

First Presbyterian Church

Lenten Devotional Booklet
2018



**Journey to the
Cross**

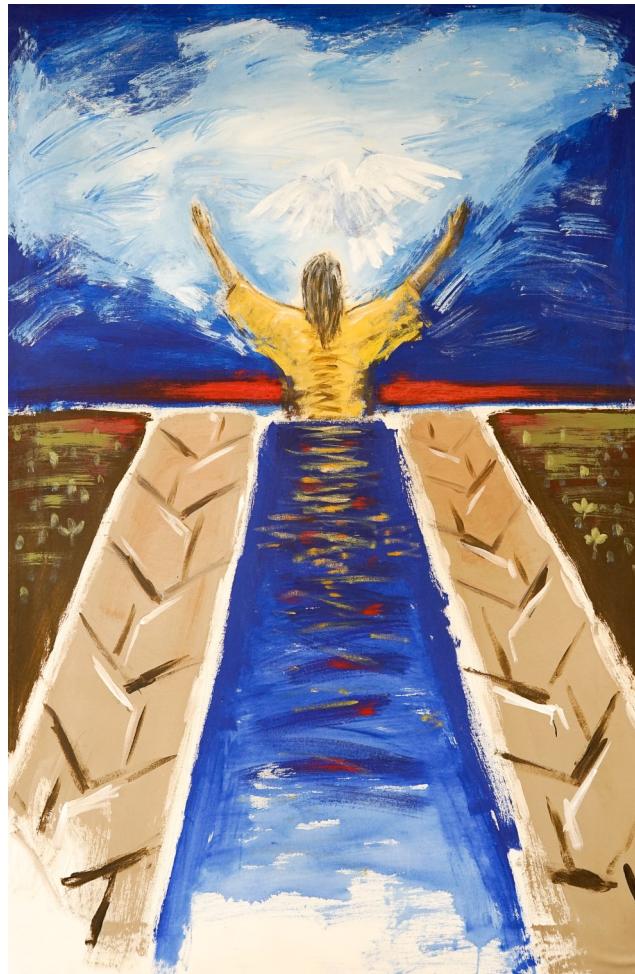
February 14

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 3:13-4:11 “Surrender”



Geoffrey Dicks



Jim Shearer

February 15:
Galatians 217-21

In today's passage Paul addresses in a very complex way a very simple concept. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not by the law we receive salvation, but by our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and living as a reflection of his example as a servant. We, as sinners, crucified Jesus. This does not mean Jesus serves sinners, but that our nature died on the cross with him and our new nature is born from Jesus sacrifice for us. We must now live as servants from our sins instead of servants to our sin. By our faith Jesus lives in us and we are healed by his grace.

Dear Lord, dwell in me and make me a servant worthy of your sacrifice on the cross. It is by your grace I live a life of service devoted to your praise. Thank you for your sacrifice for me. Amen.

February 16

Isaiah 45:9-11

If any of you have worked with your hands, be it woodworking, knitting, peeling a potato, painting, or as a potter, you understand how integral pressure is to the finished product. You are the master of the materials you work with, or at least we strive to be. I have ripped out many stitches in my days.

We have a Master also - a perfect master. He applies the exact amount of pressure we need to be formed into his perfect creation. If we resist or question his guiding hand, we open ourselves up to the pressures of this world. The results can be as subtle as the potter forming an off center vessel to dynamite blowing up rocks at Mt. Rushmore. Both forms are equally dangerous. The wrong form of pressure, that which we bring upon ourselves, is destructive. Yielding to your Master's pressure is refining and leads to a beautiful creation.

Who are we to question God's touch in our lives? Don't let the pressures of this world blow you up. Let the Master's constant, perfect touch turn you into a beautiful diamond worthy of the Lord's crown.

Dear Lord, let us daily seek your will in our lives. May we remember to yield to your guiding hands that we will become the creation you saw in us from the beginning. Amen.



Misslers

February 17

Romans 12:1-2

Each morning I start my day by taking time to read God's word and asking him to lead me. I want to be rooted and grounded in God's ways, because his values are different than the world's. And, I want to please Him, more than I want to make other people happy. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that we are to offer bodies as "living sacrifices" to God, doing the things that please Him. We are not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds on what God says is true and good. It goes on to say that *this is our spiritual act of worship to Him, So we honor and please God when we take the time to get to know him and trust him, obey his commands, are grateful for the things he provides, and when we care for and serve others.*

-Chris Mayer



Barret Kaltz

February 18

Matthew 20:24-18, 23:1-12 "Servant"





Ann Phillips

February 19

Galatians 5:13,14

For you are called to Freedom brethren: only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Our culture's view of freedom:

1. The state of being beholden to no one.
2. The ability to pursue happiness without threatening the happiness of others.

Samuel Coleridge's view:

"Rightly understood, it is a universal license to be good."

The Christian view:

In gratitude for Christ's removing the chains of our past sinful lives and giving us lives of unquenchable exuberance (which we so often decline) we joyfully love and serve others.

- Bert Ebi

February 20

Joshua 22:5

Keeping God's Commandments

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matt 22: 38-40)

In these clear and simple terms Jesus summarized the teachings of centuries past. Later, just prior to His death, he added a new commandment: "That you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn 15:12)

This is a profound and remarkable new teaching, for it asserts that no longer is our love of others to be calibrated according to our own internal standards of self but rather it is now to be compared to Christ's redeeming sacrifice for all God's children!

That is a sobering challenge for anyone.

Prayer (*Richard of Chichester, 1236*)
*May we know Thee more clearly,
Love Thee more dearly,
And follow Thee more nearly,
Day by day.
Amen*

-Alan Brailsford



Jose Brailsford



Barret Kaltz

February 21
John 12:23-26

Being Fruit

Jesus calls us to follow him and serve him. We must put him first, “giving up” our lives in this world. I believe this means we need to be willing to give up worldly things and worldly values and turn instead to focus on spending our time serving him, which means serving others. He tells us that in order to do this we must “be with him”. We cannot serve him if we are not connected to him. We must be in an active relationship with him, walking next to him, talking with him, steeped in scripture, being engaged with other Christians who also know him. He wants us to be constantly with him as we strive to do his will, follow and serve him.

I think this is kind of hard to do! Can I look in the mirror and say that I do this? I don’t really think so. I try to serve him through my various church, service and work activities. But I’m not sure I can say that I always feel that I’m walking by his side when I do these things. I do feel connected with him in the morning when I sit and read my daily devotional and scripture and pray. But after that I quickly drift out of his presence into my worldly day. This Lenten season I will make a commitment to stop several times a day to close my eyes and just try to “be in his presence” and feel him walking beside me.

-Sue Young

February 22

Proverbs 11:25

“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes will himself be refreshed.”

It is fairly easy to be generous with money but Jesus sets the example for us to be generous with our time and talents and He teaches us to do this with love.

