



# Daily Walks

A Devotion Book For Lent

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Lent 2009

Each year, in the middle of winter, this congregation rolls up its sleeves and digs deep into the gardens of spiritual growth. Using every tool available, members search for evidence of God in their lives. When they find it, they examine it closely, they turn over in their hands and minds, they pray over it, and finally, they put it on paper for you. The result is a spiritual growth experience for the writer. It is also a gift of hope for you, the reader.

This Lenten Devotional Book bears the marks of God's truth. It contains real and lived out evidence of God's pres-ence among us. These pages contain sage advice, quick wit, ancient truths, modern examples, family stories, workplace facts and garden practicality. They are the sights, smells and presence of God. These sensations are as wide and varying and as pointedly clear as anyplace else on God's earth. Fortunately for us, we find these experiences of God not just anywhere, but here in the people of the Auburn United Methodist Church.

May you find solace and sanctity in your daily walks with God in this season; and may you experience joy and God's glory in the grand experiences of all these saints.

Blessings,

Fred Richart

pastor

BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

*"When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets."*  
Matthew 6:2

Several years ago my husband lost his job and until he was employed many months later times were pretty rough around our house. He got a new job in May so by the time Christmas rolled around things were much better. Of course, I went all out with gifts for my family and friends. But, looking back I scarcely remember what I even bought.

I do remember exactly what we bought for the Toys for Tots box at my husband's new job. I also remember hearing about a small boy in our community that didn't even have the basic things that he needed. I remember buying shoes, socks and underwear for him and dropping them off on his porch without telling anyone where they came from.

These are the things I remember most about that bounteous Christmas season. I never got to see the look on their faces or got a thank you, but I will never forget the "giving in private". It is easy to miss the opportunities to give in private, but I do try to look for them. Those times are the most special and memorable in our lives.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to always see those in need and to give generously.

**Thought for Today:** God wants us to give to the needy.

**Prayer Focus:** Children who have to do without what they need.

## TEACH US TO PRAY

In this scripture Jesus is teaching us to pray. God loves to hear your prayers. Even if it's just a quick prayer every so often God is there to listen. The disciples wanted to learn to pray like John the Baptist's disciples. Jesus' response to the disciples was the Lord's Prayer.

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.. (vss. 9-10)*

Those are very powerful words. God wants you to know his kingdom is always open to you. You just need to do those three simple requests that I mentioned above. You can ask and talk with the Lord and you will receive what you need. Be open and watch out for everything because you will find hope or whatever you are looking for.

Praying can bring wonderful gifts. I believe Jesus gave us a wonderful gift in prayer. Luke 11:9-10 talks about how you can knock, seek, and ask. Jesus wants us to be open to him. One way is through prayer. God will always answer your prayers.

**Prayer:** Dear God, I am glad you taught us to pray, helping us learn to "ask". Amen.

**Thought for Today:** God is always ready to hear your prayers.

**Prayer Focus:** Those who have trouble finding God in their life and need help in prayer.

## JESUS CALMS THE STORM

I had a friend who constantly worried about what might happen. She worried about how she would have time to get everything done, her children and everything they needed to do, her husband and everything he needed to do, work and everything she needed to do there, the weather, the economy, the wars, global warming, politics and on and on and on.... It was exhausting just listening to her. She was so worried about what was coming around the corner that she didn't see what was right in front of her. I seldom heard her say a word of appreciation for what her friends or family had accomplished or take time to notice the beauty in the world around her.

She had a really nice family and home, and a comfortable living, but she was always rushed and tired and hurting. I tried to point out the good things in her life and she replied with "yes, but...." and was off naming everything that didn't get done or wasn't exactly right.

Several years ago I heard a sermon about worry. The minister said it was wrong and pointless to worry. God has promised he would provide. He has a plan and the future will take care of itself. It's pointless to worry if there is absolutely nothing you can do about the situation. You can't control others and you can't control the weather so why worry. If it is something you can do something about, do what you can and then put your worries away. You've done your best. Let God handle the rest.

**Prayer:** Please help those who struggle to trust in you to put their faith in you first and ask for your help with their problems. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Put your worries in God's hands.

**Prayer Focus:** Let God handle the worries.

WORRY OVER TOMORROW

I tend to worry about things too much. I worry not about clothes, food, or shelter, but about things like when do I have to take care of or help my parents more, how do I deal with my sister's problems, do I have enough money saved for my kids' college?

In Matthew's scripture the verse that helped me the most is verse 27, "*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*" It will do me no good to worry whatever happens, it's in the Lord's hands. One of my favorite no worry songs is entitled I Know Who Holds Tomorrow. One of the verses says,

*I don't worry o'er the future for I know what Jesus said and today I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead. Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.*

Verse 34 sums it all up: *therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

So I will think positive and let God take care of it all. My parents will let me know when they need more help, my sister will live the way she wants, and my kids are smart so hopefully there will be some scholarships.

**Prayer:** Dear God, no matter what life throws at me I know the one who feeds the sparrow is the one who stands by me. Thank you for helping me not to worry, and being there to hold my hand.

**Thought for Today:** Let us seek first the kingdom of God and our worries will be turned over to Him.

**Prayer Focus:** The worriers.

**Sunday, March 1**

**Mark 1:9-15**

## BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

...*“You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*

Mark 9:11

These words came from the heavens as Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Usually, after a baptism, a celebration is in order. In the case of Jesus, it was the complete opposite. After the heavens were torn open, Jesus was sent to the desert for a total of 40 days where he was tempted by Satan.

My baptism, and probably everyone else's baptisms, didn't go this way (exactly). The majority of us most likely had a family gathering after this religious testament. In some ways, however, our baptism is somewhat like Jesus' in a much more mild fashion. Baptism isn't a .free ticket. to eternal life. Problems will still occur whether we have been blessed with holy water or not. It is the way we solve those problems that proves whether we truly are committed to serving the Lord and to eternal life.

After Jesus' baptism, John was sent to prison. Jesus travelled to Galilee to proclaim the good news of God. Jesus proclaimed that the “Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” The term “Kingdom of God” is used as a big theme in the book of Mark. Many people thought Jesus would begin a political kingdom that could rule the earth. The Bible, however, describes this kingdom in spiritual, not political, ways. In one example, due to Jesus, the kingdom is already here. In another it isn't .all. here. These ideas are similar to many life events. Birthdays are one. You have already had some of them. But you still have ones to look forward to in the future. The kingdom of God has had a few birthdays, but nowhere near all of them.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to become closer to you through our problems, birthdays and events ahead. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** What can we, as Christians, do to help solve problems and look forward to life ahead of us.

**Prayer Focus:** Those recently baptized.

Brent Comstock

**Monday, March 2**

**Matthew 5:13-16**

## SALT AND LIGHT

Recently I had a conversation with a friend about being surrounded by negativity. We all know what it is like to start a new day with a happy attitude, and then come in contact with a grump. How quickly the mood can change! But by having a grateful heart and a positive outlook, we can help change the mood of the negative we have come in contact with.

