

Advent 2007 Devotional Booklet

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**Sunday Worship: 9:00 and 11:00 A.M.
Sunday School: 9:00 A.M.**

Advent 2007 Devotional

This year's Advent Devotional will walk us through the life of Jesus using the Gospel of Luke. For each day of December, we'll read a chapter of Luke, so by Christmas we will have shared together the entire gospel (good news) of the life, death and resurrection of our Savior; and perhaps, we'll glimpse the cross in the cradle. This gospel, told from the perspective of Luke, the physician, is sensitive and compassionate and full of healing stories. Of all four gospels, Luke has the longest birth story about Jesus. It holds the longest recorded conversation of Jesus – with the woman at the well. And it's full of examples of lostness, foundness, and the celebration of God's amazing grace. Inclusiveness, justice, equity and equality are themes in this gospel that include the beloved parables of The Good Samaritan, The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin and The Prodigal Son. Luke's gospel ends with Christ's ascension into heaven and the Great Commission. Then Luke's history book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with the story of the ascension (so Luke picked up where he left off). But for Advent, we will enjoy the thoughts and devotional messages from the members and friends of the Mt. Fern United Methodist Church, as we walk together through Luke's beautiful and pastoral gospel and experience the continuity of this joyful invitation to follow and open our hearts to Jesus.

With blessing for the journey,
Diane

First Sunday in Advent, Sunday, December 2, 2007

Luke 1

There is so much in this first chapter of Luke. As I read it with an open heart and an open mind, many meaningful verses pop up as direction for this meditation. But the one verse I will lift up is Luke 1:28a, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." Indeed, the Lord has been with me for these 74 years. I have prayed and prayed for many things. The Lord always answered my prayers. Not always the way that I wanted. And many times I did not accept the Lord's answer.

I prayed to be a Girl Scout. I told my dream to my best girl friend who was a scout and she spoke to the scout leader. The leader invited me time after time to join the scouts. My mother said, "No!" But now, I know, this Girl Scout Leader would have acted on my behalf if I had only accepted her invitation and explained my situation. I never said a word but just kept pleading for God to intervene. He did! I just not recognize it.

I prayed to the Lord for a husband. My major requirement was he had to be someone I could love and someone who knew the Lord and wanted a lifetime of serving the Lord. Again God arranged a date for me with this young man through the intervention of my Uncle Ben and a co-worker. The seed was planted and blossomed into a romance. But my prayer to go to college had been answered. I had hopes and dreams. I told Dick the plans I had for my life, but never really asked him to join me. God included Dick in my plans for a life dedicated to serving the church. We served for over 50 years together before the Lord called him home.

I prayed for a son to dedicate to the Lord like Hannah dedicated Samuel. I must say that although I was thrilled when my new baby daughter was born, I was a little disappointed because I did not have the vision of a future when daughters could choose ordained ministry in The Methodist Church. But God knew the future! I had to trust God that He would accept this child as a gift.

And O what a gift she became! Not only to the church, but to me!

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for answering prayer and surrounding me with loved ones. I know you will watch over me and walk with me as I begin a new chapter in my life journey. **Amen.**

by Dottie Gilbert

Monday, December 3, 2007

Luke 2

Luke chapter 2 spans the life of Jesus from a few days before His birth, when Mary and Joseph are traveling to Bethlehem to register for the census, to age 12, when Jesus stayed behind in the temple after the celebration of the Passover Feast. Although there are not a lot of details about the early life of Jesus, this passage of scripture brings us God's message of salvation as it is brought by His Son Jesus Christ. In verses 10 & 11 the angel of the Lord declares to the shepherds, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." The shepherds hastily traveled to Bethlehem where they found the baby Jesus and worshipped Him, and they shared the Good News of the Christ Child with all around. Then further on in verses 26-32 we read about the Lord's faithful servant Simeon whom the Holy Spirit had blessed with the knowledge that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, Simeon held him and declared, "For my eyes have seen your salvation...a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." The message is clear. Salvation is available to us through Jesus Christ and all we need to do is to invite Jesus into our lives. I take pause; because, how often we are like the inn keeper who found no room in his inn and did not open his home and his heart to Jesus. What would it take in our lives to make room in our inn and in our heart for the King of Kings, who has come to bring salvation to us? The invitation of this Advent season is to make it a time of preparation – a time for examination