The regrets I have in my life are when I missed an opportunity to show kindness. When I held back and did not reach out. Those failures of compassion remain like a thorn in my memory. We may never know how a simple act of kindness and love may impact another person. Often my words sound inept to my ear but I trust the Holy Spirit to make them right so I reflect God's love and mercy.

What a great promise God gives us. “...he who refreshes will be refreshed.” We can experience God's joy when we treat people with grace and kindness.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing us with the Holy Spirit. Fill us with your Spirit so that our lives increasingly reflect your will. Open our eyes to those that are lonely, discouraged and in need of comfort. Allow your Holy Spirit to work through us and serve God with whole hearted devotion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

-Diane Missler



John Barr

February 23

Matthew 18:1-5

Today's passage opens with Jesus' disciples asking him who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, no doubt envisioning an earthly hierarchy of power and privilege, their pride and ambition on full display. But Jesus calls a child into their midst, a living example of weakness and humility, and tells them that they must change and become like this child in order to enter the kingdom.

We learn so much from children, who approach the world with frank acknowledgment of how little they know, and with such joyful curiosity and determination to learn as much as they can. They run to the arms of a parent or beloved caregiver without pretense and with a sense of total dependency, confident of receiving nurture, comfort, instruction and unconditional love.

Jesus tells his disciples, and us, that we must become humble as a little child, and further, that we must welcome and care for the weak and humble among us as we would for Jesus himself.

Dear Lord, help me to put away all pride and pretense, and to teach me humility. Help me to acknowledge my total dependence on you. Open my mind and heart so that I may learn your will and walk in your ways, and always receive and care for the humblest and most vulnerable of your children. Help me to see you in them. Amen.

-Janet Witkowski



Alexandra Slanec

February 24

Isaiah 58:9-11

How interesting that I should get this passage. The idea of making Christianity “attractive” has been on my mind. The passage says (NIV):

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.
And the Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.

How do we make Christianity attractive? We don't grumble and criticize. We're patient and loving. We do good works. We show the beauty of God in everything we do.



Beckie Dicks

Other verses to reflect on:

Philippians 3:14-15: Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

Matthew 5:16: In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Is this me? When I go throughout my day am I a light? Do people who know I'm a Christian see God's light reflected in my actions? Am I selfless and loving? Are my works good and done in a manner that is pleasing to God? Do people who don't know I'm a Christian see there is something different in me? Something attractive that they want too?

Prayer: Lord, through my words and actions, let my light shine for you. Guide me. Amen.

-Lynette Carlson

February 25
Matthew 18:12-14 "Shepherd"



Ann Phillips

February 26

Psalm 23

In describing the Lord as a shepherd, David wrote out of his own experience because he had spent his early years caring for sheep (1 Samuel 16: 10,11). Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance, and protection. The New Testament calls Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10:11); the Shepherd (Hebrews 13: 20,21); and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). As the Lord is the Good Shepherd, so we are his sheep—not dumb, frightened, passive animals, but obedient followers wise enough to follow one who will lead us in the right places and in right ways. This psalm does not focus on the animal-like qualities of sheep, but on the discipleship qualities of those who follow. When we recognize the Good Shepherd, we need to follow him!

When we allow God, our shepherd, to guide us, we have contentment. When we choose to sin, however, we go our own way and cannot blame God for the environment we create for ourselves. Our shepherd knows the “green pastures” and “still waters” that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently. Rebelling against the shepherd’s leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests. We must remember this the next time we are tempted to go our own way rather than the shepherd’s way.

Death casts a frightening shadow over us because we are entirely helpless in its presence. We can struggle with other enemies—pain, suffering, disease, injury—but strength and courage cannot overcome death. It has the final word. Only one person can walk with us through death’s dark valley and bring us safely to the other side—the God of life, our shepherd. Because life is uncertain, we should follow this shepherd who offers us eternal comfort.

In Middle Eastern culture, hosts were expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with God. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us throughout our life and to bring us into his home forever.

Taken from: Life Application Study Bible
Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

-Bunny Barr

February 27

John 15:1-5

When we moved into our current home, we inherited a row of scraggly looking pink roses. My husband bought a book at the garden center called, All About Roses, where he learned proper care and pruning. Using his newfound knowledge he diligently feed, watered and pruned, cutting some of the bushes down drastically. The next season our pink roses flourished so well that our neighbor commented, saying, "Those roses have never looked so good!"

Rose bushes are similar to grape vines in that they require a loving caregiver to prune them in order for them to have the greatest yield. When Jesus used the analogy of the vine and branches, he painted a picture for His disciples (us) of what the nature of their relationship to God is. We cannot bear fruit unless we abide in God. When we let our thoughts, attitudes and actions block our ability to grow in ways that are more Christ-like; God intervenes.

The periods in our lives where we struggle; whether it is due to illness, loss of a loved one or the desire for something that seems far out of reach, make us feel as though we are being pruned to the core of who we are as individuals. God, the gardener, uses those times to strengthen us and bring us closer to Him, if we let Him. Jesus told His disciples that they had already been pruned by the message that He had given them (John 15:3). It is the same message we can find by reading His word and spending quiet time in prayer. Doing this encourages us to remain in Christ so that we will bloom and grow into people who produce much fruit, and bring glory to God.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for your loving presence in my life. Guide me today, and help me to remember to remain close to you so that I will produce good fruit and be refreshed and nourished by your unconditional love. Amen

- Nancy Slanec



Jose Brailsford



February 28

Isaiah 40:11

The Lord Jesus in this passage will provide all that is necessary for his people. He will guard and govern his people. He will provide protection and a shelter against danger. If we are willing to accept what he has to offer, it will truly be a blessing. Not only will he provide securing for us but to the next generation, our youth, as well.

To summarize, Our Lord Jesus's nature is one of a mild, gentle and tender characteristics. He has a real interest in us. He has a real concern for our youth. He also has a real concern for our family members who have special needs.

We need to imitate Our Lord Jesus until he comes.

Dear Lord Jesus, help us to become shepherds to all of God's Children. Help us to be mirror images of you in all that we do and say. Let us be kind, considerate and compassionate to all that we meet in our daily journeys. Amen.

-Bill Kennedy



DeHamer

March 1

John 15:11-15

The PW Horizons Bible Study this year, *Cloud of Witnesses*, discusses the importance of Community. Our Cloud of Witnesses are the Christians that built a foundation for our faith by modeling a relationship with God through a caring & nurturing community with a rich history of traditions. These relationships reflect the beauty of God's love for us. God lives in us and through us; We are his hands and his feet. We are invited to participate in the life of God. We participate in the life of God by showing Christian, caring love for each other as Jesus loves us.

According to Melissa Bane Sevier, the author of *Cloud of Witnesses Horizons Bible Study*, "A living God is the God who is active and caring, calling people to light instead of darkness, glory in place of gloom, and to a party instead of issuing a warning to stay away."

As the youth so beautifully taught us through their Christmas play, *Angels Aware*, Jesus came to us as a baby so we could learn to love and cherish Him, and as a human, to teach us how to have a relationship with Him and to show us how we should all relate with each other.

