! I became overwhelmed with the sense of the Holy Spirit walking those grounds. Life, God's gift to us all, was overcoming destruction and death. New life was coming to the forest! For me, this was an experience of the Holy Spirit being active in our world.

We can experience the Holy Spirit in many ways. Some are physically manifest in expression, and some are manifest in the sense of awe and or humility we have. Either way, the Holy Spirit is being shown to us that we might come to know God more completely. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: God of Hope, renew our sense of Your presence in our everyday. Help us to recognize you in both the dramatic and the small. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

By *Pastor Daniel Diss*



"I will listen for the word of God,
Surely the Lord will proclaim peace
to His people, to the faithful, to those
Who trust in Him." -Psalm 85:9

TRUST HIM

When our troubles overwhelm you
And your nights are far too long
When your heart is filled with sorrow
And everything goes wrong...
Just remember God who loves you,
He's your very special friend:
Ask Him for His help and trust Him;
On His help you can depend.
God is always there beside you;
He will hear your anguished prayers
If you call on Him to help you.
For God loves you and He cares.

By *Delphine LeDoux*
Submitted by An Ashbury Member

GOD NEVER CEASES TO CARE

Matthew 10:29, 31: "Are not two sparrows sold a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father's care. So do not be afraid: you are of more value than many sparrows."

Civilla Durfee Martin wrote two of the world's most popular gospel hymns, "God Will Take Care of You" and "His Eye is on the Sparrow." The first is in our hymnal and begins, "Be not dismayed what-e're be-tide, God will take care of you; Beneath his wings of love a-bide, God will for take care of you." Remember it?

Though not in our hymnal "His Eye is on the Sparrow", is perhaps better known due to the singer Ethel Waters who loved it so much that she made it the title of her autobiography. Mrs. Martin tells that she wrote the lyrics after visiting a couple named Doolittle. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nearly twenty years, and her husband propelled himself to and from his business in a wheel chair. Despite their afflictions they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration to all who knew them. When asked their secret, Mrs. Doolittle replied, "It's simple, His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me."

That very night Civilla wrote the words and the next day sent them to Charles Gabriel who wrote the music

Why should I feel discouraged,
Why should the shadows come.
Why should my heart be lonely
And long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion?
My constant friend is He;
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He cares for me.

The chorus lifts my heart whenever I hear it sung, as I have here at Ashbury:

I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.

Floyd Stradley,
United Methodist Minister,
Retired (2005)



NOT THAT GOD NEEDS TO KNOW

Read Philippians 4:4-9

Truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Psalm 66:19 (RSV)

There is something tremendously refreshing in the musical “Fiddler on the Roof”, which depicts Jewish village life in Russia at the turn of the century. Each time I have seen the movie, I have gained new insights. I remember Tevye, the dairyman, whose five daughters brought him questions about things they could not understand. When Tevye was alone, he would simply talk to God—in the field, on the road peddling milk, or outside his humble home. The way he talked directly to God is a picture of what our prayer can be. He prayed through conversation in a personal certainty of God’s presence right with him.

We, too, can talk to God when we are angry, heartbroken, excited, depressed, lonely, sad, hopeful—at any time, for any reason. God is there. God hears and answers. We can tell God everything, not because our Creator needs to know, but because we need to tell Him. While we ask for help, direction, and strength, we can thank, praise, and honor God for what He is doing and has already done.

PRAYER: O God, when I feel anxious, troubled, or disheartened, help me draw on the courage and strength which only You can give. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
To be real, prayer must be honest.

Raymond M. Veh (Wisconsin)
From *The Upper Room* (1981)



WILDERNESS

Whenever I think about Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days, I didn’t remove his humanity. I mean, I’m human and I cannot fathom going 40 days without food. I don’t even like to go half a day without food. So when I sit and force myself to consider his humanity in the wilderness, I get uncomfortable. How did he do it? Why did he do it? Exactly what was he doing for those 40 days? Did he try to distract himself from the hunger pains? Did he ever pass out from low blood sugar? When I think of him in the wilderness, these are my real questions as a fellow human.