of our lives – a time to make room in the inn.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be open to the invitation to make this season a time of preparation for your coming. Open our hearts and our lives to receive your gift of salvation. **Amen**

by *Linda McElroy*

Tuesday, December 4, 2007

Luke 3

It was at the beginning of Advent in 1974 when I first began to hear John the Baptist speaking to me of the need for repentance and asking forgiveness for sins. Oh, I guess that I had heard the words before, but I had never really listened. Of course it wasn't really John the Baptist speaking, it was Roger & Beth Bourgeois. And unlike John, they didn't dress in funny clothes, hang out in the desert, and have an odd diet. They were normal people who worked, had a family, and liked to have fun. They were faith-filled and faithful to God and desirous of sharing that faith, but they weren't proud or "holier than thou" when speaking with those who hadn't yet found faith or who were new in faith. They were real people who were approachable and had to deal with the same world that I did.

When Jesus approached John and asked for baptism, one of the things that he was doing was identifying himself with the people whom he had come to save. The only perfect and truly holy person ever to have lived, Jesus did not have a "holier than thou" attitude. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that Jesus can relate to our every temptation, our every pain. This is not to say that Jesus ignored sin and told people that it was fine to continue in their sinful ways, indeed, he called for repentance, change, and offered men and women a new life and a new way of life. John had spoken of sin and the need for repentance, he had prepared the way for Jesus, who came with words of hope, not words of condemnation. He showed men and women that by following him their lives could be different, better, fuller. He offers salvation, not condemnation.

A question you might ask yourself as you ponder this chapter of Luke is: Who has played the role of John the Baptist in your life - who prepared you for the coming of Jesus into your personal world? And a second, perhaps more challenging, question might be: For whom are you called to play that same role – for whom are you to be John the Baptist?

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the people who have come into my life who have played the part of John the Baptist for me. I thank you that you offer forgiveness and new life. I ask that you lead me to live a life that imitates Jesus and leads others to want to know Him. I ask that in this season of preparation I remember how John prepared the way for Jesus, and that I be alert for ways in which to act as John for others. **Amen.**

by *Dave McElroy*

Wednesday, December 5, 2007

Luke 4

"A Miracle in a Cottage" could be a best seller written by Nicholas Sparks. In truth, it concerns Jesus curing Simon's mother-in-law, who is not mentioned by name, of a major fever. The book illustrates Jesus' willingness to serve without crowds present to praise him.

After being cured, Simon's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus, Simon, and his friends. Mothers are like that. My mother was like that. Mom quit school at the age of ten to support her family of five after her dad was killed in a coalmine in Pennsylvania. She valued education and made sure that her daughters were prepared for life.

I became a nurse and have been active in nursing for more than 40 years. For more than ten years I have been working in hospice, for me, the most rewarding field of nursing.

Nursing is synonymous with service: joyous in helping in the

birth of a baby, to easing the pain and sorrows at the end of life's journey.

To serve others in Jesus name has been fulfilling, and at age sixty-five it's not yet time to quit.

Prayer: Lord thank you for the priceless gift of health and strength. May I use it in the service of others? **Amen.**

by Gerry Zeich

Thursday, December 6, 2007

Luke 5

Luke 5 is full of the teachings of Jesus Christ. The verses that stand out to me are verses 1 through 11. When Jesus finds the fishermen and got into one of the boats to begin teaching, He asks Simon to put down his nets for a catch. Simon tells Jesus that he had spent all night in that same spot. But, he did as was asked. To Simon's amazement, he put down his nets and an amazing catch was in them.

Simon Peter was amazed. He recognized Jesus as His Lord and Savior. After that Simon Peter was a fishermen of men. After our recognition that Jesus is our individual Lord and Savior, He asks each of us to become "fishers of men (people)." Jesus calls each of us in different ways to "bring in the catch." Some people are called to tell the masses or to stand on a corner and share the GOOD NEWS. For most of us, He calls to share the GOOD NEWS as he leads in all parts of our daily life. Sometimes we need to be bold and speak out about Jesus. Sometimes we need to share Jesus by the example of our lives. I do not think that Jesus asks each of us to witness to His power of salvation in the same way.