Through our relationship with Christ and the support of this community, may we share our love as we respond to concerns in our family and friends, our church, and our neighborhood. Help us to create a welcoming community. Just as our Cloud of Witnesses taught us, send us now to do the same for others.

-Jane Mykytenko

March 2 - World Day of Prayer

Ezekiel 34:11-16

This passage reminds me of the story of a sheep who wandered away from its flock and was lost for several years. The sheep was found living in a cave at the most remote part of a mountain. He was unrecognizable. The person who found the sheep needed to carry it down the mountain because the fleece was so overgrown and heavy it could not walk.

At times, we all lose our way like the sheep. We may make bad choices, but GOD does not condemn us, he looks for us. He seeks those who have walked away from HIM and found themselves lost and alone. As disciples, we need to pray to GOD and ask for his help to seek those who are lost, bring back those who were driven away and bind up those who are broken and weak, and lead them back to the true shepherd, Jesus Christ.

-Shereen Lind



March 3

John 15:16-18

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

Jesus told His disciples to go and bear lasting fruit. I feel that He meant for them to go out into the world and spread the word about His love and grace. To do this was dangerous and Jesus knew that His disciples would need to be strong. He told them to love one another because to give and receive love is strengthening.

Back then as now there was a segment of society that looked down on and ridiculed christians and the church. Jesus was telling His disciples then and now us to not be discouraged when he said "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first."

Dear Heavenly Father thank You for loving me unconditionally. May Your love be an example for me to see others as you see them and love them as You have commanded.

-Bob Missler



Ann Phillips

March 4
Matthew 5-7 "Sage"



Jim Shearer

March 5

Psalm 1:1-3

As I read and reread this passage, I'm at a loss on what to write about it. For over 25 years, I've made it a practice to read the Bible daily, going from Genesis to Revelation each year, changing translations each January 1st.

The days that I am too busy to read a section, I find myself missing the peace that comes making the time, not to mention the guilt I feel as if my life is too important to make time for God.

Daily spending time with God's word gets me started in the right perspective for the situations I will face during the

day and hopefully helps me make Christ-like decisions at least most of the time. I do know it cuts down on television time, so I'm spared the porn and violence of so many shows and commercials while giving me time to knit hats for those in need of warmth from the hat (and the knowledge that someone cares enough to make it for them); to listen as friends pour their hearts out to me, even if I don't have anything but an ear or maybe a hug to offer to them; and to be a friend to those I meet at breakfast, at work, At Eastern Star functions or wherever I end up each day.

This is not saying I'm perfect - far from it! It does say God gives me His way for my life and I'm able to take the bad when it comes (not without kicking and screaming sometimes) along with all the blessings He gives me - a warm house, food on the table, people around me that love me and, most importantly, eyes to see and ears to hear His beautiful creation in the flowers, the fresh snowfall, the birds, etc. Plus there's the best gift of all in Jesus.

Faith in God has opened many doors to me that I might have passed by if it wasn't for the teachings of Jesus to how to live my life. He has shown me that all good things come from His and even the bad are not as bad as what Jesus faced for my sake, so who am I to complain (I still do sometimes, though). He has shown me He is ultimately in charge and most days that is enough for me.

Dear God, help me to see your plans for me as I try to take to heart Your words for my soul. Help me to remember that Your plans for me are always for good, even if I don't see them that way at the time. Thank You for the beauty of Your creation, even when it blows my mind as I consider its minuteness and its vastness that are both beyond comprehension. Amen.

-Dottie Kennedy



Ann Phillips

March 6

I Corinthians 1: 18–25

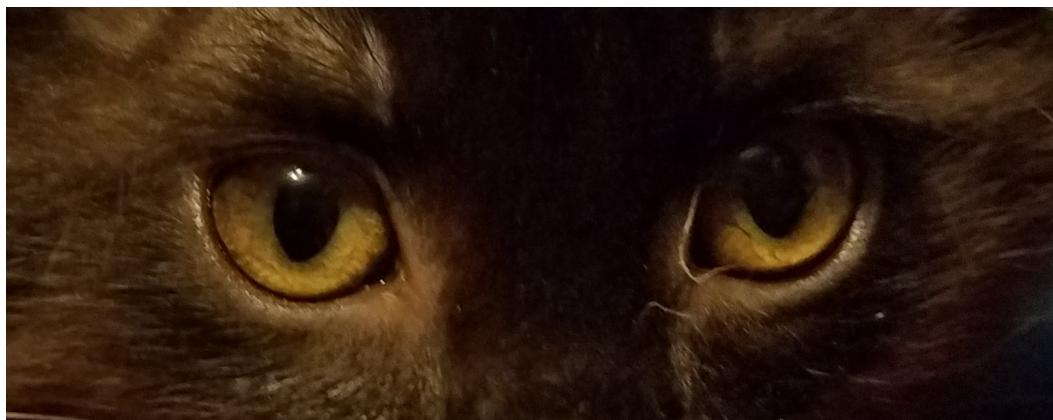
Besides my good looks, I consider my intelligence to be my greatest attribute. But, then again, what do I know? The truth is, I really don't know much. I have lived half a century and still a world of knowledge awaits me. And is this a bad thing? No! I can't wait to read every book within my reach on any and every topic, so hungry am I for knowledge. Knowledge is power, for with knowledge comes understanding and with understanding comes humility.

Isaiah 29: 14 states, "Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish." I suppose some people who hear this may take the words as a warning and they may be afraid, but as a student of life, I find the words exciting because I find them to be humbling and humility opens the door for better understanding. The apostle Paul paraphrases Isaiah in I Corinthians 1: 19. "For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'" The words Paul uses to summarize Isaiah affect me differently than the original phrase.

As a teacher and true pursuer of knowledge, the last thing I want to feel or cause is frustration. Yet, in his words, I hear a great promise and a great reminder. I should never confuse my knowledge with God's knowledge because "The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (I Corinthians 1: 25) Knowledge is empowering when it comes to understanding the world, but when it comes to understanding God, it can be a stumbling block. Hung up in the wisdom of the world, we may confuse our role with Jesus' role, Jesus "who has become for us wisdom from God." (I Corinthians 18: 30) Books can't bring us closer to God, our own wisdom cannot lift us higher – only Jesus and his wisdom.

Should I then give up my pursuit of knowledge? No. Knowledge is good - the more I read, the more I learn – about my world, about people, about the universe. And one book in particular keeps reminding me of life's most important lesson: There is a time to put down the books and look inside myself rather than inside the pages, to let go and let God.

-Charlie Aronson



Beckie Dicks

March 7

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

I've been practicing listening to God with some diligence for a few years. I think I'm getting better, but there is still room for growth. A lot. Sometimes maybe a piece inside me doesn't *want to hear*. *That would be the part where I lack the discipline to listen to and accept God's will.*

Discipline. This is hard for me! I grew up with lots of punishment and no discipline.

