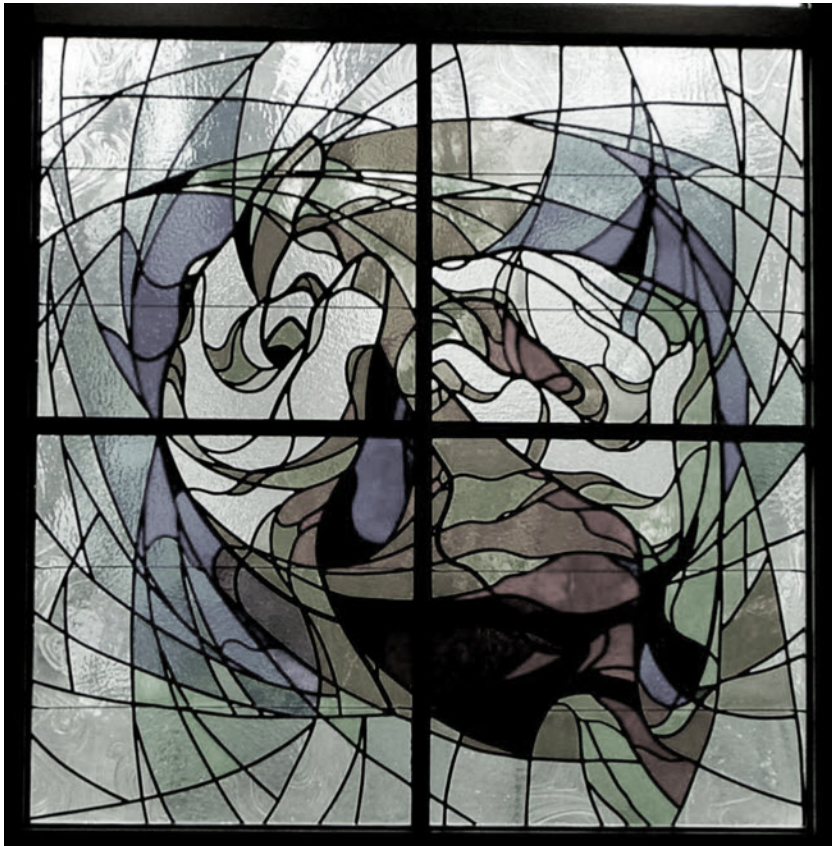


Grosse Pointe United
Methodist Church
Lenten Devotions -
AD 2010



Introduction

At last, a Lent that doesn't start early in the year, that doesn't sneak up on us before we have a chance to finish, or at least to start writing those devotions we've been storing up since last Easter.

What's that? I seem to be dreaming, don't I? Well at least there were plenty of books available on that last Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Oh, wait

Sadly, the calendar simply didn't cooperate with me this year, and there wasn't quite the creative "outreach" [you may prefer to think of it as "begging" or "badgering"] of previous years. No endless harangues, no threats of "this page left blank courtesy of <your name here>," nor even purple Lenten Stockings hung in the hallway with care.

This translated into not very many submissions for this year's book during the normal collection phase.

After eleven of these books, is it time to take a year off? Are we burned out from all this writing? Should we just do a book of classics?

Wait a minute. That's what we did last year - a few new ones and a bunch of favourites from the past. How many times can people read about my coffee addiction, after all?

So, nothing was published - at least not on time - and yet, the devotions continued to trickle in, and we decided that we couldn't miss out on some of these moments of sharing. So, a quick drag through the hymnal, a search through old emails, and - voila! - we have an all-new Lenten Devotion book.

I thank all of you who helped, cajoled, threatened, and wrote for this excellent effort.

Just as in the past eleven years, it seems only appropriate to repeat the introduction from our congregation's first book of devotions of more than thirty years ago:

Keeping a true Lent requires us to be vigilant in many ways: in prayer, study, worship, sacrifice, giving, meditation, and fellowship.

One or all may take precedence, depending upon our daily commitments. From these devotions, lovingly prepared, may you find a well spring of faith to renew and sustain you, so that the Glorious Triumph that is Easter will remain with you always.

The Lenten Committee

Again, we can but say, "Amen."

Charlie van Becelaere, Editor

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Ash Wednesday - Friday February 17-19, 2010

This story is a wonderful way to start our Lenten journey, and it's well worth reading a few times, so let's start with three times, shall we?

Daniel's Gloves

I sat with two friends in the picture window of a quaint restaurant just off the corner of the town-square. The food and the company were both especially good that day.

As we talked, my attention was drawn outside, across the street. There, walking into town, was a man who appeared to be carrying all his worldly goods on his back. He was carrying, a well-worn sign that read, 'I will work for food.' My heart sank.

I brought him to the attention of my friends and noticed that others around us had stopped eating to focus on him. Heads moved in a mixture of sadness and disbelief.

We continued with our meal, but his image lingered in my mind. We finished our meal and went our separate ways. I had errands to do and quickly set out to accomplish them. I glanced toward the town square, looking somewhat halfheartedly for the strange visitor. I was fearful, knowing that seeing him again would call for some response. I drove through town and saw nothing of him. I made some purchases at a store and got back in my car.

Deep within me, the Spirit of God kept speaking to me: 'Don't go back to the office until you've at least driven once more around the square.'

Then with some hesitancy, I headed back into town. As I turned the square's third corner, I saw him. He was standing on the steps of the store front church, going through his sack.

I stopped and looked; feeling both compelled to speak to him, yet wanting to drive on. The empty parking space on the corner seemed to be a sign from God: an invitation to park. I pulled in, got out and approached the town's newest visitor.

'Looking for the pastor?' I asked.

'Not really,' he replied, 'just resting.'

'Have you eaten today?'

'Oh, I ate something early this morning.'

'Would you like to have lunch with me?'

'Do you have some work I could do for you?'

'No work,' I replied 'I commute here to work from the city, but I would like to take you to lunch.'

'Sure,' he replied with a smile.

As he began to gather his things, I asked some surface questions. Where you headed?'

' St. Louis '

'Where you from?'

'Oh, all over; mostly Florida ..'

'How long you been walking?'

'Fourteen years,' came the reply.

I knew I had met someone unusual. We sat across from each other in the same restaurant I had left earlier. His face was weathered slightly beyond his 38 years. His eyes were dark yet clear, and he spoke with an eloquence and articulation that was startling. He removed his jacket to reveal a bright red T-shirt that said, 'Jesus is The Never Ending Story.'

Then Daniel's story began to unfold. He had seen rough times early in life. He'd made some wrong choices and reaped the consequences.. Fourteen years earlier, while backpacking across the country, he had stopped on the beach in Daytona. He tried to hire on with some men who were putting up a large tent and some equipment.. A concert, he thought.

He was hired, but the tent would not house a concert but revival services, and in those services he saw life more clearly. He gave his life over to God

'Nothing's been the same since,' he said, 'I felt the Lord telling me to keep walking, and so I did, some 14 years now.'

'Ever think of stopping?' I asked.

'Oh, once in a while, when it seems to get the best of me But God has given me this calling. I give out Bibles That's what's in my sack. I work to buy food and Bibles, and I give them out when His Spirit leads.'

I sat amazed. My homeless friend was not homeless. He was on a mission and lived this way by choice. The question burned inside for a moment and then I asked: 'What's it like?'

'What?'

'To walk into a town carrying all your things on your back and to show your sign?'

'Oh, it was humiliating at first. People would stare and make comments. Once someone tossed a piece of half-eaten bread and made a gesture that certainly didn't make me feel welcome. But then it became humbling to realize that God was using me to touch lives and change people's concepts of other folks like me.'

My concept was changing, too. We finished our dessert and gathered his things. Just outside the door, he paused He turned to me and said, 'Come Ye blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom I've prepared for you.. For when I was hungry you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, a stranger and you took me in.'

I felt as if we were on holy ground. 'Could you use another Bible?' I asked.

He said he preferred a certain translation. It traveled well and was not too heavy. It was also his personal favorite.. 'I've read through it 14 times,' he said.

'I'm not sure we've got one of those, but let's stop by our church and see' I was able to find my new friend a Bible that would do well, and he seemed very grateful.