Anyone who cooks knows that if there is no seasoning in our dish, it really doesn't have any flavor. In people, if we don't have Christ in our lives and live with love in our hearts, we become worthless to God. Our purpose is to .season. the world with our examples of God's constant love. We shouldn't become that negative Nellie. by adapting to our surroundings, but should shine with positive energy that becomes contagious to others. One of my favorite children's songs from Sunday school is .This little light of mine... If we allow ourselves to be pulled into being quiet when we should speak, or ignoring the needs of others, we are letting our little light be covered by a bushel basket!

Each and every day I roll out of bed, I begin the day with gratitude for the blessings in my life. My goal is to carry my attitude of gratitude out into my day and to share a smile or a simple act of kindness with the people I come in contact with. My prayer is that through me, someone else will have a blessed day and know that God's constant love and forgiveness is there for all of us.

**Prayer:** Gracious father. Use me today to bring positive energy and .season. the lives of the people I come in contact with today. Let me light your world with a smile or kind words to someone who is in need. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Start your day with a grateful heart.

**Prayer Focus:** May someone have a blessing from me today.

Debbie Borgan

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

*But some of the seeds fell into good soil and yielded thirty times as much as he had planted.* Mark 4:9

I would like to dedicate this devotional to my beloved husband, Pat, who died one year ago today. Little did I dream when I wrote last year's devotional article for March 4th, that he would be buried on March 7th.

As one of his grandsons said "He was always a no-nonsense, no-toxins, no-vice kinda' guy --pretty admirable". He was truly dedicated to his church, family and community. As an example, he was a 50 year member of Rotary with hopes of making it to 50 years of perfect weekly attendance, but was short of that by a few months. He lived life to the fullest and was an example to his family, whom he loved dearly. He was a man of deep faith and he lived it.

I use this example of Pat as a person who reaped a good life from the "seeds" that were sown by his principles and ideals of being a good man of God.

I would like to reiterate what I wrote last year: "I would like to take this opportunity to THANK all my family and friends for the prayers and support you have given me. Without them, it would be even more difficult. Just knowing that the prayers and support are "out there", is more comforting than I can tell you. This has also helped me empathize with others who have gone through, or are going through, 'testings' and I pray for you also. So bless all of you for caring. "

**Prayer:** Gracious God, I thank you for Pat's life with me. Please continue to grant me strength that can come only from You, and help me to count my many blessings.

**Thought for Today:** I praise God for Faith, Family and Friends!

**Prayer Focus:** Families with serious health issues in their lives and families who have lost loved ones.

## PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

In the parable of the weeds an enemy came and sowed weeds where the farmer had planted his crops. If the weeds had been pulled too early it would have destroyed the wheat. So the workers were told to leave the weeds grow until harvest time when they would pull the weeds and burn them prior to harvesting the wheat.

I have always enjoyed nature and being a part of it has been a part of happy times as well as sad ones. Most of my gardening experiences have been growing small vegetable and flowers and in so doing the weeds have always been the enemy. Getting them out of the garden and the flower beds is a hot, aching back chore. And as in the parable some of the crops were sacrificed to get rid of the pesky weeds.

When experiencing the painful loss of a family member I found the weeds in my garden to be of great value. The very exercise of kneeling and pulling weeds, feeling the sunshine, and nature around me became a daily meditation. My gardens and my emotional state both improved over time.

**Prayer:** Kind and loving Father, thank you for all of our blessings, the ones we are aware of as blessings and those that become blessing as they are needed. Be with those who mourn, comfort them each in your unique and loving ways. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Look for gardens and sun.

**Prayer Focus:** Those who mourn.

Thursday, March 5

Mark 10:13-16

## JESUS AND CHILDREN

Receive the Kingdom of God like a child! That would be with 1) blind faith, 2) wonderment, 3) joy, 4) curiosity and 5) humbleness. It would be without 1) doubt, 2) worry, 3) fear and 4) suspicion.

One of the first Bible verses I learned as a small child in St. Matthew's church in Johnson was, "*Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not—for of such is the Kingdom of heaven*" (vs. 14). There was a large picture on the wall of that small Sun-day school room, depicting this verse. It was Jesus surrounded by children. We had a folder to take home with us with this picture on the front of it, the story inside was about the disciples wanting to keep the children away from Jesus because they wanted him to be talking to more important people. I loved the way that story ended with Jesus gathering the children at his knees on his lap as he laughed with them and blessed them.

Maybe we should envision that picture with faces of children we know or imaging our faces in the crowd of children, with wonder, faith and love on our faces and in our hearts as we put ourselves in the picture with Jesus. He gave so much joy to those children that day and shortly after that he gave his life that we might have eternal life. Let us put ourselves in the picture with Jesus as we go through this Lenten season on our way to a glorious Easter Sunday.

**Prayer:** Dear God, open our hearts to receive your blessings as a child would. Free us from doubt, fear, and worry and replace it with a peace that fills our hearts. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Imagine ourselves in the picture with Jesus gathering us to himself.

**Prayer Focus:** Receiving God's love as a child.

Helen Casey

GLORIOUS GIFTS  
PARABLE OF TALENTS

I remember as a child waking up on Christmas morning full of excitement waiting to see what gifts I had in store. I would play with the toys, could hardly wait until someone would play my new game with me, or ride my new bike. I believe God is the same way with us. When are we going to use the gifts he gave to us? I can't remember a time when I sat on a gift and didn't use it. How can I do that to a gift that God has given me?

I would like to think that music is a gift that God has given me to use for His kingdom. We are called to bring God's light to people and Glory to him. I sat on that gift for many years because I had embarrassed myself by not playing up to my potential at a friend's wedding. So the horn sat in its case. It wasn't until we came to church here at Auburn that I was encouraged to break it out of the case and play again. God works through others and through their encouragement I found the joy of playing music again and using those gifts for God and his glory not my own. My trumpet has not been in the case for very long at a time since.

Get out there and use your gifts and may your joy and the joy brought to others be increased ten fold.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, help us to know what our gifts are and to use them to better your kingdom and bring that special joy that only you can bring to those around us. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Don't sit on your gifts..... use them!

**Prayer Focus:** Our church musicians.

**Saturday, March 7**

**Luke 12:13-21**

### THE RICH MAN'S BARN

I learn, then forget, then re-learn several valuable lessons every so-often. One of the best is the bottom line of this verse: *Our life does not consist of the sum of our possessions* (vs. 15). I admit it, I'm a pack -rat; can't get rid of things even when they go unused for 5 years. Yes, Sherry finally made me get rid of the bell-bottom pants.

About a year ago, on yet another mission trip, this lesson was vivid. Along with a group from Oklahoma, we ventured into Communist Cuba for a couple weeks. We drove from Havana all the way to the other end of the island for 12 -14 hours, in a mostly agricultural country. The farther from the city, the less .stuff.. Around our destination of Pilon, there were oxen plowing the fields, no tractors, hardly any cars, and lots of horses and mules on the road. The church had about 120 people, yet no parking lot: no need, because no one had a car, only one donkey cart.