I have a hard time dragging myself out of bed on Sunday mornings. Friday and Saturday nights I tend to stay out late with the thought of sleeping in the next morning. A night owl by nature, I do not like to get up early. Things can get crazy in my life- my job, keeping up my home, volunteering, being a mom, a daughter & an aunt - and I often don't get enough sleep. So when my furry 4-legged alarm clocks wake me on Sunday, they are met with groans!

Don't they know I can sleep an extra hour on Sunday?!? After putting the dogs out, I could crawl back into bed. Really- what difference will it make if I sleep in and skip church? I'll read the Bible later; going to church doesn't make me a Christian; I can still go to Einstein and host brunch; just a little more sleep . . . Then the real Sunday alarm goes off. Snooze. Snooze. Snooze. I better go- I know I'll regret it if I don't- what if I miss my favorite hymn, what if we have a visitor, what if the message is something I really need to hear...

I rush out of the house- no tea, no breakfast, no name badge- racing in to church half out of breath. I'm greeted at the door with a handshake and a smile. The usher hands me a bulletin and gives me a warm "Good morning". I take my seat in the back right and see familiar faces- some more familiar than others- but all happy to be together.

I go to church because I'm needy. I need to listen and be filled up with some good stuff because it's all been sucked out of me during the week. When we slip-up on our path (and we all do) we need to get back on track. Sure we can read the Bible on our own, listen to sermons online, read Christian inspiration, but is that enough?

Not for me. For one thing, I'm not disciplined about giving those activities my undivided attention. In church, I stay focused for an hour -OK my mind wanders but there is something to bring it back- stand, sit, sing, pray.

I need all that. I think other people do too and they don't realize what they're missing or why their lives are a bit out of whack, or how to get out of their funk.

Why don't they know? Why is church attendance down? We have all gotten used to just doing our own thing and marching to our own drum. Discipline is lacking in our budgets, our diets, our bedtime,

Self-discipline develops with the help of outside discipline- like schedules, classes, and others who hold us accountable. We need to keep practicing discipline till we get it right. Maybe going to church can help.

Dear Lord,

Give me discipline to learn your word and will so I know what I stand for.

Help me to understand that your will is what is best for me.

Give me strength that I may stand firm in my faith, even when I don't understand

Energize and revitalize my heart that I might live in Love.

Amen

Lynn Campbell

March 8

John 1:1-5

The light shines in the darkness

...And the darkness has not understood it (From NAS)

... and the darkness has not overcome it (From NIV)

John loves wordplay. His gospel is full of it - One Greek word, multiple meanings, each lending its own significance to the text. So here is the translator's puzzle: to select one word in English, and only one word, to complete the sentence, without losing too much meaning.

I imagine the befuddled translator going to John and pleading, "But which word translation should I use? What did you really mean?" And then I imagine John giving an enigmatic smile and answering, "yes, it's exactly what I meant. I meant to leave it that way." You see, there is beauty and profundity in the ambiguity. He does it on purpose.

This passage is a perfect example: I could ask, "John, '*Katelambano*.' *What exactly did you mean by that? Did you mean that the darkness hasn't understood the light, or that the darkness hasn't overcome the light?*'"

I believe he would smile and answer "yes, that's just what I meant. *Katelambano*."

What am I as a non-Greek-Bible-reader to do? Both words fit. How am I supposed to know what the original Bible meant? What is the Bible really telling me? How am I supposed to study this passage?

This is why it's so great that we have so many translations. Each Greek word has many flavors - so many shades of meaning. So if I look at the choices of more than one translation, I start to see the bigger picture.

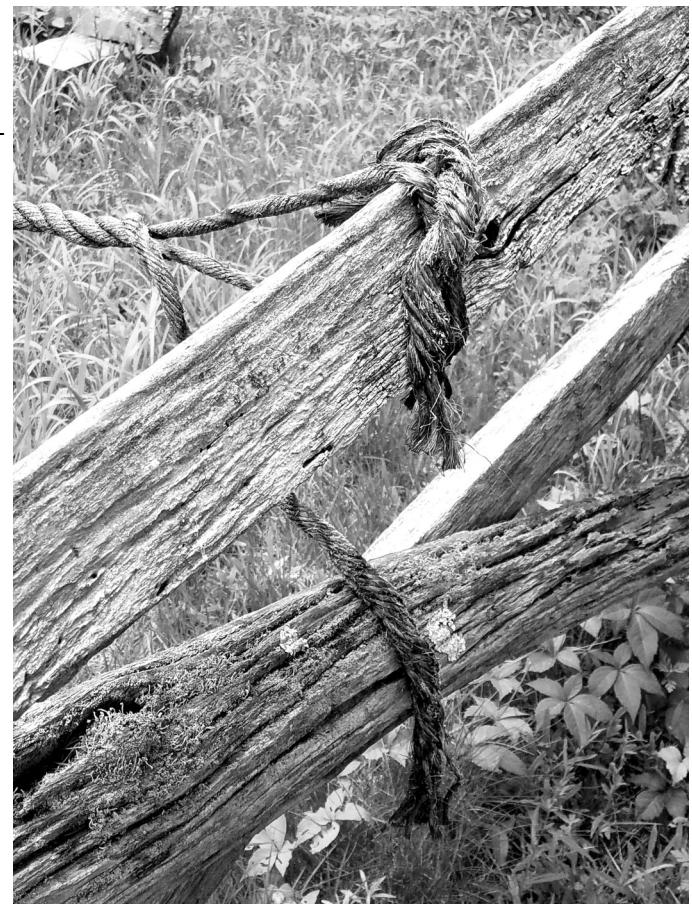
Understanding. Overcoming. Both require a certain kind of power over the object, or maybe dominion is the word I'm looking for. "Apprehend" overlaps pretty well...

Okay, enough technical talk. Let's cut to the chase:

Darkness cannot touch the light, either in comprehension or in power.

And those are words to live by. So let's live bravely.

-Beckie Dicks



March 9

Isaiah 55:8-11

*...For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.*

Every day, every moment,
an opportunity
to turn toward God.

Every day, an opportunity
to abandon
the delusion of omnipotence,
the illusion of omniscience.

Every day, with every trial,
the chance to look beyond,
the chance to look toward,
The chance to trust

in something, someone,

bigger than myself.

God, give me courage to trust.

-Beckie Dicks



Barret Kaltz



Betty Brown

March 10

James 1:5-8

Wisdom is a word not often heard in a secular world which has become comfortable with malicious lying, stealing public money including charitable funds, murder, callous promotion of selfish celebrities, including once trusted highly intelligent professionals manipulating others for their own agendas.

Wisdom comes from God, having to do with understanding, truth, compassion, and knowledge. When Solomon asked God for Wisdom so he could rule Israel with justice, this pleased God. The wonderful example of two women claiming a highly prized male baby as her own shows how Solomon used God's Wisdom to see into the true mother's heart. "We will simply take a sword and cut the child in half, each mother receiving her half." Love of the true mother responded, "Give my baby to her."