'Where are you headed from here?' I asked.

'Well, I found this little map on the back of this amusement park coupon.'

'Are you hoping to hire on there for awhile?'

'No, I just figure I should go there. I figure someone under that star right there needs a Bible, so that's where I'm going next.'

He smiled, and the warmth of his spirit radiated the sincerity of his mission. I drove him back to the town-square where we'd met two hours earlier, and as we drove, it started raining. We parked and unloaded his things.

'Would you sign my autograph book?' he asked.. 'I like to keep messages from folks I meet.'

I wrote in his little book that his commitment to his calling had touched my life. I encouraged him to stay strong. And I left him with a verse of scripture from Jeremiah, 'I know the plans I have for you, declared the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you; Plans to give you a future and a hope.'

'Thanks, man,' he said. 'I know we just met and we're really just strangers, but I love you.'

'I know,' I said, 'I love you, too.' 'The Lord is good!'

'Yes, He is. How long has it been since someone hugged you?' I asked.

A long time,' he replied

And so on the busy street corner in the drizzling rain, my new friend and I embraced, and I felt deep inside that I had been changed.. He put his things on his back, smiled his winning smile and said, 'See you in the New Jerusalem.'

'I'll be there!' was my reply.

He began his journey again. He headed away with his sign dangling from his bedroll and pack of Bibles. He stopped, turned and said, 'When you see something that makes you think of me, will you pray for me?'

'You bet,' I shouted back, 'God bless.'

'God bless.' And that was the last I saw of him.

Late that evening as I left my office, the wind blew strong. The cold front had settled hard upon the town. I bundled up and hurried to my car. As I sat back and reached for the emergency brake, I saw them.... a pair of well-worn brown work gloves neatly laid over the length of the handle. I picked them up and thought of my friend and wondered if his hands would stay warm that night without them.

Then I remembered his words: 'If you see something that makes you think of me, will you pray for me?'

Today his gloves lie on my desk in my office.. They help me to see the world and its people in a new way, and they help me remember those two hours with my unique friend and to pray for his ministry. 'See you in the New Jerusalem,' he said. Yes, Daniel, I know I will...

'I shall pass this way but once. Therefore, any good that I can do or any kindness that I can show, let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again.'

Author Unknown, submitted by Carolyn Franklin

February 20, 2010

Rejecting Rejection

Read: Luke 18:1-8

Dear [Interviewer's Name]:

Thank you for your letter of the 13th.

After careful consideration, I regret to inform you that I am unable to accept your refusal to offer me employment with your firm. This year I have had been particularly fortunate in receiving an unusually large number of rejection letters. With such a varied and promising field of candidates, it is impossible for me to accept all refusals.

Despite your firm's outstanding qualifications and previous experience in rejecting applicants, I find that your rejection does not meet with my needs at this time. Therefore, I will initiate employment with your firm immediately following graduation. I look forward to seeing you then.

Best of luck in rejecting future candidates.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

What might happen if we were really persistent in prayer? in study? in praise? in worship? in generosity? inconceivable? I hope not!

P.S. - if you try this method, please let me know how it works.

February 21, 2010

Take Time to Be Holy

Take time to be holy,
speak oft with thy Lord;
abide in him always,
and feed on his word.
Make friends of God's children,
help those who are weak,
forgetting in nothing
his blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy,
the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret
with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus,
like him thou shalt be;
thy friends in thy conduct
his likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy,
let him be thy guide,
and run not before him,
whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow,
still follow the Lord,
and, looking to Jesus,
still trust in his word.

Take time to be holy,
be calm in thy soul,
each thought and each motive
beneath his control.
Thus led by his spirit
to fountains of love,
thou soon shalt be fitted
for service above.

William D. Longstaff

February 22, 2010

The Reason for the Season

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 15:1-11

Even with all the commercialism of Christmas – it starts right after Halloween, or maybe even before – still we see and hear sometimes, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season".

Now the Season is Lent, and Jesus is the reason for this season. He was born for us - lived for us - and died for us!

As we go through this holy season of Lent, we can't imagine such sacrifice. God sacrificed his Son for us. Jesus gave His life for us. We are blessed beyond belief.

Jesus is the reason for the season.

Shirley Van Becelaere

February 23, 2010

"A little child shall lead them"

Read Isaiah 11:1-6

A few years back during the busy Advent season, I was running through the church picking up trash. In my mind I was yelling, "For goodness sake! Why is it so difficult for people to pick up after themselves? Styrofoam cups, napkins, pencils, mugs, etc were all over the building. People had left coats, and a mitten or two along with an umbrella and a hat. Someone's eyeglasses were on a table.

There is enough to do getting ready for Christmas Day besides picking up trash other than my own. I still had shopping, baking, wrapping, and cleaning to do. There was no luxury of getting it all done Christmas Eve as I was committed to sing in the choir for two services, and our children were in a third.

Upon entering the Great Hall I saw a gold envelope, the kind we use for special offerings, lying under the manger with baby Jesus on the piano. There it was again, trash! Picking up the envelope I noticed a child had colored a rainbow on one side, and on the other were two beautiful flowers planted in a garden complete with sun and clouds. By the flowers, the words "I love you Jesus" were printed in pen. Below in the grass were the words, "From: Faith, To: Jesus." I had discovered a letter inside. There was a red heart that covered the whole page and inside the heart was a picture of baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes. I knew it was Jesus as it was labeled. There was another salutation that stated: "To: Jesus, From: Faith, I love you Jesus."

What a wonderful gift had been left under the manger for the baby Jesus. This child named Faith had created a beautiful portrait of how she envisioned the baby Jesus and sent it to Him. By finding the envelope and reading the message Faith had reminded me of the greatest gift God had given us, His Son. The letter made me pause and reconsider all that I was doing for Advent and why. Faith had led me to renew my faith.

Lynn Van de Putte

February 24, 2010

Listen!!

The boy Samuel was serving God under Eli's direction. This was at a time when the revelation of God was rarely heard or seen. One night Eli was sound asleep. It was well before dawn; the sanctuary lamp was still burning. Samuel was still in bed in the Temple of God where the Chest of God rested.

Then God called out, "Samuel, Samuel!" [I Samuel 3:1-4]. Samuel thought that Eli was calling him. God called four times before Samuel understood.

One day long ago, God's Word came to Jonah, Amittai's son: "Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer."

But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish -- as far away from God as he could get. [Jonah 1:1-3]

The Bible teaches that God has a plan for each of us, a task that uses our particular, special talents. But what is that task? Samuel was chosen to clean up the Temple and lead Israel. Jonah was chosen to preach God's judgment to the people of Nineveh. The Bible teaches us to listen for God's call.

I listened, and heard nothing.

I prayed for years and heard nothing.

Finally I heard a quiet whisper that contained the germ of an idea. Slowly that whisper grew into a loud, clear assignment.

I thanked God for answering my prayers. Then I heard God laugh and say, "I answered every day from your first prayer. The hardest part was cleaning out your ears so you could hear me."

Dear Lord, help me to hear you speak to me. Grant me the patience to listen for your words, the quiet to hear when you speak and the faith to follow your command.

Open my ears, that I may hear
Voices of truth thou sendest clear;
And while the wave-notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
Ready my God they will to see;
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Ched Fine

February 25, 2010

AN ALL-CLEAN LENT

"... Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith; with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." - Hebrews 10:22

My grandmother observed the annual ritual of spring house-cleaning. Up came the rugs to be beaten outdoors, curtains washed" and stretched, windows and furniture polished, floors scrubbed, and every drawer and cupboard cleaned and straightened. My parents for many years did a similar ritual: washing walls and ceilings and curtains, cleaning rugs and carpets and upholstery, waxing furniture. I can still remember the fresh, clean aroma of a special cleaner "they purchased at Hudson's. Before clean-burning furnaces, washers and dryers, and vacuum cleaners, spring cleaning was a necessary chore after the need for wood and coal stoves was past and warmer weather permitted more washing and drying outside. I have a 90-year-old friend who still cleans her house from top to bottom every spring! And I must admit I rather miss the feeling of satisfaction in having - at least briefly - an all clean house. As a major in Home Economics/Field Service at Albion College, I put together a sample hand-out booklet titled "AN "ALL" - CLEAN SPRING" promoting the cleaning product "ALL" for a senior project.