As we enter the season of Advent, let us remember to be open to wherever and however we are to let down our nets and become fishers of those people in our lives who need to know the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Jesus, make me a fisher of men, women and children. **Amen.**

by Karen Hintz

Friday, December 7, 2007

Luke 6

Luke 6 is rich with the words of Jesus. I decided to focus on a few concepts that Jesus was trying to promote. The first was the concept of the good tree versus the bad tree. Jesus said that the good tree would bear good fruit and that the bad tree could be known by its bad fruit. He says that the good man brings good things out of the good stored in his heart and that the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. What makes a good tree bear good fruit? A tree needs water and nourishing soil to bear good fruit. As a Christian we can get our nourishment by attending worship services regularly, fellowship with other Christians, regular prayer, Bible study. The good fruit that we bear results in good deeds of service or outreach to others and kind words. We can practice the fruits of the spirit because we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we pray. Let us not grow into unproductive trees. Let us be vigilant about our Christian lives.

Jesus also asked his followers not to judge. He asks why we look at the speck of dust in our brother's eye and fail to see the plank in our own. It is hard not to judge others. One trick is to realize that what we are seeing is someone's humanness and that we are human and make mistakes too.

Prayer: Dear God, Help us to see where we let others down and how we can be better Christians by nourishing ourselves in regular prayer and communion with You. **Amen.**

by Melanie Newton

Saturday, December 8, 2007

Luke 7

In this chapter, Luke gives us several examples of Jesus' parables about our faith. In the first, he talks about a Centurion (upper level Roman soldier) and his servant. The servant was saved from dying because the Centurion master displayed great faith. In the second story, Jesus had compassion on a widow and brought her only son back to life. And in the third story, Jesus speaks to some disciples of John the Baptist, who came to find out if Jesus is the Messiah. The disciples witnessed many miracles, which proved who Jesus was. They went back to John to report on what they had seen and heard, and Jesus continued to preach to the crowd around him. There were Pharisees in the crowd, and Jesus called them out for not recognizing John for the prophet he was, and Jesus for the Messiah he was.

In the final story, Jesus went to the home of a Pharisee for dinner. A sinful woman cleaned Jesus' feet with her tears and her hair, and poured perfume on his feet. When the Pharisee saw this, he criticized Jesus, thinking he did not know what was going on. Of course he did, and he rebuked the Pharisee for not showing him the courtesies a guest should have, like foot washing, as the woman did. And he forgave the woman's sins. He reminded the Pharisee that those who are forgiven much, love much in return. How much have you been forgiven? I think that I have been forgiven much. Even though I have not committed "big" sins like murder or theft, I have committed many sins, and I know I am forgiven every time I ask. Take a moment now to tell Jesus how much you love him, and to ask him to forgive you for your sins.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to show yourself to us, and to experience the temptations and hurts that we all face. Please forgive me for the times I have failed you, and others around me, by not living up to the faith you have entrusted to me. Thank you, Lord, for your forgiveness and your unconditional love. **Amen.**
by Linda Westenberger

Second Sunday in Advent, December 9, 2007

Luke 8

Storms in life, who doesn't have them from time to time. Some are huge, others small All usually feel huge at the time. How do we deal with them? Are we like the disciples, scared, or do we trust God to guide us through? I'm far from perfect, stop laughing, but usually I can trust God to carry me through my storms. Right now I'm having a rough time letting God in. Even in times like this, I still feel hope that God will lead me to break down the barriers between us. I'm thankful that God keeps loving me and seeking me. He never gives up on me. That's really what keeps me going. It's just a matter of me getting my head and heart right with God. Even now it continues to amaze me how much God loves us. Not feeling as close as I should to God, He still guides me with this devotional. Simply amazing.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for always loving us and seeking us. Please never give up on us. Please draw us through the storms of life. **Amen.**

by Jim Prommel

Monday, December 10, 2007

Luke 9

Perhaps the most poignant passage of this chapter is Peter's confession of Jesus as The Christ. Jesus first asks the disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" They answer, "John the Baptist; but others say, Eli'jah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen."