Jesus was Wisdom personified. Confronted by a calculating mob trying to trap him in a difficult situation, Jesus simply knelt by the woman caught in adultery. He wrote on the floor of the temple in Jerusalem where he was teaching.

Our son, Pastor Guy, asked a chilling question in one of his sermons. "Why do we assume that Jesus wrote in dirt? The Temple of Jerusalem was the most beautiful building on earth at that time. Floors were made of gleaming marble. Perhaps what really turned the accusers away was the miraculous act of Jesus writing a commandment in stone, following the original act of His Heavenly Father. In His perfect Wisdom, Jesus completed and fulfilled as He always did, the Old Testament in the New."

-Brenda Ferguson

March 11

Matthew 10:16-25, 13:54-58, 16:24-36 “Suffering”



Misslers

March 12

Isaiah 53:3-4

The Wycliffe Commentary reports that “rejected by others” can be considered more exactly as “lacking men of distinction (as his supporters)”. Also, “as one from whom others hide their faces” is more literally “and (it was) like a hiding of face from him.”

Likewise the phrase “he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases” is more literally “sicknesses”. It goes on to comment that the subject matter here is the illnesses of the soul rather than the body and therefore “grieves” is more pertinent.

When I was a child, my brother and I were inseparable. He is a year and eight months older than me, but I was built bigger, and so we were equals in athletic ability quite early (by age 5 or 6). My brother, being older and more inclined to stretch the boundaries, often would petition me to support some act of childhood exploration that we knew would get us in trouble, if discovered by our mother (a stay-at-home mom all through our childhood). These excursions into the forbidden often involved leaving the yard and being well beyond the reach of my mother’s voice (the boundary we all recognized and were forewarned would be cause for punishment if broken).

There was usually a conversation between us when my brother got the itch to do something forbidden: “Mark, lets wade down the creek to the car dealership and then up the branch creek and see what’s there!” My reply, “Rod, Mom will call us, know we are gone, and we’ll get a whipping!” Rod, “Naw! We won’t be gone that long and she won’t know....”. Me, “HAH! We’ll get down there and you won’t want to come back, and we’ll be gone too long and she’ll come out and holler for us and we won’t be there and we’ll get a whipping!” Rod, “Well, if you are such a big chicken, then stay here! I’M going”....and off he would start. I would wait about 30 seconds, fuming, then I would say, “Hey, wait up! I’m coming too!” You see, I figured if I went along, at least I could encourage him to come back sooner and maybe keep him out of trouble..... Thus my brother abdicated his responsibility to listen to the voice of reason internally, and conferred that role to me....and he was able to freely enjoy the license to do what he wanted without guilt and he could count on me to nag him until he tired of exploration and agreed to go back home.

When we got home, of course, often our mother had searched for us, knew we were off somewhere, and was waiting for us to return with fire in her eyes. I still remember my brother’s demeanor as we stood before the judgment seat (my Mom, all 5’2” of angry eyes) and he would look at the ground, his feet, anywhere but in those eyes.....and he wouldn’t look in my eyes either.....

Continued on next page



DeHamer

...For my part, I knew I was guilty as charged, but I had sacrificed my goodwill with Mom to try and convince my brother to do the right thing and then had gone along with him as the voice of reason to try to limit his transgressions...to no avail. I hung my head and took the punishment because I knew any protest to Mom would be met with derision over my "good intentions". My actions had spoken louder and had condemned me just as certainly as my brother's had condemned him.

This early childhood behavior and dynamic continued between us well into high school. Looking back now, I realize that I may have used my brother as a rationalization to explain away my own culpability in various transgressions, but there was still often a kernel of hope that I could influence my brother to do the right thing and avoid punishments. That we survived those years is a testament to God's Providence.....

In some way, the words of Isaiah resonate with the feelings I had when my brother stood looking anywhere but at me (or Mom). If my brother had spoken up and accepted the responsibility for leading us astray (his idea and insistence to go), then my punishment may have been avoided. But instead, he turned his face away and allowed me to share a full measure of punishment (undeservedly so I thought, at the time). However, it was a punishment I risked many times in a effort to keep my brother from harm's way (or so I told myself).

-Mark Dearth

March 13

James 1:2-4

I had the privilege to serve in a Federal jury trial and wondered how it would feel to be accused. How would one face a trial wishing to be proved innocent? The prosecution will look to convince the jury that you are guilty. Evidence will be brought to link you to the accusation. People will be asked to speak about your character. You might be directly questioned about your actions, motives, and relationships. Your defense will seek to convince the jury that the evidence, your actions, and your character do not match the accusation. Ultimately the jury will decide if you are guilty or innocent. Can you imagine considering your trial nothing but joy?

We will have unexpected trials in life. An unjustified accusation, unexpected illness or loss of employment, persecution, temptations, or other trials will test your faith. The Greek for testing comes from *dokimos*, meaning used for the proving (testing) of coins, confirming they were genuine, not counterfeit or corrupted. Your trial will test your faith as genuine, your willingness to persevere, and build your trust that God loves you. Choose to be joyful as your faith matures through the trial.

-Brian Mayer



Ann Phillips

March 14

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

Do Not Forget the Lord: God tests us in order to know what is in our heart, and whether or not we will keep his commands. When He humbles us and causes us to hunger, it is to teach us that we don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from Him.

This morning when I woke, Coldplay's Viva La Vida was playing on the clock's radio. This has been one of Coldplay's most popular songs. You might know the song: I used to rule the world, Seas would rise when I gave the word. Now in the morning I sleep alone, Sweep the streets I used to own. . . . A powerful song about having been at the top and losing it, and how you'll be judged: "I know Saint Peter won't call my name".

I relate to this song's feelings of optimism, and the excitement "of rolling the dice". This moving song also helps us understand how fragile our success is: with our "castles" built on "pillars of salt and pillars of sand" and how everything can change.

In these good times, it is easy to feel confident, living like kings. Who needs God when you already have everything? But Deuteronomy 8:1-3 reminds us not to forget the Lord. For God tests us in order to know what is in our hearts. This could be especially true during the good times when we have the most opportunity to leverage what's in our hearts. And when God humbles us and causes us to hunger, we will learn that happiness is not provided by material things, but from our relationships built on God's word.

Dear God, we are so very blessed to live this long life, now, today: THANK YOU!! Please help each of us to understand what you call us to do. And help me find the strength and courage to do what I know in my heart needs to be done with the gifts You have provided.

-Doug Stormzand



Geoffrey Dicks



Ann Phillips

March 15

Philippians 3:8-10

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ...

Paul's at it again! For those of us who tend to speak in somewhat moderate terms, the apostle Paul's language can seem over the top. A bit hyperbolic.

Everything is garbage, he says.

Everything? Really? His education? His experiences? The faith of his youth? All those things that went into forming his thought processes, his speaking style, his personality? Garbage? Really?

So let's listen more closely to what he's saying: Through a supernatural experience, Paul met Jesus. It changed his life. It changed him, and he would never, never want to go back to what he was.