There’s so much we don’t know about Jesus’ life. So many moments untold. I wonder if he shared the details of those 40 days with his friends. Or were they shared between him and his father? What I do know is that he did it. And he ended that time with the strength that allowed him to withstand the most tempting (but false promising) of offerings, and emerge with clarity in his calling. Immediately he began preaching and calling his disciples to follow him.

Thankfully, I’ve never felt God calling me to fast for 40 days. But that’s not to say I haven’t walked through wilderness seasons. I felt the pain of emptiness. I struggled to find energy. I felt isolated and uncomfortable, and aimless. And when I’ve allowed myself to actually live in those places, not forcing a way out or salvaging crumbs or clinging to words no longer there, I have met God in a new way. I’ve been stripped of so many of the things that gave me comfort, validation and affirmation. And I’ve slowly learned to rest in a very simple reality of being His. And finding that to be enough.

Whether you’re actively participating in Lent, or you’re being led into your own wilderness, I pray that you come face-to-face with the most true thing about yourself, you are His.

This was an excerpt from the Lenten devotion, entitled “Embracing Your Need For God”.

By *Sharon McGuire*

HAVE YOU
TALKED
TO GOD
TODAY?



FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:5-8; Isaiah 65:24

Key verse: But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words (Matthew 6:7)

THE SECRET PLACE

Meditation: Lloyd John Ogilvie in his book, "God's Best for My Life," says ... Face the questions honestly. Why do so few people pray in any consistent, rewarding way? Why is there time for everything except profound times of listening to God? Why are the best hours of our days given to other pursuits? Luther prayed three to four hours a day. Could it be that his effectiveness and original thought could be traced back to those hours?

We know the answer. The great saints of all ages received their original thought from times in prayer. Prayer is the only source of authentic originality and creativity. Jesus said that we are to pray in secret. The idea behind this challenge was that people of wealth often had a place where their treasures and valuables were stored. They would go to this room to count their accumulations and to do their private business affairs. This suggests at Jesus wanted people to talk to God in the place where their real security was hidden.

Our inner hearts are our secret place. That's where Jesus wants to meet us. He was not talking about a place but a quality. The "room" of which He spoke is more than a location. It is the dwelling place of real, personal, self-purpose, plans and perspective. The Lord wants to communicate with us there about who we are and where we are going. The reason many prayers are empty and ineffective is that they seldom come from the "secret place". And the reason we avoid prolonged prayer is that we fear opening the door of that inner citadel to God – or even to ourselves.

Thought for the day: I will invite the Lord into the secret place where the real decisions about my life and values are made.

Clarence and Arelis Henrikson (1985)

The fifth chapter of Galatians portrays what life lived with the Holy Spirit leading the way can look like. Paul describes part of the outcome of life lived under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul says the Holy Spirit will produce fruits in us. Paul writes, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires." (Galatians 5:22-23, CEB). In other words, the Spirit will show itself to us when we experience/witness these ways of being.

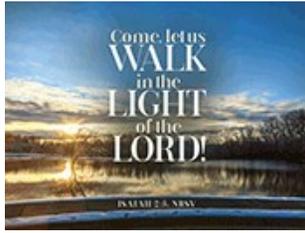
When I lived in Connecticut, I was dating someone, a local – a towny. To summarize the story, when we broke up, I was told, "You're too nice and your friends are too nice." That was the reason for the break-up. While I didn't understand in the moment, I came to understand that what I took for granted, living with people who expressed and wanted to express the "fruits of the Spirit," was that everyone had that experience. For some the experience of the fruit of the Spirit is frightening. We in the Christian community all too often take spiritual fruit for granted. We forget that they are an expression of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and the lives of others. But seeing the Holy Spirit is all too often a challenge.