Then he asks them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "The Christ of God.." Upon hearing this of Peter Jesus immediately commands them to tell no one of their beliefs. He also warns them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

However, instead of perhaps asking them to work to protect or defend him, he teaches them that they must rather prepare for how they will cope with the suffering, on his behalf, which they must ultimately each face:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

Is the same not true for us today? In the same way as the disciples, we are instructed to "take up our crosses daily" and to not be concerned about our own lives, our well being, status or possessions. As difficult as it may seem surely this is because we constantly get our senses and focus clouded by the world around us, the demands of this society, this culture, our health worries, and so on. If love is the goal of our faith, as I believe it is, we need to cast our cares upon Jesus and let him figure out what we ought to be about, "the way everyone else does it is what we need to be doing."

Prayer: Lord, help me to bear your cross consciously, willingly and without grudge. Remind me that you are there with me every step of the way ... even when I don't perceive it. Help me to be more loving and patient and more aware of my fellow travelers sufferings than those of my own. **Amen..**

by Steve Sharp

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

Luke 10

A couple years back I was unemployed at Christmastime. This is perhaps the most uncool thing ever. My husband and I had decided to do as many handmade gifts as possible, which was actually great because I love to bake and I love to craft. I got a little in over my head, though, and on the morning of the big "Friends Christmas Party" paint was still drying on the salt

dough ornaments I had made, and quick breads were still going into the oven. And sometime in the afternoon, totally, completely overwhelmed, I had a panic attack that almost sent me to the hospital. This was not how I wanted to feel in the middle of the Christmas season. Christmas, for me, is always about the amazing gift given to us by God – the Christ Child. I wanted to be basking in His Presence, not curled in a ball on my bed.

Martha may not have had a panic attack, but she was mighty angry that her sister wasn't helping her. She was worried and distracted – just like so many of us during Advent!! Because of this, Martha was completely missing out on Jesus' visit with her. How sad for her – she was missing a tremendous gift. **Are we, too, missing the opportunity to spend time with Jesus because of our distractions?**

by Regina Heater

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Luke 11

Luke 11:33 "The Light of the Body"

This scripture is so beautiful to me. It reminds me of the wonderful children from Watoto who visited us just one year ago. The light of Jesus was so evident in them. They beamed with enthusiasm and hope. More importantly, they became a beacon of all that Jesus can do. Their light shines brightly and draws you in. It is true that at times, we hide our light, shy to let the world know about the meaning of Christ in our lives. It is so important to let your light glow and to reach out to one another. Others will be drawn to it. I have been asked why I am cheerful even when times are trying. It is in those times that the light of Christ burns even brighter. I don't always say what I should, what I feel. I am cheerful because I am a Christian; I have hope and love in my life. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind us of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Allow his light to shine ever brightly for all to see. Just as the

Watoto children sing the praises of the Lord, may we be a mirror of Christianity, helping each other, and spreading the Good News. In His Name. **Amen**

by Sue Forshay

Thursday, December 13, 2007

Luke 12

These passages describe Jesus' story of a man and his fig tree. Basically, this man had planted and gave it care for three years, but the tree did not bear any fruit. He wanted to cut it down. So, being frustrated, he sought help from a fellow gardener who advised him to wait another year, and if the tree still doesn't bear fruit, then discard it. A simple story, but one may ask, what does this mean to me?

Have you ever been impatient, anxious, or annoyed about things or events in your life? This story is a classic example. Many people want all the good things in life (i.e.: money, fame, nice clothes, big house, car, etc.); but most people do not have it all and most likely cannot have it all. We become materialistic and ignorant, which can lead to greed, jealousy, anger, and sin.

Is that really what Jesus wants us to believe as a Christian? Why can't we be patient? Why can't we be humble enough and accept the fact that certain things may not come the way we want it to be?

We all should be happy and grateful for what we have. We must accept the consequences and results for what God will give us in our future. There are millions of people in this world who aren't as fortunate. We need to pray for them and help the best way we can to give them hope, confidence, health, and happiness. That is what God wants us to do. Therefore, with patience, love, and understanding, we all will accomplish our ultimate goal of entering the kingdom of Heaven.