The Eastern Orthodox Church begins Lent on the Monday before Ash Wednesday when traditionally the faithful cleanse their souls by penance and scrub their cooking utensils clean to remove all -traces of meat and fat, which are forbidden during Lent. Before Passover many Orthodox Jews clean out all their kitchen cupboards, throwing away any forbidden foods and making sure all the dishes are clean and kosher.

"Spring-cleaning can also be psycho1ogical, a time-out to confront the emotional clutter that has accumulated in your mental closet. It's a time for introspection, a mid-course "correction for ordinary people "in ordinary stressful lives" (-Abigail Trafford, quoted in "Simple Abundance" by Susan Breathnack). Perhaps Lent should be a spring-cleaning - not of our wood and brick houses, but of our flesh and blood houses - out hearts, minds, and souls.

The psalmist writes, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2). On our Lenten journey, let's make time to do some internal spring cleaning and then let God take over.

"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." -1 John 1:9

Noelle Landin

February 26, 2010

Be Still

“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

Learning to “be still” has been a journey. Being busy is more my nature than being still. I like to fill my time with activities that have a purpose and make me feel productive.

Over the last few years we have moved with my husband’s work.

While we were in North Carolina, my new friend, June, shared her love of the Lord and how she spends time in relationship with Him. She would read the Bible, journal about it and write out a prayer. Journaling was something that I had not done before.

We then moved to Hawaii and a new friend, Vickia, shared a book titled Adoration.

The book was about Mary and Martha. My friend would say to just “be still” like Mary at the feet of Jesus. Mary showed adoration and devotion to Jesus by choosing to spend time with Him. Our faith grows as we get to know Him more.

The church we attended in Hawaii encouraged doing daily devotions. They gave out bookmarks with a Bible reading plan for three months on it. Wow! A plan to go by; that was just what I needed to get me started on my new challenge to “be still”. It was time for me to grow in my knowledge of the Bible and my faith. The Bible verse that the church quoted a lot was Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plan to give you hope and a future.” This verse is so full of hope. I started the reading plan and discovered more promises and applications for life.

We then moved to Tennessee, where I attended the Rock Solid Bible study with three new friends that are inspiring teachers. We studied a book titled, Lord I Want to Know You. Then I met a sweet neighbor, Alice. She came out one day for our walk wearing a tee shirt that said BE STILL on the front with the rest of the verse was on the back. I wanted one immediately, but it was from a 2003 Spiritual Retreat she had been on. It was as if God was reminding me again to “be still” with Him to learn His directions for my life. I have had encouraging mentors all along the way, plus the Divine Mentor. God wants us to seek Him with all our hearts. “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

Prayer: Thank you God for your Word. Help me to hear You today. I want to be still so that I may hear your marching orders for my day, my week, my life. Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening. IJNA

Doing daily devotions, a time to “be still” with God’s Word, gives us hope and a future as we learn to trust Him more and more.

Nancy Kent

February 27, 2010

Non Campus Mentis

Read: UMH #156

The new History teacher had been teaching his seventh-graders about World War II, and a test question was, "What was the largest amphibious assault of all time?"

Expecting to see "the D-Day invasion" as the answer, he found instead on one paper, "Moses and the plague of frogs."

Well, those frogs really did give Pharaoh what for, so it's nice to know that someone was paying attention in Sunday School, even if he missed the regular school lesson.

It's never fun to get one wrong, but how often do you have Bible stories come to mind in "everyday" life? It's kind of nice to have those stories in our heads, isn't it?

February 28, 2010

Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face

Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face;
here would I touch and handle things unseen;
here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
and all my weariness upon thee lean.

This is the hour of banquet and of song;
this is the heavenly table spread for me;
here let me feast, and feasting, still prolong
the hallowed hour of fellowship with thee.

Here would I feed upon the bread of God,
here drink with thee the royal wine of heaven;
here would I lay aside each earthly load,
here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
the feast, though not the love, is past and gone.
The bread and wine remove; but thou art here,
nearer than ever, still my shield and sun.

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by;
yet, passing, points to the glad feast above,
giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
the Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.

Horatius Bonar

March 01, 2010

Who is Your Betty?

Read James 1:22-27

Over the summer I read the book “Garlic and Sapphires” by Ruth Reichl, a former food critic for the New York Times. One of the challenges of being a food critic is getting restaurants not to recognize you. The goal is to review based on the experience someone like you or I might receive at a four-star restaurant – not based on the service given to Times critics. Reichl’s book chronicled the many disguises she endured in order to eat inconspicuously, and the treatment she received as a result. For Le Cirque, a one-time stomping ground for the likes of Martha Stewart and Rudy Giuliani, Reichl dined as “Molly,” a retired school teacher from Michigan. She was “Brenda,” a bold, bohemian redhead for her trip to Daniel Boulud’s new restaurant. But the disguise that stuck with me most was the one she created for her meal at Tavern on the Green.

Reichl’s “Betty” was inspired by a woman she saw on the bus one afternoon. Reichl watched the woman climb onto the bus, “her swollen fingers chafed against the string handles of the shopping bag they held.” Reichl noticed the ragged hem of the woman’s dress, and that her grey hair appeared “chopped at the bottom, as if she had scissored it herself.” The woman fell forward as the bus lurched to a stop. That’s when Reichl decided to offer the woman her seat.

“For me?” the woman asked, surprised. “Thank you, dearie. No one ever stands up for me.” She added, “Sometimes...I feel invisible.” At that moment, Reichl knew that “invisible” was just what she needed to be for her visit to one of the more expensive restaurants in the city. And invisible she was. Betty spent most of her evening at Tavern on the Green flagging down waiters; feeling unnoticed. The waiters, she noted, acted like they were doing her a favor anytime they glanced her way. Her soup arrived 40 minutes after she ordered it. It was cold. Even worse, throughout the night – even on her way to and from the restaurant – no one smiled at Betty, or even said “hello.”

Since reading the book, I’ve often thought about Betty. Is she the crazy man on the street corner who is speaking to himself, or the exasperated woman behind the counter at my favorite coffee shop? Have they been flashed a smile yet today? We’ve all heard the old cliché that you should walk a mile in someone else’s shoes before judging them. We might consider eating dinner in someone else’s shoes as well.

It’s sometimes easy to forget that Jesus befriended the invisible and ostracized in his society. Jesus would have reached out to the Bettys of the world, too.

Beth Versical

March 02, 2010

Positive Attitude

Joshua 1:9 *"Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

I was recently in Baton Rouge, LA with my sister. As many of you know, she is battling breast cancer, and it has been a rough year. I am amazed at her courage and determination. She isn't letting anything get her down. I went down to be with her as she began her chemo treatments, and have been to Louisiana several times in the last year. We have spent hours talking, often about inconsequential things, but also about concerns for what is happening to her. She has told me that she isn't going to be a cancer patient with a big C on her forehead. She wants to live every day as a gift and thank God for it. There are problems along the way. She lost her hair, but it will grow back. She might have fatigue or stomach upsets, but the next day will be better. Her clothes don't fit the same way, but that's a good reason to go shopping.

We have used each day to get closer to each other, but also learning daily to be strong and have courage. God is providing for her. God is watching over her family and giving us strength to face the challenges that each day brings. Many people don't realize that Margaret is going through chemo or radiation. She has a smile on her face and keeps a positive attitude. She reminds me of the Energizer bunny because she keeps going and going. She wants to live her life to the fullest everyday with a strong faith. There may be times she feels down, but that's when she rests and wraps herself in a prayer shawl and spends quiet moments in prayer.

I think we could all learn from Margaret and have a positive attitude. She wants me to thank her Michigan friends for all the cards and prayers for her. She knows that having a positive attitude is her part in making all the prayers work as she struggles with the big C.

Prayer: Lord, be with all those who struggle. Help us to have courage to face the trials of our lives and live each day as a testament to our faith. Amen.