As we pause and consider how the Holy Spirit works in our lives today, I would ask you to consider this question: Where have I witnessed love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in the week just past? Take time to reflect on where you have seen examples of God's Holy Spirit working in the world around you?

Prayer: Holy God, grow your Holy Spirit in my life that my life might reflect Your presence. Use me to show your love to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss

Saturday, March 21, 2026



RUNNING THE RACE

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

“Let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.” Hebrews 12:102 (TEV)

Our son had to run three kilometers (about two miles) for his final sport examination in high school last year. Two months before the examination he started practicing by running in the fields behind our house. My husband repeatedly reminded me to give our son extra food so he would have the stamina to run.

This turned my thoughts to the word of God. In Philippians 3:13-14 the Apostle Paul talks about reaching the end of the race to receive the prize for which God is calling us.

In order to run, we must feed our minds and souls with the living word of God for strength. We must discipline ourselves and avoid things that could keep us from doing our best. We must train our minds and souls to do what they should do rather than only what they want to do. We do this by constant fellowship with other believers and with God through prayer.

If we set our hearts and minds on the One who can direct our way to the goal, we will press on and reach the goal. Then we will receive the crown of life.

Prayer: God of all power, help us to run our life’s race with patience and win the prize. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Thought for the Day

Running the race of life requires discipline and dependence on God for strength.

Sarojini Martin (West Germany)
From *The Upper Room* (1981)

Wednesday, March 5, 2026



I-80 MIRACLE

My Dad always believed in guardian angels and his served him for 98 - and one-half years here on earth. Returning from the memorial service for our nephew in Salt Lake City, Utah our son Jeremiah, Herb and I experienced our own guardian angels at work.

A few miles west of York, Nebraska, Jeremiah’s car was sideswiped by a semi he was passing. As soon as he safely brought the car to a stop on the passing lane shoulder we realized that all three of us had been protected from harm.

Next we experienced a visit from an angel with a crew cut and wearing a flannel shirt. He came walking up to our car after Jeremiah had driven us to the opposite shoulder of the road so it would be safe to assess the damage. Our angel told us he had already called his “buddy,” the deputy sheriff, and he would be there in 2 minutes, and he was!

Some time later we were led to a Walmart Tire Service Center on the edge of York. The technicians checked out the damaged car and drove it before they pronounced that it would be safe to drive it back to IL. That was truly a miracle! The major damage was to the front passenger door. But it could be opened from the inside. However, it took Jeremiah’s “brute strength” to close it from the outside every time we stopped on the rest of the way home.

Our Lord and Savior taught us that God is always by our side.

AMEN

By Suzanne Thompson



LIFE AFTER DEATH

I recently watched the film "Train Dreams". It's a poignant film about a logger in the Northwest in the early 20th century. The logger has become a hollow, sad man upon the loss of his wife and daughter in a forest fire. He feels hopeless and useless. A wise friend tells him, "In the forest, a dead tree is as important as a living one."

What a profound statement! And it's true. You might wonder why in forest preserves and parks they generally do not remove fallen trees. Dead logs provide nutrients to the soil as they decompose; they serve as shelter for forest critters; they are good environments to host moss and fungus which help clean the air. And, sometimes, they are a handy place to sit as you breathe in and enjoy the scenery.

Are dead people like logs? Your loved ones who have passed nourished you with the lessons they taught you and the love they shared with you. Your memories give you solace and time to reflect on the gifts they gave to your life. They help you grow and move forward as your mind travels back. What a gift!

Jesus, of course, gives us the ultimate example of life after death, but on a much smaller scale, personal grief is also an example of how lives live on.

John 16:20 "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."

By Laura Hays



ON GIVING "THANKS"

The Hebrew word for "give thanks" in the Old Testament is YADAH and it literally means "to acknowledge God in the middle of the mess."