Prayer: Dear God, we are thankful for your Scripture lesson.

Please give us the strength and guidance to help and serve other people less fortunate. We need to continue being patient and trustworthy as you have taught us. We thank you for what you have given us with humility to the needs of others. We ask this in your name we pray.

Amen.

by Dean Matienzo

Friday, December 14, 2007

Luke 13

In the 13th Chapter of Luke, Jesus talks about salvation, sins, repentance, confession, healing and most of all He speaks about honesty with God. He often speaks in parables.

Jesus calls us to repent of our sins and to be honest with God about our sin, our weaknesses, failures and negativities and to confess the wrongs we did to others. We do not know when our day of judgment will come, so we must be prepared.

I remember how great I felt once I had confessed my sins and asked God into my heart. We all know that we can't hide anything from God. He knows what is in our hearts, we must get right with God ourselves and not judge others—that's His job.

I lost my first wife, Jane in 1992 and just recently lost my mother. I don't know how I could have survived if I didn't have my faith in God and the support of my wife Cary, my family and my Christian friends.

Prayer: Dear God it is my prayer today that all who read this devotion, that don't know you yet, will confess their sins to you and will ask you into their lives. **Amen.**

by Walt Hoffman

Saturday, December 15, 2007

Luke 14

There is so much material in Luke 14 that it would be impossible to examine it all—even a little—in this devotional. What,

with a healing which breaks convention, a teaching on humility, the parable of the great banquet and the cost of discipleship—where does one begin?

If there is any sort of common thread here, what strikes me is the lavishness of the grace of God. To the Pharisees, surface, formal “religion” was important. To Jesus, *people* are important. Knowing Jesus is about becoming whole and the person God intends us to be.

Jesus wants to heal us in the most total sense. For the man in Luke 14:2, it was a physical healing.

Then Jesus talks about humility. Jesus wants us to have our security in Him. How “prominent” we are in society’s eyes is not important; knowing our identity in Christ is, and that puts us into a posture where we can be humble before others. We no longer need to appear “important” to others because we have the inner peace of knowing we’re immensely (and equally) important to God.

This equality among humankind, i.e. everyone’s divine worth, leads to Jesus’ challenge (to his Pharisee-host who had invited him to dinner) to invite those who have no means to pay him back rather than those of similar social and financial status. How are we doing with that—in our church, Bible Study or share group, our homes and social circles? Are we hesitant to rub elbows with those who might “embarrass” us in the company of our “more acceptable” friends?

I have not done prison ministry, but in conversing with those who have, I’m moved when I hear stories of how numbers of those prison residents—many of whom have done unspeakable things—have welcomed the amazing grace of God into their lives with such joy, often finding it difficult to believe that God would forgive “a wretch like me”. In Luke 14:15-24 Jesus describes the great banquet which none of the “original” guests could attend (because each one had an excuse) and it ends up

being filled with the “street people” of the day. Don’t we see that so much today?—many “successful” people are too busy with their families, professions and property to take God, His church and His work very seriously. What is it about human nature that makes some of us need to hit a “mini bottom” or “big bottom” in life before we take a serious look at the feast God is offering us in Jesus Christ?

And once we do take a look, do we count the cost of following Jesus or simply try to get what we can out of God? It’s interesting that the “excuses” for not coming to the banquet were not “evil”. Trying out oxen (one’s job), checking out the new field (managing property and possessions) and getting married (family joys and obligations) are hardly despicable. So, what is Jesus saying here?

I think what Jesus is challenging us to is that our life’s ideal around which everything revolves and is balanced, needs to be seeking to be in His presence—to feast at His table, as it were. It’s when these “excuses” stand in our way of truly following Him that they become a problem.

Prayer: Gracious and merciful God, only You can help us prioritize our lives so that You remain at the center even when life gets busy and filled with potential “excuses”. We pray that this would be so, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

by Jeff Evans

Third Sunday in Advent, December 16, 2007

Luke 15

Luke 15 contains the three parables of lostness and the joy of being found as a time of rejoicing and celebration.