Libby Van de Putte

March 03, 2010

Lessons in Life

Acknowledge Him in all thy ways and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:6)

A friend sent me the following via an e-mail just before Christmas. Sorry I can't provide you with the accompanying pictures and music but I think you'll find it very meaningful just the way it is.

1. Life isn't fair but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
4. Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and parents will. Stay in touch.
5. Pay off your credit cards each month.
6. You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
7. Cry with someone. It is more healing than crying alone.
8. It's okay to get angry with God. He can take it.
9. Save for retirement starting with your first paycheck.
10. When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.
11. Make peace with your past so it won't screw up your present.
12. It's okay to let your children see you cry.
13. Don't compare yourself to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
14. If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it.
15. Everything can change in the blink of an eye. But don't worry because God never blinks.
16. Take a deep breath, it calms the mind.
17. Get rid of anything that isn't useful, beautiful or joyful.
18. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
19. It's never too late to have a happy childhood. But the second one is up to you and no one else.
20. When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
21. Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
22. Over prepare, then go with the flow.
23. Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear purple.
24. The most important sex organ is the brain.
25. No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
26. Frame every so called disaster with these words: "In five years, will this matter?"
27. Always choose life.

28. Forgive everyone everything.
29. What other people think of you is none of your business.
30. Time heals almost everything. Give time, time.
31. However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
32. Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
33. Believe in miracles.
34. God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.
35. Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
36. Growing old beats the alternative—dying young.
37. Your children get only one childhood.
38. All that truly matters is the end is that you're loved.
39. Get outside everyday. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
40. If we threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
41. Envy is a waste of time. You already have everything you need.
42. The best is yet to come.
43. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
44. Yield.
45. Life isn't tied up with a bow, but it's still a gift.

With your life experiences, I'm sure you could come up with some additional life lessons to add to this list.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your mercy, grace, and forgiveness that sustain us as we learn life's lessons.

Pat Deck

March 04, 2010

Liberty

"Proclaim liberty throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Leviticus 25:10

In January of 2009, Cleopatra Rigas Greenwell VERY kindly invited me to be a part of the bell choir. I was thrilled, because I had played bells when I was in the youth program at First United Methodist Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I had many fond memories of our director, sweet Georgia Woolrich and of that cute Luke Finchem, who played the big, low bells.

I was nervous to play with the venerable musicians of GPUMC, but they were welcoming and patient, and I have grown to very much enjoy rehearsing and sharing our anthems with the congregation. It is just SO much fun to make music with other people!

The Bible verse above is printed on the Liberty Bell in Freedom Hall, Philadelphia, PA. I wanted to write about bells and the bible, and liberty fits in well. One definition of liberty is freedom from servitude and bondage. Synonyms for liberty include permission, license, privilege and immunity. I feel that playing with the bell choir at GPUMC has given me increased liberty.

How so? I was nervous before our first anthem in church – imagining that ugly C# rung instead of the correct C – losing my place after the page turn (although Noelle would whisper the correct measure number to me) – ANYTHING could happen and that would be embarrassing. Then I remembered that when we make music, we are worshiping God. One cannot make a mistake in worship, and one cannot worship wrong. I was given permission (liberty) to joyfully ring and the experience is indeed a happy one.

After we play, many church members have graciously complimented our music and how much they enjoy hearing the bells. Jen Dixon wants us to play for little Kate's wedding! I want to thank them for the privilege (liberty) to share that music with them. It is such fun to play that I feel indulged by the congregation's audience.

I also have the liberty (PRIVILEGE) to play with such a kind and talented group of people every week. Cleopatra always reminds us of the messages we convey in worship – she makes it quite a profound spiritual experience. Charlie can play fifteen bells at the same time! My neighbor, Sue, is so calm, she never misses a note, and I have appreciated her welcome. I love the silly jokes that come from the Van de Putte (boys?) men. I have liberty to have fun and enjoy these wonderful people.

That's where God is for me – in the people. Thank you, God, for the lovely experience of making music with the GPUMC choirs. Amen

Anne Sullivan

March 5, 2010

Where are Your Trophies?

Read: UM Hymnal #504

Last week, while walking downtown, I passed by the well-known DuMouchelle Auction House. The windows on one side of the building were filled with the most amazing collection of wild animals one could imagine in one place.

The large lions were in a running position, and filled large sections of the windows. This piqued my interest, and I entered the building to take a closer look at the animals. The collection was even more impressive when seen up close.

It was evident this large collection of animals from all over the world represented a lifetime of perseverance, energy, dedication, and resources to assemble.

I walked over to the man at the desk and asked if this was a single collection or a combination of many.

He said, "No, these trophies all belonged to one man." He was a Detroit auto executive whose name I recognized. "All of his trophies are for sale."

This statement reminded me of the refrain from one of the best-loved songs of the church by George Bennard -

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.

The executive had laid down his trophies.
Where are your trophies?
Would you exchange them for a cross and a crown?

Doug Ross, Sr.

March 6, 2010

Pray for Rain and Bring Your Umbrella

Read: Mark 11:23-25

The minister's little six-year-old girl had been so naughty during the week that her mother decided to give her the worst kind of punishment. She told her she couldn't go to the Sunday School Picnic on Saturday.

When the day came, her mother felt she had been too harsh and changed her mind. When she told the little girl she could go to the picnic, the child's reaction was one of gloom and unhappiness.

"What's the matter? I thought you'd be glad to go to the picnic." her mother said.

"It's too late!" the little girl said. "I've already prayed for rain."

Ah, the faith of a child. She prayed, actually believing that God heard and would answer. Pretty cool, eh?

When's the last time you prayed, knowing that God heard and would answer?

When will the next time be?

March 7, 2010

O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
your loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your savior come,
and leap, ye lame, for joy.

In Christ, your head, you then shall know,
shall feel your sins forgiven;
anticipate your heaven below,
and own that love is heaven.

Charles Wesley

March 8, 2010

His Eye is on the Sparrow

“Look at the birds of the air; the neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” Matthew 6:26, 10:29-31

For those of you who know me, this past year has been a year of many changes: retirement, family illness, economic worries, a graduation for one child, changes in job and location for another child, continuing concerns for the third. It has been a rough time. Through it all, the one constant has been faith. Prayer has been a part of my daily life. Many people say why bother? Are prayers answered?

One thing I know for sure, prayers are indeed answered. God is watching out for those I love. God is watching out for me. Maybe we don't always understand the events in our lives, but overall there is a greater plan for us. I like to be in control, but there are many things that I don't have control over. It's very hard to relinquish the control. Remember the phrase, “Let go, and let God.” That's what we have to do. If we offer our prayers to God, we are letting go.

As a prayer, here are the words to the gospel hymn, “His Eye is on the Sparrow.” Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come? Why should my heart feel lonely and long for heaven and home? When Jesus is my portion, a constant friend is He. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches over me. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me. I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Libby Van de Putte.

March 9, 2010

Devotion

Read: John 15:12-17

When we think of the devotions in this book we think of memorable events, acts of kindness or wondrous happenings. Each Sunday the bulletin has a list of those serving in the military. The service of these who have volunteered to serve the country wherever they are sent is easily pushed to the back of our minds since it is remote and mostly does not touch us directly. This is a different kind of devotion - - one of devotion to the country, to the safety of their families and friends, and to preserving our way of life.

This devotion evolves into an even greater devotion to their fellow servicemen and women and brings a closeness not understood outside the military. Devotion to the point of self sacrifice (sounds a lot like Christ).

One returning soldier responded when asked why he served "to keep the F in VFW"

A special thanks to all.

Jack Van Becelaere.

March 10, 2010

Walk With Me During The Wilderness In My Life

Read John 14:15-19

Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:20

When the road gets tough to walk alone, many times we hear the call to 'walk that walk' with our friends and colleagues or we call a friend ourselves for that helpful hand. Sometimes, the calls from others come at just the wrong time, but nothing is more important to the person who calls than to have you 'walk the walk' with them at that moment – not later – THEN.