It doesn't mean "feel grateful."
It doesn't mean "wait until things get better."
It means "God, I see you present even in this."

In Jewish worship, *yadah* wasn't used for victory, it was often used in seasons of fear, uncertainty, and waiting. Thanksgiving wasn't a celebration of how well life was going. It was an act of surrender when life didn't make sense. And that truth reframes everything we think about gratitude.

Here are several ways I'm practicing *Yadah* in my own life this week:

- Gratitude isn't something you wait to feel; it's something you choose to practice. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
- Today's pain makes more sense when you remember tomorrow's promise. Romans 8:18
- Complaining is often our heart's way of saying, 'God, I don't trust what You're doing right now'. Philippians 2:14
- If Jesus trusted His Father in the worst moment, I can trust Him in mine. 1 Peter 2:23
- When I think I deserve better, gratitude disappears. But when I remember grace, it returns. Luke 13:2-3
- If you can't lose Christ, then you can't lose your reason to give thanks. Romans 8:35-39

Thanksgiving isn't just about being grateful for what you can see; it's learning to trust God with what you can't see. It's saying "God, I thank You now because You already know what I don't. Biblical thankfulness isn't built on what you have; it's built on the God who holds what you don't understand. And you can trust Him "even in this".

Excerpt from James Bell

Submitted by *Sara Miller*



GOD'S "PHONE" NUMBER

Hello God, I called tonight
to talk a little while
I need a friend who'll listen
to my anxiety and trial.

You see, I can't quite make it
through a day just on my own...
I need Your love to guide me,
so I'll never feel alone.

I want to ask You please to keep
my family safe and sound.
Come and fill their lives with confidence
for whatever fate they're bound.

Give me faith, dear God, to face
each hour throughout the day,
And not to worry over things
I can't change in any way.

I thank You God, for being home
and listening to my call,
For giving me such good advice
when I stumble and fall.. !!!!!

Your number, God, is the only one
that answers every time.
I never get a busy signal,
never had to pay a dime.
So thank You, God, for listening
to my troubles and my sorrow.
Good night, God, I love You, too,
and I'll call again tomorrow!

P.S. Please bless all my friends and family too.

(from the internet)

Lois Eilts



DISCIPLESHIP

Max Lucado has been a wonderful and prolific disciple of the Lord whom I have learned from over the years of his (and my) existence. One of his books, "God's Inspirational Promise Book", was published in 1996, and after years of using it at home and as one of the chaplains of the Chancel Choir, I have worn out my original copy and have replaced it.

Here's a sample entry: "Watch a small boy follow his dad through the snow. He stretches to step where his dad stepped. Not an easy task. His small legs extend as far as they can so his feet can fall in his father's prints.

"The father seeing what his son is doing, smiles and begins taking smaller steps so the son can follow."

It's a picture of discipleship.

In our faith, we follow in someone's steps. A parent, a teacher, a hero—none of us are the first to walk the trail. All of us have someone we follow.

In our faith, we leave footprints to guide others. A child, a friend, a recent convert. None should be left to walk the trail alone.

It's the principle of discipleship.

Psalm 119:105 – "Your word is a lamp to my feet and light for my path."

By Phil Hays

GROWING YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

In Galatians 2, Paul recounts how he traveled to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, Paul confers with the leadership of the Jerusalem Church: James, the brother of Jesus, Cephas (Peter), and John (the Beloved Disciple) about his message and commission from God. Paul was welcomed as their equal. Paul's experience of welcome by the leadership in Jerusalem seals his role as an apostle, particularly to the Gentiles. Paul and those leaders are modeling something important for us: Christian Conferencing.