The Lost Sheep — As a child of 7 or 8 my mother sent me to live with an aunt in Brooklyn for summer vacation. Aunt May sent me outside to play on the street. I was having a good time until it was time to go “home”. But where was “home”? All the houses on the block looked alike, one right up against another. I stood on the corner

and cried so loud my aunt heard me and came to bring me “home.” What joy filled my heart to know I was safe and secure.

The Lost Coin — I can relate to loosing something—even when it is not necessarily valuable. In our home I spend much time looking for lost articles. Dick would put his glasses down in the evening and then forget where. He would leave me a note to be careful where I walked in the morning because he could not find his glasses. Many mornings I spent searching the apartment for lost items. Actually I became very good at finding things. I celebrated over each found item and thanked God for directing me in the search.

The Prodigal Son — I know first hand what it is like to leave home and take all my worldly possessions with the knowledge that I would not be welcomed back. And the joy I felt when my father said, “Come home!”

It is like that with God. I love the song “Comin’ Home to My Savior.” Dick did not want to leave me behind. He tried very, very hard to outlive me so he could continue to “take care of me.” He was afraid I would not survive without him. But I “found” long ago my Savior, my Redeemer, my “Father”, and I know that I do not walk alone. God will take care of me through a loving family, a devoted church family, and so many friends and loved ones.

Prayer: Lord, when we have found You, we do not need to look any further. Help us share that joy of foundness and celebrate with others. **Amen.**
by Dottie Gilbert

Monday, December 17, 2007

Luke 16

This chapter includes the parable of the dishonest steward and the story of Lazarus and the rich man, as well as other wise sayings about the law, marriage, and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Reading this passage, three principles jumped out at me from Jesus’ words.

The first seems appropriate as Americans consider who they will select for their next president. Jesus said in verse 10, “The

person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.” The traits of honesty and trustworthiness are two of the most important components of Christian character. God knows all that we do and think, and even though misdeeds may be hidden for a time, they will eventually be revealed. We can diligently pray and teach this to our children and hope and pray that our Christian leaders, educational leaders, and political leaders serve in a trustworthy manner.

The next truth that I love from this chapter is that as Jesus put it, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest part of a letter of the law to become invalid.” How often do we hear that the Bible is antiquated and that truth is evolving and changing with the times. This “situation ethics” idea has been around for a long time and is not true. The Bible teaches eternal truths that do not change from generation to generation. Each decision we make should be measured against the truth we find in the Bible. Being centered in God’s truth will keep us in his perfect peace.

And the last verse of this chapter is noteworthy also. At the end of the story of Lazarus, the rich man asks Abraham to let Lazarus come back from the dead to warn his brothers to repent before they die. Abraham answers, “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.” For those who are praying for the unsaved, this verse helps us realize how hard it is to convince someone of their need for salvation. But, thanks be to God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, unbelieving hearts can be converted in Jesus name and have eternal life.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for your great gift of salvation and for the eternal truths shared with us in the Bible. Please keep us trustworthy, and help us to select leaders who will follow your teachings. **Amen**
by Cindy Richards

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

Luke 17

Luke 17 (Verse 5)

“Give us more faith.” That was the disciples’ request that day. Jesus’ answer? There is no more or less in faith, all you need is the tiniest grain. That tiniest grain, that speck of belief in God, is enough to move mountains into the seas.

Such a powerful thing, faith! Miraculous things happen when you have it. And here is the good news: we don’t need to compare ourselves to one of the great biblical examples and wonder, if only I was like Moses...there is no quota to be filled in order to achieve a great blessing, a miracle.

Such a simple thing, faith. All we need is the deep certainty, the belief deep in our hearts. That belief could help us achieve the impossible. But, oh, how hard it is to keep that certainty! Even if at times we feel secure of God’s love, often that certainty slips away when faced with the many challenges life throws at us. If we don’t keep our eyes on Christ, and don’t fill our souls with his Word, that certainty becomes harder and harder to maintain and we end up finding ourselves living a life far removed from the one God had dreamed for us.