The pastor's home where we stayed was very empty by our standards, they had no mirror in the whole place. And not much food. They told us that everyone has ration cards and every month gets 30-days of food from the government – that lasts about 15 days. How do they feed a dozen visitors like us, I asked, visitor ration cards maybe?? Well, no, they have to save from their meager allotment, mostly beans, rice, bread [all starches] for us. Don't forget that we in the US have the embargo and many would consider Cuba an enemy. Yet this congregation with literally nothing, gave us strangers their donkey cart when we needed it, and about half their food. It was a humbling lesson to see these poor people being so generous to the rich North Americans.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to love people more than stuff. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** The world is a very confusing place; simplify your life as much as possible.

**Prayer Focus:** Volunteers in Missions.

Tom Black

JESUS SPEAKS OF SUFFERING

*And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, ...*

Mark 8:31

I went to school, Kindergarten through 12th, with a bully, as many of you have. Her name was Sue and she was one of the meanest people I've ever encountered. I can remember a couple of incidents when I was the target of her bullying – times when she tried to embarrass me in front of others, or just tried to make my life miserable in general.

My parents made quite an impression on me to treat others kindly – so I did my best to ignore her, even though I was hurting on the inside. At our 5 year class reunion, my friend and I found ourselves talking to a nice man we didn't know – later, Sue found us and said her husband had talked with us and told her about us two women who were so nice to him... Yes, she apologized for those years of torment, and we found out she'd suffered years of abuse in her home. She seems a changed woman – with her husband's help and God's.

Jesus relied on God and His plan; what a good example for us!

**Prayer:** Dear God, Please help us through our suffering, and remind us to pray for others who suffer, also. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Think of others.

**Prayer Focus:** Victims of bullying.

PARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

This passage teaches us that our Lord includes everyone that truly asks to be forgiven. Those that we have shied away from are treated and received the same by our Lord. We each have had an instance when we shied away from someone we felt were too busy or not qualified to be involved. Our God put all of us here together for a reason. We can figure it out.

Everyone is to be respected and is granted equality. People are not disposable nor are we to abandon others because we Didn't like decisions they made (those decisions we consider mistakes).

Our challenge is to bring out the best in each other, accepting some flaws and each bending to make it work. This is hard WORK since it is about feelings and respect within the relationship, not about business and jobs.

**Prayer:** Lord, give us each your strength to know what we each need or can change so that strong, graceful, faith filled, and everlasting relationships can be formed. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Can we accept people for who they are at the moment? Can we not judge others because of their differences?

**Prayer Focus:** Pray for the gift of respecting others.

## JESUS AND THE OUTCASTS

*Jesus said...“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

Matthew 9:13

Sinners, outcasts, underdogs, un-cool, the unwanted, wall-flowers, those who don't fit in. Jesus spent time with all of them. No matter what label is applied, it still means those who are left out.

Trying to fit in can be a difficult thing at any age. The loneliest place in the world can be the middle of a crowd if you feel isolated. There are times when, even after 12 years, walking into the library at church can still be intimidating for me. I have a soft spot for people who are left out. Having moved so many times and being shy has taught me to watch out for others. I won't let my kids leave anyone out, and I try hard not to do it to anyone. In my experience the grateful smile I get for including people in conversation or a group or making sure they are taken care of makes the extra effort worthwhile. It is not always easy, and sometimes it's uncomfortable, but my heart hurts for a person who doesn't feel loved. Being friendly is loving someone, and we are called to love everyone. I guess if Jesus could do it, I can try, too.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to reach out to those around us. Help us to see those in the crowd who feel like outcasts. Help us to show your love by including them in our lives. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** What can I do to help someone feel included?

**Prayer Focus:** The "outcasts" in our town.

LOVE OF ENEMIES

*Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* Matthew 5:44 (NRSV)

Clashes of viewpoint or not seeing a situation or problem in the same way is probably the closest I've come to encountering the 'enemy'. I do not believe I've experienced firsthand an enemy that wanted to cause me harm, injury or death. (I pray that I am spared these experiences.)

I believe Jesus includes all types of 'enemies' in his words to us in how to deal with the conflicts we encounter. I know for myself the human emotions I experience in conflict situations fall short too many times of Jesus' advice to love. My "me" gets in the way.

Poor 'me' I'm the good guy. I'm right and they must have it all wrong, I'll dig in my heels and not learn from this situation or help solve a problem..

God is good! With time and Jesus' examples He shows me that perhaps my perspective of the 'wrong or right' may have different viewpoints to consider. That perhaps we all have new life lessons to learn on how to treat each other with respect and act in the best interest of everyone (not just me). Maybe loving your enemy is learning to trust that even if someone has a different viewpoint that together we can find a better way to do something that will benefit all.

**Prayer:** Dear God, enemies come in different degrees.

Strengthen our love for those we bump into along life's path that may view your world in a different light. Protect us from enemies that seek to cause harm, injury and death to others. May your empowering love embrace all enemies so that their hearts turn to you to seek to do good. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** "When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you." -African Proverb

**Prayer Focus:** Enemies' Hearts

## LOVING THE LEAST

There are people that "irritate me" (like some drivers). There are people that "get under my skin" (like ones who litter). There are people who don't agree with me, or me with them. And don't deny that you have had the same feelings! We all do at times. And, I feel that's understandable sometimes, EXCEPT that we need to work on having more loving thoughts at all times especially toward those who "upset us". Replace unloving thoughts with a prayer—for the other person and yourself. And you know, Jesus had the same problem, BUT what did he say? He loved them unconditionally and prayed for them!!!

I'm sitting here looking at my clock on the wall as the second hand ticks by—thinking THAT second has gone by and I'll never experience it again. Why waste our "seconds", having unloving thought about anyone? Love one another, and maybe the unlovable the most...It isn't always easy.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, forgive my unloving thoughts of anyone. Please "nudge me" to remind me to say a prayer to replace these thoughts. Amen.

**Thought of Today:** Let every day be one with kind thoughts and words, with God's help.

**Prayer Focus:** For those who "irritate me" and "get under my skin" and disagree with me. :)

Jeannine Crotty

CASTING STONES

*As they stood there asking questions, he straightened up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her."*

John 8:7

When I think about "casting stones," I also think about "judgment of others" (Matt. 7:1-6). We are all guilty of doing both, some of us every day.

I find myself doing it a lot. Judging and casting my "stones" before meeting certain people, and once I do meet them I continue to "cast" or toss my stones, before I look at myself and ask, "who am I without sin?"

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I ask that you help me to be more like you and to try and not cast so many stones. I ask this in your name, Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Which of us is without sin?

**Prayer Focus:** Jesus' forgiveness of me.

## JUDGING OTHERS

*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged."*

Matt. 7:1

The last six years my husband has been a correctional officer at Tecumseh State Prison. It is a maximum security prison holding drug dealers, murderers, rapists, thieves, and child molesters; truly "bad guys" in our society.