John Wesley taught us that when brothers and sisters in Christ gather together, we can experience the grace of God through Christian Conferencing. Christian Conferencing is the act of gathering with other Christians for the purpose of learning and growing together. We can experience this expression of conferencing in Bible Study or prayer, choir practice, serving at the food pantry, or even gathering for a meeting. The Holy Spirit shows up in all these places and in all manner of ways that we might come to love, know, and serve God more completely. When we pause to listen with our ears and our heart, we are participating in Christian Conferencing. Christian Conferencing may happen in very informal manners, too. We may experience it over a cup of coffee, a shared meal, or even in a chance encounter on the street. God's grace is not constrained nor is God's Holy Spirit.

As we continue our Lenten journey this coming week, in what ways can you gather with other Christians for fellowship and for growing spiritually? There are Bible Studies at the church building and online for us as well as many opportunities in communities. There are opportunities to work alongside other Christians committed to similar goals like at the food pantry. There are opportunities to share a cup of coffee with a friend. Christian Conferencing is one of the ways God reminds us that we are not alone in our faith journey. God blesses us with each other! This is the great truth of Christian Conferencing: At its best, Christian Conferencing shows us how powerful this expression of God's grace can be. How will you grow your spiritual life in community with others this coming week?

Prayer: Lord, help me to experience Your presence this week when I meet my brothers and sisters on the street. Help me to greet each one I meet as if they are You meeting me. In Jesus' precious and holy name, Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss



INCREASE OUR FAITH

Lord Jesus,
increase our faith

We tend to rely too much on our own calculations,
on our own common sense and on our negative attitudes.
Turn us around and shake us out of our skepticism
so that we may realize what a treasure You have to share with us,
. . . if only we have the openness to believe in You.
Help us to grow in the faith we need to get in touch with
the energy and power of Your love.
Help us then to use that energy and power
as we each do our part to build up
The Kingdom of God.
Amen.

From "The Patrician"(1995)
Submitted by an Asbury Member

Dan Forrest, the composer of The Work of Christmas, text by Howard Thurman, which the choir sang the last Sunday of December also composed a song that the choir has also sung several times.

LET ME LISTEN

We come from different places,
You and I,
On different paths we journey;
let me walk beside you for a while –
Let me listen.

So briefly do our lonely paths converge,
Yours and mine,
along this human journey;
what hollow loss to never hear your song –
let me listen.

*Let me listen,
let me listen as you tell your story:
Your triumphs and your tears,
Your trials and your fears.
Your story never has been mine to tell –
so let me listen.*

And if a silence is your choice to keep,
then I will keep it with you;
as long as we walk together,
You and I,
I will listen.

Too long you've waited too long,
to share your journey, your song –
so let me listen.

Charles Anthony Silvestri, 2022

Music has been a part of my life from a young age. Where people memorize scripture or poetry, I remember music and lyrics. The first time I sang this song I cried. I cried for others as I could envision the many suppressed/oppressed groups: Women, Youth, Children, Native Americans, Blacks, Immigrants, Jews, Muslims, Hispanics, LGBTQ... So many groups with things to say but do we give them the space, opportunity, chance - to just sit with us and share their stories?

DO WE LISTEN?

James 1:19-20

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." NIV

By *Ellen Liehr*, 2025



"GO FORWARD"

Rest in me, quiet in My Love, strong in My Power. Think what it is to possess a Power greater than any earthly force. A sway greater, and more far-reaching, than that of any earthly king.

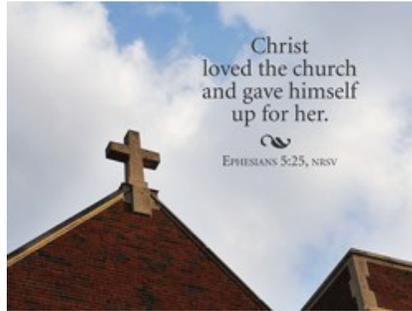
No invention, no electricity, no magnetism, no gold could achieve one millionth part of all that you can achieve by the Power of My Spirit. Just think for one moment all that means.

Go forward. You are only beginning the New Life together. "JOY, JOY, JOY!!"