And so, we bow our heads and pray: “God, our Father. You are the giver of all good things. Give us grace and give us strength, so we may keep our eyes on Jesus. Help us, Lord, to see that you are always there – be it cloudy skies or clear blue ones. Help us to remember that no matter what comes our way, you can turn it around to benefit us. How wonderful you are to do this for us, if only we believe. May our hearts be filled with the certainty of your presence and your love. In Jesus’ name we thank you. **Amen.**”

by Alex Dodds

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Luke 18

Can you recall the most recent incident where you were persistent upon a certain request or item that you wanted to the point you were annoying? Did you get what you wanted? In the parable of the persistent widow, Luke 18:1-8, Jesus is describing a story where a widow kept asking the local judge to “Grant me justice against my adversary.” After some time, the judge finally gave in so the widow would not bother him again.

The parable clearly states in verse 1 that we should be persistent in prayer and never give up. This is an easy message to understand as we are trained to be persistent in everything we do to succeed at work or to make sure we are never made wrong. It never mentions in the Bible how the widow came across to the judge each time she approached him with her question but I feel that rather than persistence, our delivery is just as important. That is the reason God is asking us to be persistent in our prayers. To be honest we turn to God when we are in a time of need. We are praying for a quick solution so we can move on with our life. If we pray to God with an annoyed attitude wondering why this situation has been placed upon us, I feel our prayers will not be answered immediately. God wants us to take the time to reflect upon the situation and in essence cool down. When we have a clear mind we can sincerely have a conversation with God and listen to his response. Do not give up on God the first time around. Be persistent and clear for what you pray about. Whenever we have a personal problem at a store or with a bill, we want to talk with a supervisor directly to resolve the crisis. If we do not get the answer we want, we continue up the ladder to get the answer that will make us victorious. Aren’t we fortunate, we have a God that we can go directly to for our answers?

Prayer: Dear Lord, allow me to remember how to conduct myself in a Christian manner so I am a reflection of you every day. Do not pray in just the time of need. I need

to continuously have a conversation with you every day and my prayers will be answered. **Amen.**

by Tami Haupt

Thursday, December 20, 2007

Luke 19

In Luke 19, verses 11-27 fascinate me a little bit. I have always been drawn to parables and the multiple messages that can be derived from them. This parable of the gold coins is no different.

A soon to be king traveled far away in order to be crowned. Prior to leaving, he gave his ten servants each a gold coin. Upon returning as the king, he checked in with each servant to make sure they were wise stewards of what they had been given. One makes a lot of profit by investing and receives much more as a means of reward. Another makes a little and is given still more. Finally, out of fear one returns just the one gold coin because he wanted to make sure nothing was lost from what he was given. This servant was chastised for wasting what was given to him.

As the saying goes, "from those to whom much is given, much is expected." This reminds me of this particular parable and specifically of our Christian church. As Christians, we have clearly been bestowed with the tremendous gift of eternal life. The Lord has every right to expect great things from us. Like the first two servants in the parable, we should work hard to try and allow our gift to be fruitful and multiply. After all, our mission statement here at Mt. Fern is to make disciples for Christ for a reason. Sometimes I wonder how many people I have helped to find Christ or grow closer to Christ in my years here on the earth. Have there been any? Am I failing miserably in paying dividends to the Lord for His great gift entrusted to me? The verses complicity explain how God feels about those who sit on the status quo in fear of making a mistake or being uncomfortable. It is time to renew our commitment with Christ. If we all keep this in mind our church and every church would be packed every Sunday. What a joy that would be!

by Jim Haupt

Friday, December 21, 2007

Luke 20

Questions, Questions, Questions — why do we have so many questions about Jesus' perfect love for us? He loves us. We are his children. He will take care of our every need. The Bible is filled with the promises that Jesus lavishes upon us if we believe in Him. But, we are human. I am human and when I have more bills than money in my checkbook I ask, "Why?" When my friend's baby is born with a cyst the size of a tennis ball in her abdomen I ask, "What were you thinking?" And when another close friend's brother and brother-in-law die on the same day and her father goes in for open heart surgery later in the week I scream, "You've got to be kidding!"