Occasionally my husband will tell me about an incident involving one of the inmates and my first reaction has been to ask, "what did that guy do to end up in prison?" He has told me this: "It doesn't matter what the inmate has done, he has already been judged and my job is to keep the inmates and the public safe. It is not my job to punish the man any further, he is being punished in prison."

I pray that I can also learn not to judge when I don't know what path in life or misfortune has brought my fellow human beings to be in the circumstances that they may be in.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, help us to look at others as your beloved children. Teach us not to judge others, because only YOU have that right. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Everyone is a Child of God.

**Prayer Focus:** Those in prison and the correctional officers.

**Sunday, March 15**

**John 2:13-22**

## JESUS CLEANSSES TEMPLE

In this passage it is time for Passover and Jesus went to the temple. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and money exchangers with tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove out all of them and poured out the coins of the money exchangers and overturned the tables. Jesus told them to take these things out of here and stop making my Father's house a marketplace. "Zeal for your house will consume me," he said. So the Jews asked him, "What sign of authority can you show us for doing this?" Jesus tells them that he can destroy the temple and in three days raise it up. They respond with the fact that the temple had been under construction for 46 years. Jesus was speaking of the temple as his body and the fact that he would be raised after three days.

It is sad but true that sometimes churches, ministers, and church members get focused on their own benefits instead of what will benefit God. Are there areas in your life that need cleaned out? If so, go to the Lord and repent before he brings out his whip of cords. Instead of making the temple a place of prayer the people saw it as a house of merchandise. They could've sold things outside the temple. Sometimes we put a price tag on things that shouldn't have one. The important thing is to have zeal for God's house. Church is to worship God, learn from His work, and be empowered to reach out to others and spread the good news.

Let us learn to walk by faith, not by sight. Let Christ cleanse you this Lenten season.

**Prayer:** Dear Christ, remove those things which keep me from you. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Don't bring too many things that don't belong into God's house.

**Prayer Focus:** Things that need to be cleaned out of my life.

Mary Comstock

PRODIGAL SON

*“Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.”*

Luke 15:23

My sister has often referred to my visits back to Alabama as the “Prodigal Son coming home”. Sometimes in the past, I would be embarrassed when she said this. Where as in the scriptures, the Prodigal Son went about a lifestyle of sin and waste, my journey was a necessary venture to obtain a career and provide for my family. I felt sometimes that due to the attention I would get from our parents, my sister was acting jealous like the older son.

It is quite common for my family to get together and have a cook-out, or dine out together when I visit. It is how we celebrate all of us being together. As my sister and I grew older and had children of our own, we came to understand the attention that I received on my visits, and why my parents wanted to .kill the fattened calf. to celebrate my return. It was simply to show how much they loved me and missed me while I was gone.

Now that my children have grown up and moved away, I also miss them dearly. We talk on the phone regularly, but it is not as satisfying as “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours”. (Luke 31b).

Many families are separated by distance. Being either a parent, or a child, from far away challenges all of us. Maintaining that contact with each other, and relying on God to keep us together, will be the key to not becoming .lost. with each other.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, protect our family and keep us together no matter how far a distance we may have to live from each other. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** What are the needs of my family?

**Prayer Focus:** Families separated by distance.

## JESUS ATTENDS WEDDING

I love weddings. I love getting dressed up and the ceremony is always a favorite. I've never been to a wedding right after being in the wilderness for forty days. Jesus had just re-turned from the forty day trip where Satan offered all sorts of temptation. I would imagine he would be pretty exhausted.

The wedding symbolizes a celebration. In a way, Jesus could be celebrating the fact that he surpassed Satan by not doing the things he wanted Jesus to do. Later in Jesus' ministry he performs many miracles, but the wedding is Jesus' first miracle. A wedding is a festive and joyous occasion. Thus, Jesus' miracle was like ministering to human joy; he made people happy.

What did he do, you ask? Jesus' mother tells him that they have no more wine. Jesus then asks her, "why involve me?" Although Jesus may have thought it might not be his time to perform miracles, he would do it for her. Mary tells the servants to do whatever he tells you. He turns water into wine. This first miracle gave the disciples the faith they needed to believe in him. How many miracles have you seen?

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for all the miracles you've given me that bring me joy. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** If Jesus could turn water into wine, imagine what he could do with your heart.

**Prayer Focus:** Blessed are those who believe without seeing a miracle.

...HEM OF HIS GARMENT

As I read these verses, I felt for Jarius and the woman. I even spent time thinking about the crowd. They would gather where Jesus was because of curiosity. Jesus knew the hearts of Jarius and the woman, but wanted them to come forward to show the curious that His deeds were not magic, but that all who seek Him will receive.

As a parent, I couldn't help but know the desperate fear Jarius had for his sick daughter. All of us have had times when our children have been ill or hurt and we fear the unknown. I get myself so worked up with worry I lose my belief in medical teams and humankind. My personal experience has been once I quit worrying about the "what ifs" and turn to God to take control, I finally receive answers I can cope with and trust in others again.

The woman who reached out and touched Jesus' hem reached out in faith. She knew she wasn't worthy to even be there, let alone close enough to touch Him. But again being desperate, she did what others feared. Jesus knew who did it - but wanted her to come forward. It doesn't matter who you are, or what your issues are, Jesus knows our hearts. Through prayer, I need to bring my desperation and troubles to Him. He always hears our prayers, but no matter what is troubling us, if we take it to God, we find faith and trust again.

Many of us are like the crowd. We are curious and know of Jesus, but do we really have the relationship with Him? Do we reach out? Do we insist He come be present in our lives? Do we allow Him to heal our broken lives?

**Prayer:** Dear gracious and loving Father, thank you for loving each of us, no matter what our situations are. We pray for a relationship with you, not just a curiosity. The knowledge that you bring healing to our hearts, lives and spirit brings great comfort to us today and always. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Personal experiences of desperation.

**Prayer Focus:** Enough courage or desperation to reach out to God.

ZACCHAEUS

*And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus ...and he sought to see Jesus who he was;* Luke 19:1-2 KJV

This story in the Bible about Jesus going to Jericho is a favorite of mine. There was such a big crowd as people had heard about Jesus performing miracles. People did not like Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Well, he was pretty smart being short in stature to climb that Sycamore tree. He got away from the mob and found a spot to get a good look at Jesus.

I am always frustrated in crowds. I cannot see and I feel smothered. I always wished I could climb a tree or chair so that I could really see. I learned the song about Zacchaeus as a child and taught it to my Sunday school children, acting out the climbing up the tree "for the Lord I wanted to see."

The end of the story is inspirational when Jesus told him, "today Salvation has come to your house," also, because he too was a son of Abraham. Zacchaeus came to Jesus and told him he would give half of his possessions to the poor and if he had defrauded anyone of anything he would pay back four times as much.

I feel the encounter was life saving for Zacchaeus. He was changed, welcoming Jesus into his home and he continued to be a more caring person. He began thinking more of others than himself.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, please help us to think of others first. Help us to believe prayer can really change us and our circumstances. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** In every day we can turn to Christ for strength.