He had met his Lord, and his world shifted on its axis. Jesus now defined everything for him - righteousness, faith, power, wisdom. And his encounter with Jesus only made him hunger for more.

Everything that was so important to him before, everything that had defined him lost its significance in comparison. Down to zero on the significance scale. No, not just to zero, but to negative importance, relative to his relationship with his Lord. Jesus shone that brightly in front of him.

May God grant us even a fraction of Paul's vision and passion.

-Beckie Dicks

March 16

Isaiah 43:1–3

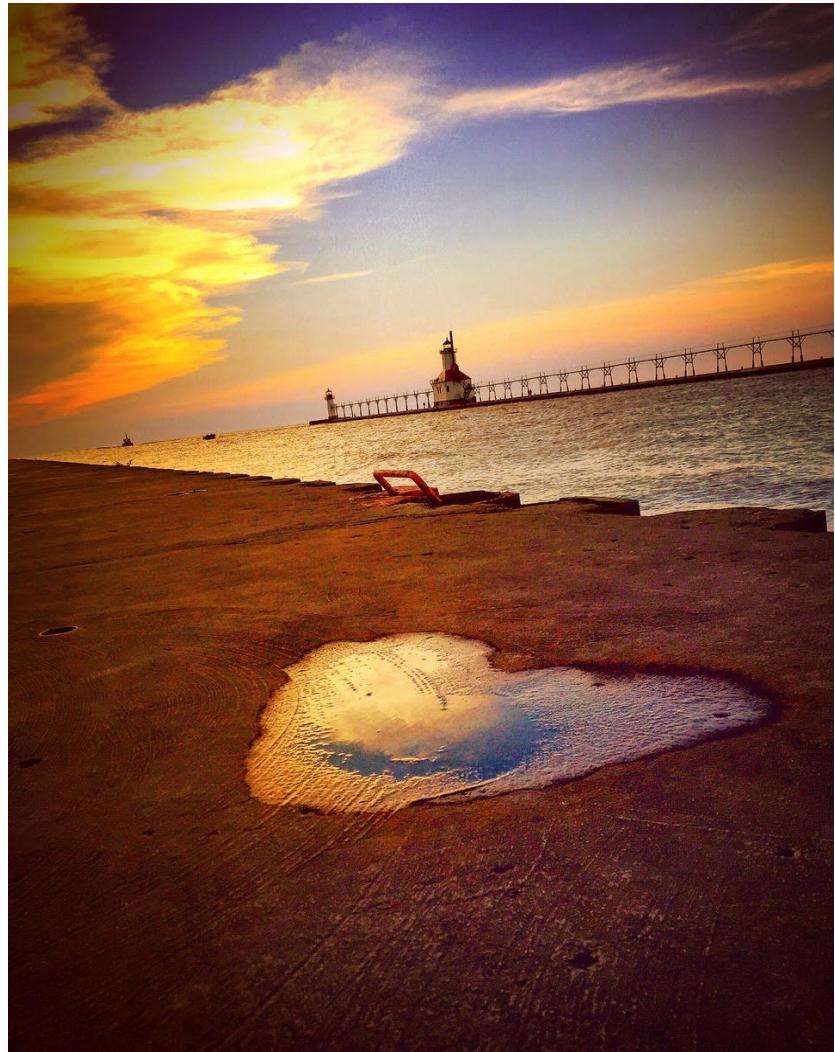
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. . . For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

These are the words of the Lord, his words to Israel and to us. In these verses, God reassures the people of Israel that, though they have sinned, though they have wandered from God, he will show them mercy, showering them with love, not wrath. These were God's chosen people, but so are we and like the Israelites, we sin, we stray from God.

We forget God in the hustle and bustle, as we wade through the waters of daily life. Yet, God's love is promised to us. He assures us that he will be there whether the waters of life are knee deep or chest deep. When the challenges of life become seemingly overwhelming, perhaps frightening like a raging river, God reminds us that he will protect us; he will not allow us to become submerged in troubles or hardships.

Some may wonder why. Why have mercy on a sinner like me? Because we are his children, formed and made by him, called by name, created for his glory. Though, like any good parent, he may become angered by our wandering off, frustrated by our strong-headedness, saddened by our self-destruction, he will always receive us in his loving arms.

-Charlie Aronson



Barret Kaltz



John Barr

March 17

2nd Corinthians 1:3,4

Today I will feel all the blessings of the Lord flow through my spirit and my soul, so that I may be a blessing to others. Let others see You in the twinkle of life in my eyes. Let them know the warmth of Your love by my smile. Help me to touch someone in a special way that encourages them to trust Your belief in them, so that they, too, will know peace in their soul.

-Matt Higgins

March 18

Matthew 9:9-13 "Surgeon"



Ann Phillips

March 19

Ezekiel 36:22-26

'...This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name...'

"Love your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:31

What is the nature of love? Is the love that we have for another reflective of that other, or is it reflective of ourselves? Are the boundaries of that love determined by the nature of the other, or are those boundaries dependent on our own nature?

God said to the Israelites, "It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone."

At first reading, this might seem like a rather self-centered view of love. But upon further reflection, it provides powerful insight on what biblical love can and should be.

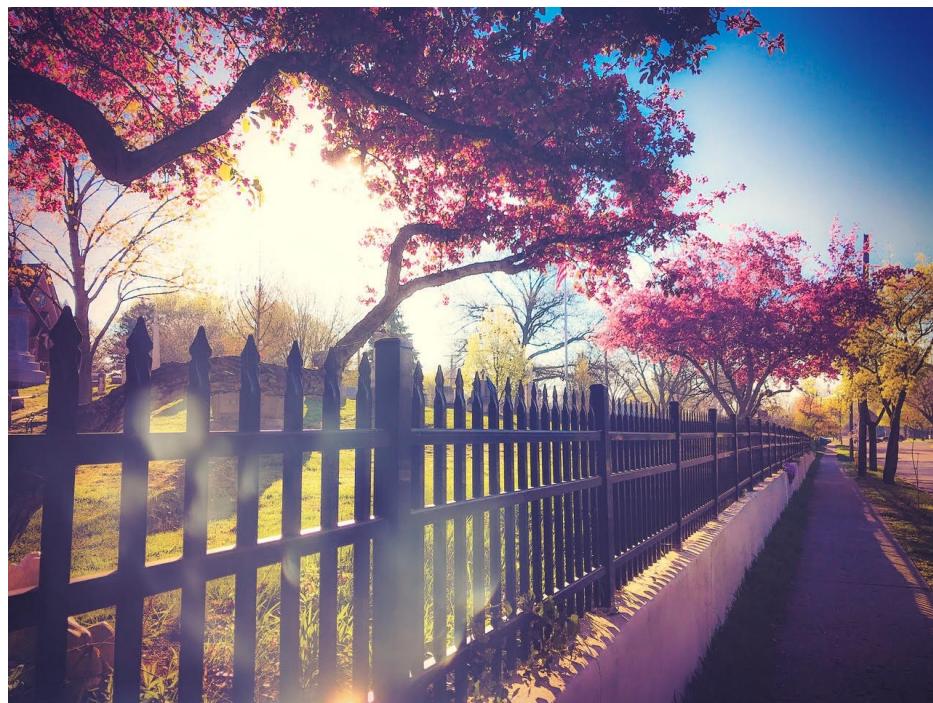
God did not love and restore Israel because they deserved it. God did not love and restore Israel because they had some inherent right to him. God loved and restored Israel because of who He is.