It doesn't matter what situation prompts the request for that wilderness walk, but what is important is that we willingly hold out our arms and take the hand of the caller and start walking their wilderness walk with them. Jesus promised to be with us always – we know he will see us through those wilderness journeys (our own or others), but sometimes He speaks through us to others. At that moment and time, as an 'other', is when we hold out our hand in a loving manner to the one in need and begin their wilderness walk with them.

Prayer: Thank you Dear Lord for being with us as we walk those wilderness journeys whether they are own or journeys with others in need. Help us to always be ready to extend our hands and arms to those in need and guide us to allow you to speak through us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Have you heard a call to walk the walk with someone in need?
What did you do about that call from their wilderness?

Carolyn Barth

March 11, 2010

What About Your “Wonderful Life”?

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

Over the years I’ve realized that inspiration comes from a wide variety of sources, some expected and some not at all so. As well, I’ve found myself remarkably touched by things both extraordinary and everyday. For these experiences I am always grateful, for I believe God uses any and all persons (and their attendant means) willing to channel a message of divine love and grace into a world not largely attuned to it.

I have at home a collection of films that are popularly associated with Christmas. Some of my favorites are Frank Capra’s “It’s a Wonderful Life,” and the various movies based on Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” (about which I wrote in these pages a couple years ago). The former, as most of you probably know, is the story of the fictional George Bailey who, finding himself at the end of his rope, wished he’d never been born. His guardian angel (Clarence) was able to allow George to see what life in Bedford Falls would be like if this indeed were the case. Having come to his senses, he realized what a wonderful gift his presence truly was among the people of his time and place.

Sometimes it is quite easy to think of ourselves as “small” and having little usefulness in a larger scheme, perhaps discouraged by limitations that occasionally overwhelm. I admit that I have had these thoughts from time to time. Perhaps you have, too. If and when we do, it is always helpful to bring to mind the countless experiences and events that would not have taken place but for our presence in the world. Carrying this further, contemplate the vast future possibilities for blessings that yet can be brought about. I think we will all be astonished!

The theme of “It’s a Wonderful Life,” as stated by Frank Capra, Jr. (the son of the film’s producer-director), is “Everyone’s life touches so many other lives.” To me, this is a way of expressing the spiritual unity of God’s creation within a world of seeming differences and separation. Remembering and acting upon our interconnection can bring about layers of blessing to a world long ago found to be weary and worn. We each have a role to play. God relies on it!

Dear God,

Whenever I am tempted to think of myself as having limited value or usefulness to You or others, send Your Holy Spirit to lift me to a higher plane where I can readily see and appreciate the oneness of Your creation and the love You have for every part of it. Help me, too, to express this love as Your Voice so reveals. Thank You very much. Amen.

Doug Dykstra

March 12, 2010

I Shall Not Want

Read Psalm 23

Growing up in the Methodist Church every since I was a little girl, this has been my favorite passage in the Bible. As I get older, it has become even more important to me.

In the midst of challenges of life, I often use this as a mantra....repeating it over and over again. It seems to calm me and helps to remind me that the Lord is my Shepherd and I will be protected in this life and the life to come. God never gives me more than I can handle; even though there are times when I question this.

When our daughter, Jami, died almost 9 years ago, someone said to me, "When God closes a door, he opens a window." At the time, I did not understand that this was even possible. But it is!!

There are many opportunities for each of us to do his work and to be the kind of person he would want us to be. When we are faced with challenges, we must listen to him and be pro-active as we figure out how we will get through another challenge/crisis. God helps us to be strong, but we must also help ourselves.

As I stated earlier, "The Lord is my Shepherd"...

Karen G. Leigh

March 13, 2010

Grandma's Meatloaf

Read 1 Corinthians 9:10-12

A new bride called her mother one evening in tears.

"Oh, Mom, I tried to make Grandma's meatloaf for dinner tonight, and it's just awful! I followed the recipe exactly, and I know I have the recipe right because it's the one you gave me. But it just didn't come out right, and I'm so upset. I wanted this to be so special for George because he loves meatloaf. What could have gone wrong?"

Her mother replied soothingly, "Well, dear, let's go through the recipe. You read it out loud and tell me exactly what you did at each step, and together we'll figure it out."

"Okay," the bride sniffled. "Well, it starts out, 'Take fifty cents worth of ground beef...'"

I've always heard that it's important to know the context of what you're reading. I guess it really does pay to know something about when and where what you're reading was written!

March 14, 2010

And Can it Be That I Should Gain?

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Savior's blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain!
For me? who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
let angel minds inquire no more.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach th' eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley

March 15, 2010

A Still Small Voice

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:11-12

After Christmas I spent 6 packed days in NYC with my younger daughter, Leah, who is still in school there. We had a truly wonderful time of museums, shows, opera, parks, food, very cold weather, packed subways and, of course, crowds. The first day we were there we decided about 5 p.m. to go to Rockefeller Center to hang out. Well, the crowds were crushing not in small part because the Center has been cordoned off because of a suspicious package that someone had left. (The package turned out to be someone's lunch). But the noise and bustle was overwhelming even for seasoned New Yorkers. NYC is a busy place all the time for sure but what we experienced was definitely a notch above the usual.

The next day we met GPUMC church member, Jack Aranda, at Christ UMC near Bloomingdale's where he attends church now he is a New Yorker. The church was spectacular, the message was inspirational and the coffee hour was very friendly – just like Methodists! I can see why Jack goes there. He confided in me that as much as he loves the city, he needs a church family to bring him to reality. He said that sometimes during a weekday he will slip into a nearby church, any church, to be alone and to center himself. Given what most people know about NYC, there is certainly a need for that.

But in many ways each of our lives are not all that different from that of a New Yorker and we all need to find a place to clear our minds, calm our emotions, pray and listen to God's directions for our lives. Of course, none of this is new for most of you. The hymnal is full of hymns that reminds us to do the same thing such as Take Time to Be Holy, Be Still My Soul, and Sweet Hour of Prayer. So that the end result is that He can raise you up on Eagles Wings!

Vivian Anderson

March 16, 2010

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

Read I Corinthians 13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians. 13:13

To love and be loved is a basic driving force in life. Most of us believe that love is the most powerful force in the world. The Apostle Paul tells us that without love we have nothing. As such, people are always looking for love and hoping they find it. We've just celebrated Valentine's Day, a day devoted to love, albeit romantic love rather than brotherly or charitable love.

We say "without love we are nothing" and "it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all". So where should we be looking for love and how will we recognize it? It's a quest that has led people to many of the wrong places and the results can be disastrous. Many songs, books and court cases deal with lost love, forbidden love and unrequited love. Being in love with the idea of love isn't any guarantee we will find love.

To find love, we need to go to the source of love, God, and his teachings about love. In 1 John, the Bible teaches us that "love is of God", that "we must love one another", and that "if you abide in love, you abide in God". We love because God first loved us. Love is the rule for fulfilling all rules. In fact the great commandment God give us is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12 and Matthew 22). Man cannot love his neighbor unless he loves himself and he cannot truly love himself unless he loves God. What an amazing connectedness: love God, love yourself, love your neighbor. We love God because of his sacrificial love for us. It is only through his love that we are able to love. We need to love ourselves in spite of our shortcomings. Ask God to help you with your weaknesses, not overlook them. We need to love others in spite of their shortcomings. Ask God to help you look for the good in others, not focus on their weaknesses.

Love has some pretty amazing qualities: you have to give it away to get it back, it has no limits on its growth, it can't be bought but it is more valuable than anything that can. The results of living loved are an abundant life and the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Ask God each day to help you be aware of his loving goodness and to be an agent of that loving goodness. Seek out opportunities to show his love and celebrate that love.

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Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the example of love in your Son. Guide us daily to seek your love and to give evidence of your love to others. May others know we are Christians by our love.

Pat Deck

March 17, 2010

It's Impossible

Read: Galatians 2:20

We have to push ourselves to work hard if living a Christian life is important to us. Don't we? Please consider the following quote.