**Prayer Focus:** To create opportunities to proclaim our faith.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The story of the Good Samaritan has always been an inspiring one for me. I look back seventy some years when I was a young bride and in those days we had what we called "tramps" going through our country. I recall seeing them trudge along the highway not too far from our home—and I have to confess at that time I hoped they would go on by our corner. Occasionally, one would come our way and we would give them food—much to our satisfaction when we found how appreciative they were. We have even had transients asking to sleep in our barn and we never turned them down.

How many times in our lives have we failed to be the "Good Samaritan"? How many times have we seen someone asking for money and we have turned them down? We now have places for shelter and food where usually people can find help, but do we take the time to give them our personal attention and show them the love that we should before sending them on for others to help?

We are all the children of God and we have so many opportunities to be a Good Samaritan if we only take the time. Read the scripture of the Good Samaritan. Are we passing by someone we might help? Are we taking the time to be a Good Samaritan? We may not be helping someone along the road, but we can help in many ways by remembering the sick, helping our neighbor who is ill, sending a special message, or even making a phone call. There are many ways we can be a "Good Samaritan" - let us try to be "just that" and more.

**Prayer:** Lord, forgive us when we withhold our help for someone in need. All we have is from you. Our gifts are meant to be shared. Help us to love the hurting and wounded. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Who is your neighbor?

**Prayer Focus:** Transients.

Ruth Smith  
In memoriam

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

*So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.*

John 6:13

Dave and I are currently planning a reception for Lauren's high school graduation. Eventually we will ask, "How much food do we need to prepare?" We will send out announcements, some of them open invitations. We can only guess how many of Lauren's school friends and church family will attend. We will make a decision on how much to prepare and it may not be enough or it might be way too much and we will be eating leftovers for a week.

God's invitation to grace is an open invitation. Everyone is welcome. Unlike us he knows exactly how many will accept. And still there is extra.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for the gift of grace and for heaping it on. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** What an extravagant God!

**Prayer Focus:** The hungry.

**FOR GOD SO LOVED...**

Isn't it great that God loves us! Christ's message is a simple message. We can spend long hours debating the interpretation of the scripture and the differences in doctrine from one church to the next, but Jesus never said you had to be a Bible scholar to be part of his family. All he said is that you have to believe in him. As Christians we often wander off from this simple message.

People are sometimes uncomfortable with Christ's simple message. This is due to the fact that when the light of Christ starts to shine in their life, it reveals all the darkness. Darkness is something no one likes to see. So come to Christ and quit lying and making excuses. All you have to do is believe. What a difference believing has made in my life, and your reward will be eternal life.

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for believing in me by sending your only son. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Believe and wonderful things will happen.

**Prayer Focus:** Let us pray for those that don't believe that someday He will save them.

**Monday, March 23**

**Mark 10:46-52**

**BLIND BARTIMAEUS**

*Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Luke 18:38 (NRSV)

My brother gave our family a Bible, years before he died. He was sick mentally but I am thankful that his spirit was not blind when he made the choice to give the Life Application Bible to those he loved. There are many times I reach for this Bible, turn to the back and look up a word that I need to understand. Most times it is a 'Life Lesson' that I believe God knows I need to deal with, to learn from, and to hopefully grow out of it so I don't have to revisit the lesson many more times.

The word this time .. Blindness. What is my blindness? What keeps me from calling out to Jesus, .Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!.? How many times have I insisted on my way over His way? Do I see my 'blindness'? I wonder where the focus is when you are blind? Maybe having his focus on Jesus is why the blind Bartimaeus asked for healing. Maybe my focus is off.

When we keep bumping into a personal 'Life Lesson' perhaps it's a big clue to identify our own 'blindness'. No finger to point, other than into my heart and to choose, as the blind man Bartimaeus did, to call on Jesus with faith that heals.

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 2:910 (NIV)

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, focus my spiritual sight to look to you and to serve with love as you did. Take away my blindness and re-center my heart to honor You. May others be blessed with your love through my service. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** People who consider themselves victims of their circumstances will always remain victims unless they develop a greater vision for their lives." -- Stedman Graham

**Prayer Focus:** Spiritual Blindness

Susan Kruse

## THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

This is a passage of scripture that we are all familiar with. We are very familiar with Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink of water as he waits at Jacob's well for His disciples to return from buying food. He then tells her all about the facts of her life that she wishes weren't public information. He doesn't condemn her for the mistakes she has made in life, but offers her 'living water' in the form of forgiveness if she will only believe in Him.

As I read this passage I began to realize how much like the Samaritan woman I am. There are things I have done in my life that I would just as soon not become public information. I am afraid that the people around me would think less of me, or perhaps even condemn me, if they knew of my past transgressions. But, like the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus already knows all about my past transgressions. And guess what....He forgives me. All He asks is that I believe.

The most important thing I believe that we all need to remember is that the people we meet in our lives don't need our condemnation. They need our love and our forgiveness. If Jesus can forgive us, why can't we forgive each other? I read one time that we see other people's needs; God sees their heart. We need to respond with love.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we humbly come before You asking You to forgive our transgressions and help us to forgive the transgressions of others who need our love. In Thy precious name, Amen.

**Thought for Today:** How might I best serve God and my fellow man today?

**Prayer Focus:** Those who need our love.

TEN LEPERS

It was just unthinkable to me that nine of ten people, healed of their sickness, failed to return to Jesus with thanks and praise for God's greatness and mercy. How could their lives be changed so dramatically yet fail to acknowledge the source of the goodness?

My thoughts did not have to wander far to apply this situation to my own life. How could I have managed to choose a scripture for this booklet that now firmly plants me in the company of the nine?

For the past two years I knew that I needed to change jobs and daily prayed for answers and guidance. This past June as I drove to an interview at the Superintendent of Schools' office I prayed that God's will be done. I got the job. Praise God! Or not? It has been hard learning and relearning, replacing twenty years in one field with new thinking. My brain felt literally exhausted for the first three months; some days I cried. I AM one of the nine.

Now, after six months have passed I actually look forward to going to my "new" job most days. I feel a sense of belonging and an excitement about the many interesting things I have learned. I know God placed me here as well as the loving, strong friends He placed around me to guide and encourage me through this transition. Sure I was grateful for the obvious. I guess that I wanted it all to be good and easy, without cost or pain but our wise Father knew better; this was lesson material. Praise God!

**Prayer:** Dearest Father in Heaven, I come to you with confessions of my sins of selfishness and an ungrateful nature. Oh, thank you for your love and mercy. Please forgive me. Thank you for your patience with me and still loving the nine of US who forget to give thanks for all you do. In your son's merciful name I pray. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Remember to say, "Thank you."

**Prayer Focus:** Those who are unhappy with their jobs.

Gina Long

## THE TWO HOUSE BUILDERS

Oh, that road of good intentions. I've traveled it many times thinking I was doing the right thing. Somehow everything seems to be going well and then.....