God's love is powerful. God's love is just and good. God's love is kind. God's love changes us. God's love proves who he is. God does not lose himself in his love for us.

The love that we are commanded to have for our neighbor should channel the Justice, the goodness, the power, and the kindness that are ours through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God, give me the strength to love with integrity.

-Beckie Dicks



Barret Kaltz

March 20

John 14:25-27



The Precious Gift

God's peace is different from the world's peace. The world teaches us that peace is found in positive thinking, the absence of conflicts, and in good feelings. God's peace teaches us that true peace is knowing that He is always in control. The Holy Spirit helps us to remember that Truth.

On New Year's Day our son Jared, his girlfriend Tina, and Lynn and I helped him to move into a studio apartment in Chicago as the firm that Jared worked for in Troy opened a new location in the "Windy City". Three weeks later my "adopted" Indian son, Deva, eagerly told me about a new job he was considering accepting in Peoria, Illinois. I advised Deva to take the job with Caterpillar, as it was a tremendous promotion and a great opportunity. Honestly, "losing" two sons in three weeks was crushing and a possible reason to grieve. It was the Holy Spirit who reminded me that he entered my life in order to fill me, and refill me, with Christ's peace. This peace is a precious gift which is a confident assurance that in this, or any other circumstance, I had no need to fear the future. God is in control. I will be able to visit my two "boys" occasionally, and perhaps our bonds will become that much stronger.

Holy and perfect God, thank-you for the precious gift freely given to us through the Holy Spirit. God, this confident assurance that you are always in control make us welcome change rather than fear it. Holy Spirit, please remind us of this Truth whenever we begin to doubt. In Jesus' name we pray. -Amen

-Pastor Mike Hoffman, CRE

March 21

Jeremiah 17:14

I find it difficult to write a devotion on a single verse. The background of this passage is how Judah (Israel) had forsaken God and Jeremiah had them contemplating their punishment. After being just about as low as you can get in the eyes of God (any sin) Jeremiah begins this prayer of vindication, asking God to heal Judah.

Jeremiah doesn't begin his prayer for all of Judah, but in first person singular because each sinner has to come before God for his own sin. All of Judah would have to bow their heads and pray for healing. Our healing comes when we pray for forgiveness because of our personal relationship with Jesus.

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved; for you, Jesus, are my praise! Amen



John A. Morley



March 22

Matthew 11:28-30

This is a day that I will rest in the ease of Your love, my Lord, for You ask little of me. Just to take Your yoke upon me. To look at life with a smile. To feel the warmth of love throughout my soul. To feel my spirit soar in the light of Your creation and the peace that passes understanding.

I shall rejoice knowing my God is blessing me today, in ways great and small. In the grin of a child, or the hug of a loved one. By the sharing of a meal and the companionship of fellow saints, may your grace flow through me into all those whom I meet.

-Matt Higgins

March 23

Isaiah 41:8-10

What a powerful set of verses. Verse 9 includes “ . . . You are my servant; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you with my righteous hand.” Do we really live like we believe this scripture? Do we really live like a servant, doing as our Lord wills and recognizing all we have is from Him? The scripture says not to be fearful or dismayed. In other words, we shouldn’t be anxious, distressed, alarmed, cowardly, worried and the list goes on. He wants us to be assured, courageous, and secure. I know I don’t always feel assured, courageous and secure. God promises to strengthen us and help us.

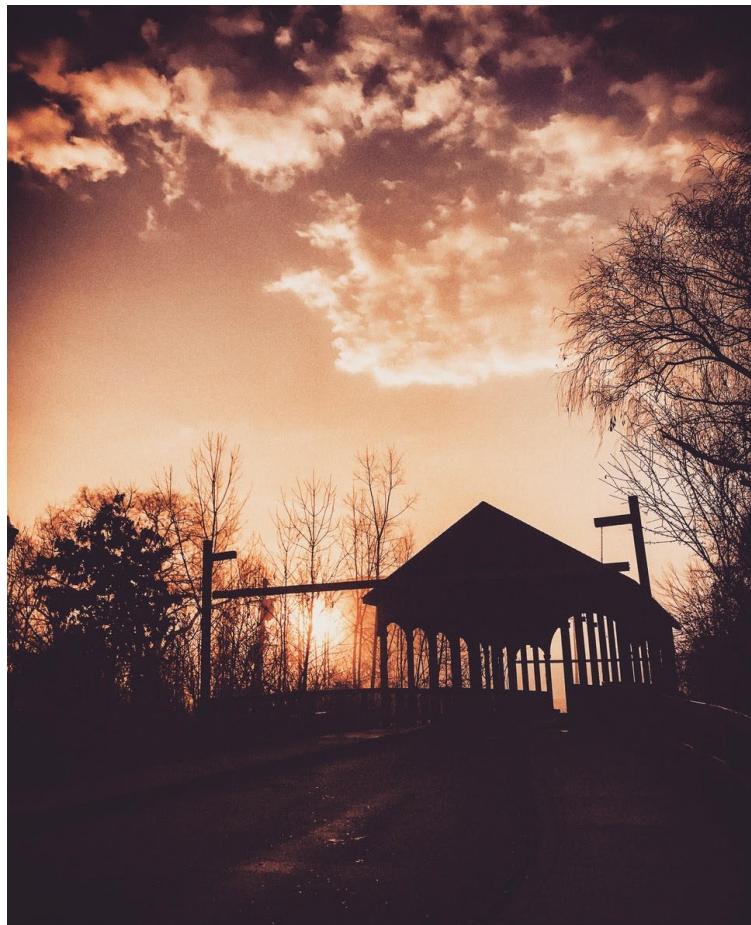
God assures us we are His; we are chosen. Let’s live today like we believe this with all our mind, heart and soul.

This brings to mind the hymn, Blessed Assurance.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

-Cathy Stormzand



Barret Kaltz

March 24

1 Peter 2:21-24

Abuse and persecution were par for the course for many who followed Christ in the 1st century. In order to comfort and encourage persecuted believers in Asia Minor, the apostle Peter wrote them a letter near the end of his life. The letter was addressed to believers in five different regions of Asia Minor, so the letter was probably routed among them. Peter opened his letter by reminding his readers of their precious hope in Jesus Christ. This hope far out weighs any sufferings they might endure for their faith. In light of this hope, Peter urged slaves to live holy lives among unbelievers, there by giving testimony to Jesus Christ. He comforted them regarding the abuse they had endured, noting that Jesus Christ also suffered. But Peter also prepared them for even harder times. These sufferings would perfect the believers' faith and purify their souls.