The Christian life isn't difficult--it is impossible. If we don't know that, we will try to do things ourselves. Faith is not necessary when we think we can do it ourselves. Faith comes along when we realize that we cannot do it on our own. -- Joseph Garlingen

When God leads us into situations that are uncertain, isn't he providing the challenge that will allow our faith to grow? So by personal struggling to overcome the situation aren't we becoming better Christians? It seems the key to it is making ourselves available to God; turning ourselves over so that God can use us to his best purposes.

If we are to believe Garlingen's quote he seems to be saying that only by putting God in control can our faith become stronger. Only by learning to depend on God can we grow in our faith. In contrast, if we depend more on our own strength than we depend on God, we will simply be measuring our personal growth.

How can we learn to turn our lives over to God? Pray every day to express thankfulness for God being willing to live through us, and offer yourself to God for God's uses. Be conscious always of how God might be using us in everyday situations to accomplish his work on earth. Be on the lookout for instances of God working through others.

Most important, we must remember that just when it seems hardest to turn things over to God, that's the time when we need it most.

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory,
Are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes
from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians. 3:18*

Joy Baker

March 18, 2010

Shoulder Rolls

Read Isaiah 30:21

For some reason whenever Charlie asks for a Lenten Devotion, my thoughts turn to our dog, Toby. Being from a suburban community is hard on a dog of Toby's nature who is built to run, so most Friday late afternoons I meet Heidi and Diane Martin with their dogs Kooder and Bonnie (Toby's good and perhaps only dog friends) at church. At the back of the property the dogs can be supervised off-leash to roam and sniff.

As soon as the phone call from Heidi comes, Toby starts whining in anticipation and pretty much continues all the way to church (good thing it's a short ride). He leaps from the car, delighted to explore and run for the joy of running – it's a beautiful thing to watch. The dogs chase the occasional rabbit or squirrel, and one time they even cornered a possum. Once in a while they stray from the property and have to be reminded where they belong (Kooder is amazingly adept at "selective hearing").

Too often for my taste, Toby engages in what Dave and I now refer to as the "shoulder roll", which involves rubbing and rolling in the most obnoxious-smelling thing he can find on the ground. This necessitates a humbling ride home banished to the "back-end" of the car with the windows open and an inevitable bath. Ironically, this situation brings to my mind our relationship with God. He gives us the free will to explore and shares our joy. Sometimes we stray, and He calls us back to the right path.

Even when we make bad mistakes, He is there to wash away our sin and guide us back to where we belong. Praise God and give thanks for His many blessings!

Sue DeWitt

March 19, 2010

Evidence of God

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...

Romans 1:19-20

Through the ages, mankind has sought to gain an understanding of God. That search has led us in many different directions, yet the Holy Scriptures tell us that the power and nature of God is clearly revealed in His creation. Numerous references are made to nature throughout the Bible from the first few verses in Genesis to the parables of Jesus. Modern man has developed complex scientific techniques with which to unlock many secrets of nature, yet the more we know the more we realize that we do not know.

Consider the tremendous flight capabilities of birds such as the peregrine falcon. This bird is only slightly larger than a crow, yet is able to reach speeds over 200 miles per hour in controlled flight during descents from high altitudes in pursuit of prey. Other birds such as eagles can soar effortlessly on air currents while in search of food. How do birds learn to fly and soar? It is not through education and training as with humans, but rather through their instincts that they know when and how to leave the nest and begin flying. I like to think of their instincts as God's programming that is exquisitely placed in their small brains for use when needed.

Another example from nature is the miraculous story of the Monarch butterfly. This beautiful creature seems so weak and fragile to us; yet, a careful study shows us just how strong and durable it is. We see Monarch butterflies in the spring and summer and marvel at their beauty as they go from flower to flower in our yards gathering nectar. Did you know that the Monarch butterfly species performs a migration of over 2,500 miles during its life-cycle? Most butterflies reproduce and die in two to six weeks. Once every four generations, some Monarch butterflies hatch in Canada, make their way through our area in Michigan, cross the United States into Mexico and spend the winter in the mountains of central Mexico. The journey takes many months during which the butterflies navigate across many different types of terrain, find food for sustenance, endure bad weather, avoid predators and time it all so that they arrive in central Mexico before the oncoming winter makes it too cold to survive. This fourth generation lives six to eight months before producing the next generation which starts the northern migration to their original homes. Not bad for a small creature that weighs just one fifth of an ounce!

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We serve an **awesome** God. As we are shown repeatedly through examples in nature, God is all powerful and able to give us everything we need for an abundant, fruitful life. All we have to do is to acknowledge Him and to trust Him.

Prayer: Lord, Thank you for your miraculous creation on earth through which we can gain insight into Your power and divine nature. Help us to always remember that just as you take care of the creatures in nature, you are more than capable of taking care of us through our journey of life. Amen

Let us worship our Creator God, as we seek to know more of Him through His creation.

Mitchell Kent

March 20, 2010

Sunday Dinner at Grandma's House

Read: UMH #621

Little Jimmy and his family were having Sunday dinner at his grandmother's house. Everyone was seated around the table as the food was being served. When Jimmy received his plate, he started eating right away.

"Jimmy! Please wait until we say our prayer," said his mother.

"I don't need to," the boy replied.

"Of course, you do." his mother insisted through gritted teeth. "We always say a prayer before eating at our house."

"That's at our house," Jimmy explained. "But this is Grandma's house and she knows how to cook."

That story is pretty funny, but it also made me think about how we view prayer.

Prayer shouldn't be a "just in case I can't handle it myself" kind of thing. It should be a "there's nothing we can do now, so we might as well pray," a last resort.

Prayer is just talking with my Father. He loves me and I love Him. I want Him to know what's going on with me, and I want his wisdom and guidance, and all I have to do is ask.

Have you talked with your Father today?

March 21, 2010

Com, O Thou Traveler Unknown

Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell Thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on Thy hands, and read it there;
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

In vain Thou strugglest to get free,
I never will unloose my hold!
Art Thou the Man that died for me?
The secret of Thy love unfold;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

My strength is gone, my nature dies,
I sink beneath Thy weighty hand,
Faint to revive, and fall to rise;
I fall, and yet by faith I stand;
I stand and will not let Thee go
Till I Thy Name, Thy nature know.

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me!
I hear Thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure, universal love Thou art;
To me, to all, Thy bowels move;
Thy nature and Thy Name is Love.

Charles Wesley

March 22, 2010

Benchmarks

Read: Colossians 3:23-24

It has been just over two years since I merged my small business with another business based in Livonia. One of the reasons we picked this company for our merger, was they offered marketing advice, and implementation of that advice, to local companies in need of finding new business. This is accomplished by listening to the owners discuss where their business has been, successes in current products, new products and trends anticipated and other background information. We take this data and develop a simple plan targeting areas where their expertise would be best accepted and acted upon. Most small businesses do a great job running their business, but need assistance reaching out and getting their company noticed in the right places. Our initial interview is free and the resulting plan is outlined and costs quoted.

How does this all relate to my relationship with God? One aspect is that our marketing 'guru' is a smart woman who has had a difficult life, but uses those experiences, coupled with her strong 'reborn' Christian faith, to work with our customers in a direct way that assists them to reach their goals. Each proposal is tailored to their actual need and focus, with no agenda other than making the best use of the available resources. Our intent is to make our customers successful. Her Christian faith is never mentioned, but is evident in her considerate and measured approach to the customer. Coming from this perspective is not always perfect, but matches my historic approach treating customers with respect and desire to create a long-term relationship that benefits all involved ... my customers, their potential customers, and hopefully us too.

Where does the GPUMC come in? Attending church and interaction with the Christian members helps remind me about keeping the right perspective in approaching the various complicated areas of the business world. We all know that today's commerce is always changing, but there are certain underlying benchmarks that can be applied. Prompting those benchmarks is the GPUMC.

David DeWitt

March 23, 2010

Breaking Bread Together

“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47

We Methodists are noted for always passing the plate and having food when we gathered together. Who doesn't like food? We have fabulous cooks to supply tasty dishes and delicious desserts for our body nourishment and our pleasure. But what does this have to do with being a Christian? Wendy Whiteside in her study book *Food & Faith happily* had answers I had never thought about.