Often times I start things out firmly planted on what I believe God wants me to do so I dig in and do things right. Another project comes along and with the best of intentions something happens and it goes sour. It may not affect me but it does affect those around me negatively. I remember a time working with youth that I had two things going on at once. First was confirmation class and second was a Super Bowl party with the High School youth group. I went to be with the confirmation class leaving the youth with other sponsors...digging down to the rocky foundation with confirmation, while poor judgment landed me in the sand with the youth. Good judgment should have told me to only schedule one thing at a time (Teresa always tells me I can't multi-task). Things did not go so well with the youth. This situation led to a lot of problems, headache, and hard work correcting the situation.

A house built on the strong foundation holds strong but what happens if you put on an addition and the same attention is not given to the foundation there. It can bring down what is good also. If our foundation goes in a different direction it could also bring down those around us. It is always good and wise to put God first in our lives and our daily living, building on that foundation. Keeping things in that order is not always easy or convenient but is always best in the long run.

**Prayer:** God, keep us strong and show us the way deep down to that rocky foundation. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Sometimes it's a long way down to get to what is right.

**Prayer Focus:** Our youth sponsors.

Dave Fletcher

WORKERS IN VINEYARD

*"They took their money and started grumbling."* Matt. 20:11

After leaving college I was hired to work in an office answering phones and setting appointments. About a year into my employment the office manager who hired me announced she was being promoted. She pulled me aside and told me she would be promoting me to replace her. A couple of weeks later the company brought in someone from another office to assess our office and make recommendations. This person decided the office manager position should be given to someone else. Ouch.

After separating myself several years from the situation I can now see that the right person for the promotion was selected. I was too immature and my work ethic was not yet developed. But at the time I felt cheated and lied to and I made those feelings quite clear to many others.

Today, I can still find many things to grumble about. It doesn't seem to me that those I live with work as long or as hard as I do. Someone leaves their dirty clothes on the bathroom floor or doesn't rinse their dish and load it in the dishwasher—hey wait a minute, those are mine. Never mind.

God has different work assignments for each of us. It is my job to determine how God wants me to use my gifts, instead of focusing on how others are serving.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me use my gifts according to your will. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Take time to seek your spiritual gifts.

**Prayer Focus:** Complainers.

Saturday, March 28

Luke 10:38-42

## MARY AND MARTHA

*"Martha, Martha you are worried and upset about many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it won't be taken away from her."*

Luke 10:41

Luke 10:38-42 tells the story of Mary and Martha. Martha is busy with dinner preparations while Mary sits at the feet of Jesus. Martha is worried about having a perfect meal for her guest, while Mary is content to set aside preparations in order to spend time with Jesus.

I have always been a "Martha" and I chose this scripture because I know many times I have missed the most important parts of life because I was worried about getting everything done.

I have been sick for over a month this winter and just kept going, working and thinking the world wouldn't turn unless I didn't get everything done. I got so sick I ended up in the hospital. When I was released I was told not to go to work for a week and to rest. Wow! A tall order for me! But you know what, the world has kept turning while I have been resting and staying home.

How many times have we all been like Martha and been so busy being productive that we fail to be open to God's presence in our lives? Jesus says, "Come and rest; listen to me." Sometimes like Mary we must be still in the presence of God.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help us to slow down and find meaning in you, not what we think we need to accomplish. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Take time to be in the presence of the Lord.

**Prayer Focus:** Those too busy to rest.

Sheila Mayfield

**Sunday, March 29**

**John 12:20-33**

## JESUS SPEAKS OF HIS DEATH

*"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"* John 12:27-28a

I often find myself glued to Paul Harvey's .The rest of the story. broadcasts on the radio. Mr. Harvey does a fantastic job of selecting some little known specific fact about a famous person or event, and connecting that fact to the outcome of the event. I wonder how Mr. Harvey would describe this section of John's gospel as related to the story of Christ.

Would Mr. Harvey relate to the fact that not only the masses that were following Jesus, but even his own disciples couldn't understand the reason for the impending arrest and crucifixion? Would Mr. Harvey relate to the fact that just as Jesus had really become recognized by the masses, his .fame. as a Jewish Prophet would soon end? Or would Mr. Harvey relate to the fact that the reason that Jesus came to live on earth, was to grant our salvation by defeating the "Prince of this World"?

Unlike the disciples, and others in this passage of the Bible, we already know the rest of the story. And the rest of the story is exactly what the Lenten season is all about; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ - Son of God, King of the Jews, and Redeemer of all mankind.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for dying for our sins, and giving us the gift of salvation. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Where could I help share the story of Jesus?

**Prayer Focus:** Devotional Ministries.

Carter Stults

THERE ARE MANY ROOMS

The park ranger in the Sonoran Desert explained that the holes in the Saguaro cacti were made by the Gilded Flicker or Gila Woodpecker. When the birds no longer need them for their nests, the holes are inhabited by other birds, insects, or lizards. Similarly, the ground squirrels dig holes in the ground. When they move on, other creatures claim them as shelters from the hot desert sun or cold nights.

In my wildest dreams, I can't image what heaven will be like. I do know that if God plans so well for the little desert critters here on earth, He will honor Jesus' promise of a place prepared for us in eternity.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your loving care. Prepare us for eternal life together. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Let us take time to enjoy and appreciate God's world around us.

**Prayer Focus:** Park rangers and the natural wonders they care for.

...FOLLOW ME...

*“Follow me” He told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*

Matthew 9: 9b

“Follow me”, said Jesus, and Matthew did. Sounds kind of like the .Come. that I say to our dog, Sable. I expect her to come when called and I get mad when she doesn’t. I try to teach my kids to do what they are told, when they are told. It Doesn’t always work, but they know that it is the expectation.

There’s a great line from a recent movie, “I want you to **want** to do the dishes”. Now, that’s a funny line (does ANY-body really want to do dishes?), but I also think it ties in with Jesus saying follow me. He wants us to drop everything and do as He asks us. Like with my kids, it doesn’t always happen, but He wants us to at least want to do as He has asked. Notice He asks, too. He doesn’t order us around like I do my dog. We have the choice to follow Him or not. But life can be so much better and easier if we do things His way. How many of us have learned that the hard way?! If we follow Him, He will lead us to a future so bright we could never even conceive it. How awesome is that?!!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for being our guide in this life. Help us to follow you wherever it may lead us. Help us to understand that you have plans for us that are wonderful and exciting, if we would only chose to follow you. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Am I following or trying to lead?

**Prayer Focus:** Those struggling to know which path to take.

CHRIST'S PEACE

*"Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears. You heard me say, 'I am going away, and coming back to you,' If you loved me you would have been glad to hear that I was going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.."*

John 14:27-28

I believe that for me, saying goodbye to my family members and friends is one of the most difficult things that I do. And it seems that with all the practice I have had, with my children living around the world I would get used to it.