Lord have mercy on me a sinner. Thank you Jesus for going on the cross to pay for my sins. My faith and hope are in you

-Dean Masouredis



DeHamer

March 25

Matthew 21:1-11 “Sovereign”



Beckie Dicks

March 26

Isaiah 43:11-13

Early in my career, I worked for a man, as school district administrator, whom I came to admire and who became an inspiration to me. He was a “gentle-man” in the true sense of the word: humble, kind, compassionate, giving and forgiving, and filled with passion for helping and educating children. He was a much older man and died several years later.

I attended his funeral and was stunned when one of his children, in a eulogy, told us that her father was a Christian who loved his life each day trying to be more like Christ, who tried each day to imitate Christ and live like Christ lived, to treat others like Christ would have treated them.

I say I was stunned because, although I admired all the attributes of this man, I had no idea, no clue that it was Christ who was motivating him. I felt almost sad that I didn’t know this, that he had hidden it and kept it to himself...like the “light under the bushel basket” Pastor Chris spoke of.

I’m not one who “wears religion on his sleeve,” but it made me think of whether anyone would know how Christ motivates me, unless I tell them or give them a sign.

So I went to our church office and got four FPCD lapel pins (one for each of my four suits) and began to wear them to work. Most people didn’t notice, or didn’t say anything if they did, but a few people did notice the small addition to my business suit and asked me what they were for. I was able to say that the cross was a sign that I was a Christian, and a reminder to me to act like one. And the rest of the symbolism around the cross was the logo of our FPCD,

I don’t know if I made any impact on anyone. Perhaps, in order to know, I’ll need to attend my own funeral! But it was my little attempt to let my light shine and tell everyone what was behind whatever good they saw in me.

-Jeremy Hughes



March 27

Acts 5:33-39

If I were Peter in that room, I would have been a very cool customer: I would have been frozen with fear.

In that courtroom where silence carried mercy requested by one man, Gamaliel, there had only been a vile rage screaming for Peter's blood.

That man, Gamaliel, spoke simple words. "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men."

Ann Phillips



I am astonished because they stopped and listened. "They took his advice."

Power hungry men crazed by violence became once more Men of Israel. A room thick with violence became a courtroom, its dignity restored.

I pray for the gifts Gamaliel displayed: a love for God's people, a gentle word that turns away wrath. Most important, he listened for God's Word.

I would have been frozen with fear. At best, I could have borne witness to what happened. No matter how honored, no matter how many factions would listen, I am stilled because above all, only God's Spirit calms that kind of rage.

Only God's Word brings light where there was once darkness.

Peter brought God's Word that day. Gamaliel brought the silence.

I pray that when God desires to use me that way, I will be more than anything, in love with Him. Then I would not be frozen because the spirit of God would rest on my lips like a fire or flame.

-Guy Ferguson

March 28

Proverbs 19:20

"Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise."

When I was a child, I ran wild. I lived by my own rules and experienced no boundaries. I received no discipline. Sounds like every kid's dream, right? Wrong. I wasn't happy. I was afraid.

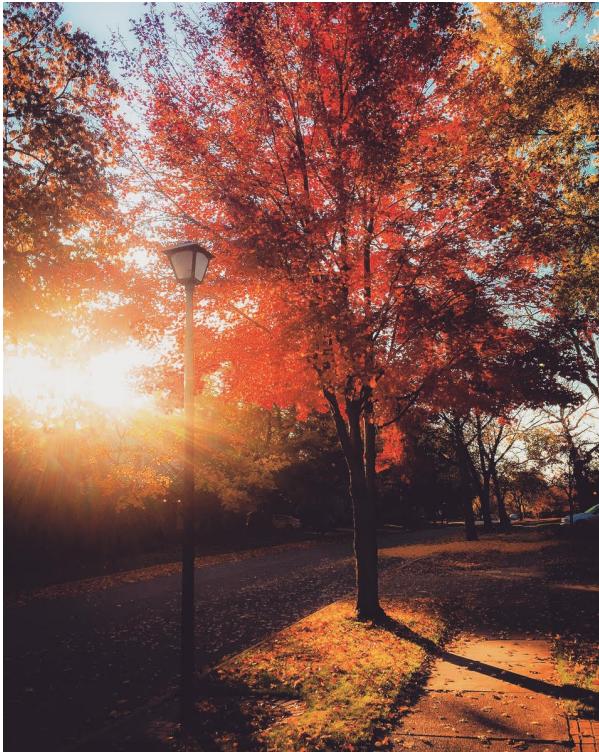
When I turned 17, I was on my own. I had no money and no knowledge about adult living. No one had advised me about college, so I hadn't applied; I didn't know I was supposed to. I was young and reckless and broke, with nowhere to go.

So, I looked up my Uncle Sam, and in exchange for 6 years of my life, he gave me three hots and a cot. And a hearty dose of discipline. One might think I would have balked at the discipline, the first I had ever received in my young life, but I didn't; on the contrary, I embraced it. For the first time in my life I had structure and the security that comes with it. Because of where I came from, I hunkered down in the discipline and I listened to my commanding officers because they had the parental voice I had never heard and yet had longed for. I learned young not to dismiss the words of advice from those older and wiser; I was so grateful to hear the voice at all.

That's not to say I became wise by the end of basic training. I'm 51 years old and I'm

still learning from the wisdom of others. I'm still struggling with self-discipline. I struggle because like most humans, I'm strong-willed, so strong-willed that I will even buck against myself and what I know to be the way of wisdom. But, fortunately, like the commanding officers that God placed in my life so many years ago, God now patiently and sternly directs me, disciplines me, and humbles me daily. And that is a good thing because it makes me a better person. I don't necessarily accept advice and discipline in the hopes of acquiring wisdom. I accept it because it brings me closer to God.

-Charlie Aronson



Barret Kaltz

March 29

Matthew 26:36-46 "Supplication"



Jim Shearer

March 30

Passion narratives “Sacrifice”



Beckie Dicks

March 31

Matthew 27:57-66

Today's scripture tells of Joseph of Arimathea offering up his tomb for Jesus's burial. A tremendous offering. For the tomb was the place that Joseph had intended to rest for all eternity, the place that his descendants through the ages could come to and know that here lay their own roots, the one from whom they spring. Joseph would be remembered.

But, Joseph gave that up for Jesus. He gave up his hopes of being remembered so that Jesus would have a place to lay.

That became the place from which Jesus was reborn, to live for all eternity in the hearts and minds of all who believe in the Messiah.

And the tomb that was donated is known as the place from which His believers trace their roots and the Christ from whom we spring.

Thus, Joseph is remembered also in numbers and ways greater than he could have imagined.

How great are the blessings of our Lord.

-Matt Higgins



Geoffrey Dicks



Jim Shearer

He is Risen!