“The early church recognized the benefit to the community of a regularly shared meal.” In fact, Communion doesn't end with Holy Communion. When we gather as a church family for a meal, it is an “extension of the Communion table.” “The presence of God in our lives is shared in community when the faithful gather for substance in the form of fellowship and food table.” Wow!

In order to have community in a church, we need to eat together. Something we at Grosse Point UMC love to do. A district superintendent was appointed to a district in crisis. There was no community, morale was low. He met with the district pastors and asked them this question: “When was the last time you ate in each other's home?” The answer was “*never*”. The DS left saying he could do nothing about morale if they were not eating together. They listened and changed. “Eating seals the bonds of friendship. Food draws us together and fellowship keeps us together.”

What happens after church in Fellowship Hall with our coffee hour is the community of faith open to all. It is a time for visitors, guests and members to gather together to exchange welcoming greetings, good wishes for the coming week and to show God's love to each. Remember at the next soup supper, Lenten Dinner, retreat, Gumbopalooza, or church activity that features food “we are bound together as a community of faith in the sharing of food and fellowship”!

Prayer:

Most holy and gracious God, help us to learn more about your holy Word and your will for our lives. May this Lenten season be a time for us to remember that we are yours and you provide our every need. Feed us the bread of life that we may hunger no more. “Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven feed us till we want no more.” In Christ's name we pray, Amen

Karen Bromley

March 24, 2010

Work in Process

Read: Isaiah 64:9

Joel Osteen says we are all a work in process, that God is continually working to improve us. We should remember that and not dwell on past mistakes or failings. If that is so - - from my observations some of us are much further along in the process than others. It isn't my place to judge; but I can have an opinion.

Difficulties and setbacks should not be unexpected, but rather we should know they are but bumps along the way in God's process. Our role in this process is to keep working to improve; to reduce mistakes and missteps and get closer to the person God has planned for us to be.

Looking ahead to the better you is much more productive than looking back to missteps or failures. God has expected those and has plans for us to overcome them as we travel the paths He has in store for us.

Keep faith in God and expect His plans to come to be; revel in the goodness of his favor; and give thanks for His blessings.

God is at work on your behalf.

Jack Van Becelaere

March 25, 2010

Providence

Read Psalm 43:3-5

GPUMC is my church. Well, it's OUR church. After all, as the song goes, we ARE the church. What amazes me is how I landed in this church 25 years ago. Makes me wonder at those who say God doesn't have a plan – even if He doesn't move us like chess pieces, I believe he at least uses an outline. Here's why.

Let's go back about, oh, 85 years. My mother was a girl in the small town of Ranger, TX. Another family, the Davenports, lived in that Texas town. One of them was Mary Edlo Davenport. My mother knew her.

In the mid-1940s, my mom, who was raised in a Christian Scientist household, had met a guy, my dad, who was raised in a Roman Catholic household. They were married and moved to Detroit where my brother and I were born.

When Art and I were 7 or so, Mom decided we needed Christian education. By that time, Mary Edlo Davenport (remember her, from Ranger, TX?) had grown up, married, and was Mary Edlo Thompson, the Sunday School Superintendent at Grosse Pointe Methodist Church. You know what's coming. Art and I received our early Christian education at GPMC.

Coincidentally, or maybe not, my buddy in elementary school attended Christ Methodist Church. He talked me into attending a gym and swim with their MYF when I was 13. I met Lynn Grose (his girlfriend) who, 10 years later, became my wife. After we started our family we made the reluctant decision to leave Christ UMC (by that time Methodism had become United Methodism) because of the children's programs available at GPUMC. We've been here since then, over 25 years ago.

I couldn't make up that series of seemingly coincidental encounters and events but I know who could. I'm here now because God wants me here. His hand is in all we do and I thank Him for bringing me to this point in my life. I'm looking forward to learning what He has in store for me and my church, Grosse Pointe United Methodist.

Fred Van de Putte

March 26, 2010

Checked Out

Read: Micah 6:7-9

I find that I am in a funk. I have “checked out” emotionally and mentally. “Out” of what I am not sure. Everyday life? Maybe not the everyday routine stuff but the stuff that matters? I am not sure, but I find I have been more reflective. I was especially interested in this year’s various Martin Luther King Day celebrations. I think because of my own state of mind, I am searching for Dr. King’s vision. I was inspired and excited at the celebration held at our own church; the idea of a beloved community is a wonderful concept. I had come across the following poem (or prayer) by Maya Angelou last June and felt like it was a prayer FOR me; meaning, I needed this prayed for me.

Reflecting on the Lenten season, this poem came to mind again. I was thinking; why not take on the tasks ourselves? Working toward a non-violent, caring, full of love no matter who or what or where kind of community. A beloved community. What if instead of asking God to speak for those with no voice, WE do the speaking; for those who are lonely, WE keep them company? I know I have it in me; I have seen it before. I am willing to take the journey and ask God to help me find it again; to become the person full of the Spirit and Love that will help me be a better Christian and better person. What better time to start the journey than now with the promise of Easter before me.

I hope this poem/prayer inspires you as well. I hope that we can pray it and reach the final goal – Peace.

PRAYER by Maya Angelou

Father Mother God, thank You for Your presence during the hard and mean days.
For then we have You to lean upon.

Thank You for Your presence during the bright and sunny days, for then we can share that which we have with those who have less.

And thank You for Your presence during the Holy Days, for then we are able to celebrate You and our families and our friends.

For those who have no voice, we ask You to speak.

For those who feel unworthy, we ask You to pour Your love out in waterfalls of tenderness.

(continues)

For those who live in pain, we ask You to bathe them in the river of Your healing.

For those who are lonely, we ask You to keep them company.

For those who are depressed, we ask You to shower upon them the light of hope.

Dear Creator, You, the borderless sea of substance, we ask You to give to all the world that which we need most – Peace.

Amen.

Laurie Stowell

March 27, 2010

Let it Shine, Let it Shine, Let it Shine

Read: John 8:12, Matt 5:13-16

One day on the way home from church a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?"

The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true too?"

Again the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the girl. "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?"

Let His light shine in your life, so that everyone who sees you will want whatever it is that you have.

When they ask you what it is, you can tell them **Who it is!**

Amen.

Palm Sunday - March 28, 2010

Depth of Mercy

Depth of mercy! Can there be
mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear,
me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood his grace,
long provoked him to his face,
would not hearken to his calls,
grieved him by a thousand falls.

I my Master have denied,
I afresh have crucified,
oft profaned his hallowed name,
put him to an open shame.

There for me the Savior stands,
shows his wounds and spreads his hands.
God is love! I know, I feel;
Jesus weeps and loves me still.

Now incline me to repent,
let me now my sins lament,
now my foul revolt deplore,
weep, believe, and sin no more.

Charles Wesley

March 29, 2010

Worship is Dangerous

Read: Psalm 43

What is worship? It's our response to God's Love. It's working out our love for Him.

Since we love God, that means we want to spend time with Him; but you know, I've decided that it's pretty dangerous to spend time with God. It's dangerous because it means spending time with the One who never changes – Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and always. It's dangerous because God's not satisfied with leaving us alone. He wants us to become just what He created us to be, and He'll keep pushing and pulling and chastening and blessing us until that's what happens.

Oh, and even though that's what we always say we want – that we want to be what God has created us to be – I know that it's much easier to say that than to mean it.

What if God wants me to be something that I don't think I'll like? Frankly, that's much more likely than the other way around. Moses wasn't much interested in the job offer he got at the burning bush. Jeremiah had his doubts. Jonah turned the job down cold.

So what would make me think that I'd like God's offer any better than they did? Nothing, really, and that's why I say spending time with Him is dangerous. It's where I want to be, but it's bound to result in what I **should** do instead of what I **want** to do, in what I **should** be instead of what I **want** to be.

Go back and reread the story we used as the introduction to this year's book. You'll find two people, Daniel and the narrator, who both spent time with God, who both ended up changed in ways they wouldn't have anticipated, but neither of whom would trade that change for their original plans.

Prayer: Father, give me the courage to act on the trust I have in You. Help me to remember that what you want for me is always far better than what I think I want for myself, and that Joy beyond happiness is what awaits me. May Christ live in me the life you have chosen for me. Amen.