I love to watch the birds that nest in my yard. Having wren houses and observing the parents working so hard to make the house ready for the family, singing so joyfully as they feed the young and care for the nest. Then the day comes when the fledgling babies fly for the first time. It was always sad to me that once they were independent I would never see them return to their home. Then I realized that their strength lies in the sure knowledge that they fly off with the gift of 'Christ's peace'.

He is giving the gift of peace. He is letting us know " beforehand, that when it happens we, as the disciples may have faith "that he will return. As it is with our families and nature's families. The wings are made strong so that their flight is made with the gift of peace.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Help us to understand the ways of nature, and the words that you have left for us to follow. Be with those who are separated by distances both real and imagined. Give them the gift of your peace. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** How difficult is it to say good-bye to family members!

**Prayer Focus:** Wherever I travel, bless me with Christ's peace.

Thursday, April 2

John 10:1-21

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*"I am the gate, I tell you the truth, all who enter through me shall be saved."* John 10:9

Jesus wants us all to be "Good Shepherds" in our busy daily lives. To be kind and generous to others. Just recently I had the amazing experience of helping do "Meals on Wheels" through my job at SENDS! It was a great and rewarding experience for me as well as the two folks who also helped with this task. Just bringing a simple meal and a little small talk to a person means the world to them!

One lady whose meal I personally delivered to her house said, "Thank you, and you know what, I will be 96 years old coming in May and as long as I still have my mind I'm gonna stay right here in my own home"! She was grateful for not only her meal but the little time I took to chat with her! I am so glad we visited those few precious moments because it made me feel very good the rest of the day! I wish I could have chatted longer with her, she seemed to enjoy it as much as I did!

Small gestures such as this short but meaningful visit is something we all may need to do more often to be more like Jesus in our earthly lives. I believe Jesus wants us to take care of each other. No matter how small the deed, it is very much appreciated by the receiver as well as the giver! So to each of you reading this, please take a few moments to call on someone and check in with them to see that they are ok and if they may need something. I believe we could be Jesus' helpers as well as good shepherds!

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, please help us to be more like you and take care of "Your" sheep. Help us all be more considerate of others and take time to say hello. Thank you for your love and care given to each of us daily. In your name I pray, Amen.

**Thought for Today:** We all need to be taken care of, let us be Good Shepherds to each other.

**Prayer Focus:** Elderly, homebound & nursing home residents.

Shirley Torres

JESUS IS REJECTED

*I may be able to speak the language of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell.* 1 Corinthians 13:1

In a conversation with a friend the other day about this devotion book, she mentioned that she would like to read again the story about the geese. In short, this story is about working as a team and seeing how geese fly as an example of teamwork. One goose flies in the front for a time allowing the others to fly behind in his draft. In time another goose will take the lead, allowing the previous leader an opportunity to fly easier in her draft. In the meantime, the geese behind the leader are always honking their encouragement to whoever is leading at the time.

I too am a honker, just ask my family. However, I have to be careful that the honking I am doing is encouraging and supporting, not critical and insulting. You know what I mean if you have sat at a stop light and the car behind you honked if you didn't move the moment the light turned green. Too many times while following in someone's draft, my honking takes the form of throwing insults and rejection to those in the lead.

God asks us to speak in the language of love—working out our differences while maintaining respect for one another. We are all loved by God and in Christ's spirit we should act loving to each other.

**Prayer:** Lord, help my words and deeds convey love and let me offer encouragement and support to those in leadership roles. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Look with love at someone you are in conflict with.

**Prayer Focus:** My attitude to those I disagree with.

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

...*“but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”* Mark 12:44b

My great-grandmother was a widow for more than half of her life. Other than selling a few vegetables out of a garden, or doing an odd job here or there, she never really had a job that paid a wage. But she did have a job. Not only did she raise her family, but due to the death of my grandmother at an early age, she also raised my mother, along with her brothers and a sister. Being a widow, she did have to make ends meet on a fixed income. I remember as a young boy going with her to pick up the monthly commodities, as back then our government issued bulk and canned foods rather than food stamps. She could make some very filling meals out of a canned chicken, and that government cheese made the best grilled cheese sandwiches I ever had. While she didn't live in poverty, she often put in everything to being a good mother and grandmother.

I see the same qualities in the elderly members of our church. Many of our older members are first to volunteer their time for service to the Church. While they may be on limited incomes, it doesn't stop them from putting everything into serving God.

As we face the current economic crisis, we need to look at these people for an example. As the economy of our country continues to decline, many will face some financial decline or hardship. Where we may not have financial wealth to give, we can still find ways to put more of ourselves into God's service.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, please help those facing financial challenges during these troubling economic times. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** What can I give?

**Prayer Focus:** Those facing financial hardships.

**TRIUMPHANT ENTRY**

Parades have characters. Some people are joyful and happy to be in the parade. They are excited and think parades are fun. Others seem irritated by all the noise when the throng seems overbearing. They don't like it at all.

Whatever we think about being in a parade, it's on the move. Parades do not stand still. They snake around corners and fill the streets from side to side.

Jesus was in a parade going into Jerusalem. There were people in front and people behind. With all the celebrating going on about the Passover, there would have been people present who were excited and who joined the throng. There would have been others who felt overwhelmed by it all and did not want a part in it. Jesus was there with everyone—both the joyful and the overwhelmed. He wasn't at the head of the parade, out of sight in the front. Instead, the image I have of Jesus is that he was in the center of the parade—with people both in front of him and behind him. He's always with the people—all the people in the parade. Jesus was with all of them, and Jesus is with all of us.

**Prayer:** Jesus, be with us all in ways we can see and hear. We ask that your presence and your sense of purpose will be ours. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Jesus is with all people.

**Prayer Focus:** Show us where Jesus is.

**Monday, April 6**

**Matthew 5:13-16**

## SALT AND LIGHT

*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."*

Matthew 5:13-14

During biblical times, salt was a very important mineral. It was used as a preservative for meat and fish. And unlike the concentrated table salt we use today, unrefined salt can lose its saltiness just by absorbing moisture in the air. This type of salt is also very effective in cleansing the bad taste out of wild game. I use it quite often to make a brine solution that I soak most of my wild game in before cooking. By doing this most of the blood and heavy fluids in the meat are drawn out by the salt, thus purifying the meat.

Coming into Auburn at night from the North or the East, you can see the lights of town from a few miles away. Most of the time when I come back into town from these directions, I've either had a long day at work or a long trip back from Lincoln or Omaha. Seeing the lights of town, I get that "journey is over" feeling that is quite relaxing.

Bumping into Church members in town also gives me a good feeling. I get a spiritual boost in seeing their light shine, and their saltiness helps keep me pure.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the members of our Church. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** How can our Church grow?

**Prayer Focus:** Our Church.

Carter Stults

## JUDAS BETRAYAL

As we read the story of Judas' plan to betray Jesus we are filled with all sorts of emotions. We ask, "How could he do such a thing?" After all, he was a friend of Jesus. Jesus trusted him. They had traveled together; shared many meals together; taught together; struggled together; and prayed together. How could he betray his Lord and condemn Him to a death by crucifixion?