(this excerpt from GOD CALLING, By A.J. Russel) is one of many that helps me walk with the Holy Spirit and indeed, I am never ever alone. Amen)

Submitted by *Judy Reiniche*

LOVE THAT CHANGES US



“Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down.”

Lent is a season when we slow down enough to notice what is really shaping us. We take an honest look at our habits, our reactions, and the ways we love. In the Wesleyan tradition, this kind of self-examination is not meant to discourage us. It is part of sanctification: the lifelong work of God’s grace, slowly shaping us to love more like Christ.

Charles Wesley’s hymn “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” reminds us that God’s love does not stay distant. We sing, “Fix in us thy humble dwelling,” because God’s transforming work happens in ordinary lives, right where we are. Sanctification is not about becoming flawless. It is about becoming more attentive, more honest, and more open to change.

During Lent, we practice letting go. We may fast from certain foods, habits, or distractions—not to prove our devotion, but to make space for God. These practices help reveal what we cling to for comfort or control. John Wesley believed that God uses such practices to reorder our loves, helping us grow in patience, humility, and compassion.

When we pray, “Finish, then, thy new creation,” we are trusting that God is not finished with us yet. God’s grace is still at work healing, correcting, and drawing us closer to holy hearts.

Lent reminds us that love is not static. God’s love keeps moving, inviting us to grow. As United Methodists, we trust that sanctifying grace will continue its work, shaping us day by day into people who love God and neighbor more fully.

Reflection Question:

What is one habit, attitude, or attachment God may be inviting you to release this Lent so that love can grow in you?

By *Cherish Nelson*



TEMPTATION

The wilderness.
Desolate,
Stony,
Hot.

Jesus spent forty days and nights there
Battling Hunger,
Thirst,
The devil himself.

Stones into bread?
All earthly power?
At what price?

I have seen the Judean wilderness,
Lonely,
Barren,
Cruel.
Jesus must have been sorely tempted.

I thirst for You. Jesus,
As You thirsted
For water
In the desert.

Be my bread of life
That I, too, can rebuke the devil
In my own wilderness
On my own lonely Mount of Temptation.

By *Carolyn Neal*

RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

In the second half of Galatians 2 Paul makes his case that it is not "doing something" that puts us in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The faithfulness of Jesus Christ and the faithfulness of God is what puts us in right relationship with God. Our part in this is trusting the message, the promise, that God bridges the gap between us and God in Jesus. Our response to God's movement toward us is to trust God in Jesus Christ. Our response is gratitude and humility. Our response is joy and celebration. God has done what we could not – bridge the gap between humanity and God.

But why do we need a bridge in the first place? The classic answer is "sin" and humanity's sinful nature. The gap which exists between humans and the divine is in our ability to love.

To be made in the image of God means to me that we are made with the same capacities as God, not that we look like God. Rather, just as God has a creative ability so do we; just as God is compassionate to those who suffer, so can we be; God is love and we can love. God is perfect love made known in Jesus. We live our lives growing ever more completely in our ability to love God, others, and self perfectly. Yet, we know we don't always love others perfectly. This is why God's love moves toward us to fill in the gap. While we grow into loving more completely, God's intervenes in perfect love on our behalf.

Lent is a time to grow more fully in our ability to love. Yet it is also a time when we learn how much God's love has filled in the gaps for us when our ability to love falls short. Doing things, like making sacrifices or keeping particular dietary rules is not the path to salvation. Rather the path of salvation is one on which God meets us and walks beside us. When we get lost or come to an abyss we cannot cross, God makes the way forward possible. Growing in our ability to love also means growing in our knowledge and acknowledgment that it is God, not we, who do the work of salvation. How will you grow your love of God, others, and self today?