Charlie van Becelaere

March 30, 2010

Jesus Never Fails

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Matthew 24:35

The passage from Matthew brings back childhood memories of my parents and conversations they shared about Rev. Arthur Luther, a beloved pastor who performed their wedding ceremony in 1953. Rev. Luther was an inspiration, and in fact, he is the one who encouraged my Dad to enter into the ministry (and he did.) While I was growing up, I remember sitting in church and frequently singing a hymn called, "Jesus Never Fails." It was composed by Rev. Luther and definitely one of my parents' favorites.

I recall my Dad sharing the story behind this hymn with his own congregation. As a child, Rev. Luther wanted to be a missionary in a foreign land, but that never materialized. He had a genuine love of music, and he dreamed about composing a popular song for everyone to sing, and he tried, but that was a dismal failure. In 1927, he became involved with an evangelistic team, often traveling to very remote places in the United States. It was in one of those places, that the hymn was born. Late one night, Rev. Luther received a telegram from home, with news that his nine year old son was rushed to the hospital suffering from a life threatening illness. He had no way to get to his child who was 600 miles away, and there was nothing he could do, other than pray. After praying, he sat down at the piano and this thought came to him, "Jesus never fails." Then and there, the words and the music of the chorus were born. Rev. Luther went on to explain that after writing the song, he felt a sense of peace in his heart, believing that God, who never fails, would provide an answer, and he did. His son survived the medical crisis.

Jesus Never Fails

Earthly friends may prove untrue,
Doubts and fears assail;
One still loves and cares for you,
One who will not fail.

Though the sky be dark and drear,
Fierce and strong the gale,
Just remember, He is near
And he will not fail.

In life's dark and bitter hour
Love will still prevail;
Trust his everlasting pow'r
Jesus will not fail.

Chorus

Jesus never fails,
Jesus never fails,
Heav'n and earth may pass away,
But Jesus never fails.

c. 1927 Rev. Arthur Luther (1891-1960)

Over the course of time, the Lord has used this song in concentration camps in Germany and by missionaries all over the world. Soldiers continue to use it on the battlefield. The song has been translated into ten different European languages and Chinese. During World War II, a church in England had the slogan printed on top of a wall. It escaped destruction from bombs until the end, and even then, the wall still remained standing.

In his hour of need, God put a song in the heart of Rev. Luther which has gone on to bless the entire world with its message of divine triumph.

Dear God, help us all to remember that difficult times should be the stepping stones to our spiritual growth and usefulness. Amen

Cindy Rolka

March 31, 2010

Humility

Read Philippians 2: 5-11

Humble. Humility. Humiliation. All three words come from the Latin root: *humus*. It means “dirt”...the soil, the rich earth out of which things grow. The word *humiliation* is related...to be humiliated is to be brought back down to the earth. The word *humble* also finds its meaning in this root word. Humble people may take their life’s work very seriously, but they take themselves lightly.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Think for a moment if that were the only verse of Scripture available to you for meditation. Take everything you think, believe, and understand about yourself, the world, even the way you form opinions and decisions and set them aside. Now, “take up the mind of Christ Jesus.” Conform and mold all that you are after Christ’s way of thinking.

Paul says Christ “emptied himself; did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited; and took on humanity in the form of a slave.” What a change Christ made for the sake of the whole world...salvation. Paul does not talk about what a good teacher Jesus was or about the miracles he performed, or anything that might distract from the essential message: Christ was God; he humbled himself to humanity and then to death as an ultimate gift of self-denial for our sake.

In this season of Lent, may we be open to reflect on our understanding of humility. How might the practice of humility enrich our life of faith? What role might it play in our speech, our actions, our decisions, our lifestyle and our relationships? Who might benefit from our gift of servanthood in the name of Christ? Paul offers some answers in verses 1-4 of this same chapter.

Judy May

Maundy Thursday - April 1, 2010

Feast of Love

Read Luke 22:17-20

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" Luke 22:19

In preparing for a discussion on the book *Food & Faith* by Wendy Whiteside for my fellowship group, I have gained a new understanding of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Communion is an act "of sharing intimate fellowship with God."

Our Wesleyan tradition calls it "an outward sign of inward grace." Whiteside *writes*, "In this sacrament we find a place where God offers each of us, in tangible ways, a channel for receiving God's grace." In communion Jesus created a new Covenant and proclaimed our sins forgiven. "Every time we eat the bread and drink from the cup, we are to experience Jesus' love and grace anew to strengthen and encourage us on our faith journey."

Methodists call the consecration and sharing of the elements *The Great Thanksgiving*. We take the bread and wine and we are restored by receiving grace. But communion shouldn't stop there. I had never thought of Communion requiring a response from us. Whiteside says, "We should respond to this gift with joyful hearts and acts of caring and kindness toward others. "In giving thanks we receive the gift of gratitude. Thanks to God for his goodness, for the gift of Jesus and our life in him is the key to our joy" Once we have this joy we are ready to serve God.

Whiteside makes clear that Holy Communion is the communion of the church, the gathered community of the faithful. It is more than a personal event. "Communion is a reaffirmation of our commitment to the family of God. We eat and drink both in acknowledgments of common loyalty and in anticipation of being strengthened for discipleship in the world."

The hymn: *Come, and Let Us Sweetly Join*

*Come and let us sweetly join, Christ to praise in hymns divine;
Give we all with one accord glory to our common Lord.*

*Hands and hearts and voices raise, sing as in the ancient days;
antedate the joys above, celebrate the feast of love.*

*Jesus, dear expected guest, Thou art bidden to the feast;
For thyself our hearts prepare; come, and sit, and banquet there.*

*Sanctify us Lord and bless, breathe thy Spirit, give thy peace;
Thou thyself within us move, make our feast a feast of love.*

Karen Bromley

Good Friday - April 2, 2010

O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done

O Love divine, what has thou done!
The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's coeternal Son
bore all my sins upon the tree.
Th' immortal God for me hath died:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Is crucified for me and you,
to bring us rebels back to God.
Believe, believe the record true,
ye all are bought with Jesus' blood.
Pardon for all flows from his side:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Behold him, all ye that pass by,
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,
and say, "Was ever grief like his?"
Come, feel with me his blood applied:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

April 3, 2010

Keep On Keeping On

Read: 1 John 1:5-9

One rainy afternoon I was driving along one of the main streets of town, taking those extra precautions necessary when the roads are wet and slick.

Suddenly, my son Matthew spoke up from his relaxed position in the front seat: "Mom, I'm thinking of something."

This announcement usually meant he had been pondering some fact for a while, and was now ready to expound all that his seven-year-old mind had discovered. I was eager to hear.

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

"The rain," he began, "is like sin, and the windshield wipers are like God wiping our sins away."

After the chill bumps raced up my arms, I was able to respond.

"That's really good, Matthew."

Then my curiosity broke in. How far would my little boy take this revelation?

So I asked, "Do you notice how the rain keeps on coming? What does that tell you?"

Matthew didn't hesitate one moment with his answer: "We keep on sinning, and God just keeps on forgiving us."

I will always remember this whenever I turn my wipers on.

I think I will also remember this when I turn on my wipers.
I hope you will too.

Easter Sunday - April 4, 2010

Christ, The Lord, Is Risen Today!

"CHRIST, the Lord, is risen to-day,"
Sons of men and angels say!
Raise your joys and triumphs high:
Sing, ye heavens; thou earth, reply.

Love's redeeming work is done;
Fought the fight, the battle won:
Lo! the sun's eclipse is o'er,
Lo! he sets in blood no more!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ hath burst the gates of hell:
Death in vain forbids his rise,
Christ hath opened Paradise.

Lives again our glorious King!
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Once he died our souls to save;
Where's thy victory, boasting grave

Soar we now where Christ hath led,
Following our exalted Head:
Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

King of glory! Soul of bliss!
Everlasting life is this,
Thee to know, thy power to prove,
Thus to sing, and thus to love.

Charles Wesley (from 1739)



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UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Grosse Pointe United Methodist Church is alive and rejoicing as we reach out to our community and beyond, living the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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