Then I began to ask myself, .How many times have I betrayed Jesus?. Every time I use the Lord's name in vain, I betray Him. Every time I don't proclaim the good news of Christ's love when I have the opportunity, I betray Him. Every time I pass by someone in need without helping them, I betray Him. Every time I hurt someone with unkind words, I betray Him. How then are my sins any less than Judas'?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I beg for your forgiveness. It is only in knowing that you already know of my sin and forgive me that I am saved from the same fate as Judas. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Through the events of Easter I am saved from my betrayal of our Lord.

Prayer Focus: Forgive yourself as Christ forgives you.

ANOINTED WITH PERFUME

*But Jesus replied “Leave her alone, why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me.”*

Mark 14:6-7

When choosing scripture, this one kept popping out at me. It is familiar to me, but it is one I have never really understood. I am very frugal. The thought of a whole bottle of expensive perfume poured over another’s head seems wasteful. At this time we are going through an intensive bathroom renovation. I found some antique tiles, and showed them to Doug. He loved them. Buying those tiles was a splurge. It was not in our budget, but we decided to go for it. We love the look, and we get a smile on our faces every time we step foot into the bathroom. We only live once and might as well splurge on something that makes Doug and I happy.

Recently something that a widowed lady said to me stuck. She was telling me about the garage that her deceased husband always wanted. She had finally decided to let him build that garage, and shortly after he passed on. I think she regretted not encouraging him to do it sooner.

We only live a short time; I think it is perfectly fine to splurge on ourselves and others once in a while. It shows love!

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to be good stewards of our funds. We are thankful for all you have blessed us with. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Show others love by acts of kindness.

**Prayer Focus:** Those who feel guilty for spending.

**THE LAST SUPPER**

I have been working on my father's genealogy over the past few years. I can't help but wonder what it was like when my great-grandfather said farewell to his father in Prussia. They would have each realized they would most likely never see each other on this earth again. His father would have been like most parents; concerned for a safe voyage, worried if his son would be able to provide for himself in a new land, hoping he would carry with him the life lessons and religious beliefs that had been instilled in him. My great-grandfather, of course, had no idea what he was getting into. Would he survive, literally, the trip? Would he find people who would help him in his new life? Where would his next meal come from? I can only marvel at the courage and conviction each generation had to have had.

It must have been similar for the disciples and Jesus, who was very much a father figure to them. The disciples worried if they were strong enough to meet the demands placed on them. And Jesus must have been very aware of the dangers that lay ahead for them. We say good-byes in many ways in our lives. When our children grow up to adulthood, we say good-bye in a way and hope for a safe voyage for them. When we say good-bye to dear friends moving away, we pray life is good for them in their new land. This is the way of life.

**Prayer:** As we say our good-byes and enter each new stage of our lives, we pray for courage that comes from our conviction that Jesus is with us each step of the way, guiding and protecting us. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Remember those who are leaving and those left behind.

**Prayer Focus:** Those we have to say 'good-by' to.

Grace Burgert

Reprinted from April 13, 2006

**THE CRUCIFIXION**

When I was a very young girl I asked my father why it was called Good Friday, when obviously it was a very sad day. I cannot remember what my father told me but to this day I remember asking him that question.

I catch myself finding similarities in the events of Jesus' life with our lives today. I suppose this is so easily done because the Bible stories are about a father, his son, followers, friends, skeptics, neighbors, enemies, life, and death. At the time of Jesus' death, his family and friends, although they had been told of the purpose for and results of his death, probably could not envision a time when they would laugh again, feel joy, regain balance in their lives, be soothed by the sun on their faces, or enjoy swapping stories about their time with Jesus.

Isn't this like our lives, too? We lose a spouse or a child, a dear friend or parent, our home or our job; perhaps even our faith for awhile. And in those dark times during our ninth hours or when darkness covers the land we cannot imagine our life will ever contain the hope, love and joy it once did. But then there comes a miracle. Slowly, sometimes without even being aware of it, we rebuild our lives with new goals and cherished old memories, and we regain the purpose in our life and carry on our message.

Jesus set the example and gives us the strength. The Son shines on our lives.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us in our darkness to remain strong and wait for your healing powers to come.

**Thought for Today:** God is always with you, even if he seems lost to you.

**Prayer Focus:** Those who are starting their lives over after a loss.

THE BURIAL  
LET ME BELIEVE

*How happy are the people who worship you with songs, who live in the light of your kindness! Because of you they rejoice all day long, and they praise you for your goodness.*

Psalm 89:15-16

She walked along humming "Jesus loves me," as she looked for special stones along the path. Maybe that rock garden will come to pass, she thought. She spotted an especially beautiful rock and stopped to pick it up. Under it was a plant struggling to get out. The tiny bud stretched its unfolding petals and a bit of purple was revealed, "A violet, it's a violet, my favorite flower. Now you can come to life after the darkness under the rock." She suddenly thought of Jesus' resurrection. The tiny violet would soon be fully alive with the sun and rain nurturing it. Surely flowers are resurrected, too.

A year later as she walked the same path, she thought of the little violet and wondered if it had survived. Instead of a single flower, a virtual bouquet of purple faces waved in the soft breeze. How could she not believe in the miracle of resurrection?

**Prayer:** My Lord, you have made me see even when I could not see. Thank you. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Open my eyes and ears to your creation every day.

**Prayer Focus:** Those who cannot see God through all the things He has created.

Theoma Underwood  
In Memoriam

## THE RESURRECTION

When I was just a little over a year old, my father, Fred Dettmer, died very suddenly. This left my mother with four young children, the oldest being nine. Mother brought us back to Nemaha County and we all lived with her brother on his farm.

With Uncle Fred's generous assistance, we were raised with love, tender discipline, hard work and a very strong belief in God. Our lives were filled with many happy memories and with mother's extended family, eleven brothers and sisters, we were carefully watched over, sometimes more carefully than we felt was necessary!

I will never forget how desperate and lost I felt when, after having Mom in my life for 45 years, she died very suddenly—a door slammed shut in my life and in my heart.

Three weeks after this sad day, our granddaughter, Nikki, was born—and light, love and a newness of life filled my heart. Yes, a door had definitely been shut, but God had opened a window. Sometimes we have to wait awhile for a window to open or to realize a window has opened, but we must remember that things happen according to God's time.

A door closed as Jesus was crucified and died for our sins, but God threw open the window as He raised His son from death and fulfilled the promise of everlasting life to all who believe. We have all had a window experience, but sometimes it takes time and faith to look back and remember when the window opened. Nikki is now 23 and a mother, and I have told her the story of her being a window for me. Hopefully, when she has a sad event she will remember to watch for the window that God will provide.

**Prayer:** Oh, God, thank you for your continued faithfulness. Thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ who died for our sins and promises men life not only in eternity, but also in those grieving times in this life. Amen.

**Thought for Today:** Take heart! It's Easter.

**Prayer Focus:** Opened windows.

Helen Casey

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