Prayer: O God, help me to love where others won't or can't. Help me to know when and where loving is a challenge for me. Grow me in love, O God. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

By Pastor Daniel Diss



THE PLACE OF THE CROSS

Mark 10:32-34, tells of the last journey Jesus made to Jerusalem and His saying to His disciples that the Son of Man will be betrayed and condemned to death, but three days later He will rise. Earlier when Jesus had told of these things (Matthew 16:24) He concluded saying, "If any want to become my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Let us think about the place of the cross in life. There's an old anecdote that bears repeating. It's the story of a children's choir that processed into the sanctuary each Sunday singing "Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." Well, the boys and girls thought it would be nice to carry a cross and so that week they worked to make an old rugged cross out of a couple of tree limbs.

Came that Sunday they line up in the narthex waiting their turn when the pastor walked by, saw them with that old cross and when informed of their plans said, "No, no, don't do that." They watched as the pastor took the cross and learned it against the wall. The processional began, the service started but the children were not to be outfoxed. Marching two by two down the aisle they lifted their voices proclaiming, "Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus out behind the door!"

That morning, they sang a better sermon than the pastor would preach for Jesus did not ask of others what He would not ask of Himself. So for more than twenty centuries His cross has preceded all who would deny themselves, taking up their crosses to follow. Prayer: Father, we give our thanks for the model of self-sacrifice which You have given in Jesus. Believing that Your Holy Spirit gives us grace to follow Christ's example, may we see His cross as guiding us in all we think, say and do. Amen.

By Floyd Stradley

United Methodist Minister, Retired, (2006)

Thursday, March 12, 2026

MORNING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

As I start this day,
help me focus my mind and spirit on you;
make me go about as if I am wearing a pair of
glasses, so that I can see everything through you;
help me choose you;
help me be your witness in the world.
Make me witness for you, Christ, in every moment.
in times of joy when my friends find some new
moments of maturity, help me to remember the
foundation of mature actions.
In moments of agony and pain of loss or setback,
guide me to you for security and support.
In heart-to-heart dialogue, remind me to enrich my
conversation with the cement of your love.
In decision and resolution, enable me to be your
witness to the foundation of all deciding.
When authority is being tested and people are
challenging or setting the course of history,
direct me to be your witness and share the
authority of eternity.
When people are claiming pride in their ancestors,
enable me to remember the roots of my heritage,
the God of Abraham and Jacob.
In moments of pride, make me not be prideful of
my accomplishments, but witness to the
accomplishments made by you, through me.
Day by day, minute by minute, opportunity by
opportunity, give me the strength and presence
of mind to witness. Amen.

“Walk to Emmaus”
The Upper Room

Friday, March 13, 2026

WITH GOD'S HELP

The Apostle Paul said “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13. We must also keep in mind the kind of “things” Paul wanted to do!

Can we “do all things through him”? Have you heard how the Roman Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, started her first orphanage in Calcutta, India?

She began as an ordinary sister in a convent with an extraordinary dream. She shared her heart’s ambition with her superior.

“Well, how much money do you have?” asked the Mother Superior.

I have two pennies!” replied Sister Teresa.

“Oh, you cannot start an orphanage with just two pennies,” said the Mother Superior.

“No, but with two pennies and God I can start an orphanage,” replied Sister Teresa. And she did!

What is Jesus Christ calling you to do? As individual Christians, and as United Methodists at Asbury, we “can do all things through Him.”

Pastor David Babb
(1992)

Saturday, March 14, 2026

TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED

Do you understand how valuable you are? Cherished, loved without limits, wanted at this moment.

You may feel abandoned, or forsaken, or betrayed, but feelings are not trustworthy and can change at the drop of a hat. Now is the time to over-rule your heart with your head. Read the scripture below. See how intimately your God knows and adores you? You’ve gotta love that! He’s still with you even though He knows you better than anyone in the entire world: Inside out, failures and successes. He will never leave you. He’s absolutely dedicated to you!

Psalm 139:15,17-18. “You watched as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb...How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!”

Taken from: “Too Blessed to be Stressed” by Debora M. Coty.

Submitted by Shelly Dankel