This passage is all about questions and fear. Jesus was a radical when he walked the earth and many people tried to discount Him. In this passage, people are trying to trick Jesus and are trying to prove that He is too good to be true. Trusting Jesus and loving Jesus may come easy to some people (and if you are one of them count yourself lucky), but not for me and many people that I know. I struggle with my faith many days. Thank goodness that I know in my heart that Jesus loves me and died for me. That he took his place on the cross so that I may have eternal life that will make sense when I walk through the gates of heaven

But for now, as I walk this road on earth, I have lots of questions. The good news is that Jesus has an answer to each and every one. Not just a good answer, but the perfect answer. And even though my little brain cannot always understand Him, and fear blocks me, I have given my heart over to Jesus and at the end of the day, he knows that I am His. Praise God.

by Jennifer Mahoney

Saturday, December 22, 2007

Luke 21

The temple fascinated both Jesus and His disciples, but for very different reasons. Jesus was attracted by the widow and her loving gift. It would have little monetary impact on the receipts of the temple that day. The “small” gift was singled out by Jesus, above all of the large contributions, because it was all the woman had. She gave out of her need; the others gave out of their abundance. Jesus commended her gift because it was evidence of her love for God and that faith would care for her needs.

The disciples on the other hand were awe-struck with the outward magnificence of the temple. The disciples were not from Jerusalem, they (like me) were, “hicks” from the “sticks.” They would have seldom gone to Jerusalem and probably viewed the temple much like tourists. What attracted their attention was that the temple was beautifully adorned, probably as a result of the “larger” donations. The temple was a great and glorious place to the disciples. How difficult it must have been to hear Christ immediately tell them that soon it would be all torn apart. “Every one of the stones will be thrown down”. Not just the building, but all it represented as well. The disciple’s response was predictable, “when will this be and what will happen just beforehand so we know that “this is it!” Jesus did not answer the first question. He does go on to indicate a number of events that indicate His return would be near. Christ’s answer is not a conclusion of history; it instead focuses on the conduct of His disciples in the interim period. It would be (and continues to be) a period of considerable length and difficulty.

Christ’s words point out several things to me. First, this laid to rest any visions the disciples had of an immediate kingdom with Jerusalem and that temple as its headquarters. Second, the Lord’s words certainly spell out “hard times” ahead for all who follow Him, rather than the “happy days,” hoped for. Those who would follow Jesus should expect the path of adversity and

persecution. Third, we do not need “good times” to preach the gospel. The gospel is “light” to those in “darkness,” and it offers “hope” in the midst of “despair.” Fourth, in order to prepare for His next coming that lies before us, disciples of Jesus must beware of deception and false “messiahs”. Lastly, we must not be afraid, even in the midst of chaos and persecution. We must not seek safety in those things that have little real meaning and that will ultimately be destroyed.

Am I ready? Am I admiring the gold in the temple as opposed to the real gifts of a faithful life? How may I better serve Him by carrying His words to those around me in the midst of our adverse times?

Prayer: Dear Lord, give me the strength and compassion to see the true gifts you give me in Your teachings. Allow my heart and actions to spread Your word to others in times of adversity. Give me the strength to discard the things around me which prevent me from knowing You. I pray to know You better and for the day of your coming. **Amen.**

by John Crandall

Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 23, 2007

Luke 22

For as long as I can remember the Scripture Lesson Luke 22 has been very powerful to me, especially verses 14-21, they really speak to me. “He sat down with the 12 apostles to share Pass-over with them before he suffered.” So selfless, sharing all he had with them. I find such hope and strength in these words “I will not drink of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come,” powerful so very powerful.

“Before I changed my will and my mind over to the care of God as I understood him” and let go of my need to control all things, that is when my life with Jesus Christ truly began. I no longer have those feelings of hopelessness, sadness and anxiety over every situation in my life. I pray and pray some more for an-

swers and now realize that I don't pray on my terms or ask God for what I think I need, but rather pray for his guidance and then I wait until it is his time to provide the answers I truly need. The waiting is hard but I now have the strength to sustain because of my faith. Worry and fretting is so draining to my body and my spirit, living in the moment is so joyous and free. I don't have to be held hostage with my endless what if's.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please shine upon those who have not found their way, and the homeless, and those suffering from addictions. Pray also for those with mental and physical illnesses and their caregivers and families. Deliver us from evil.

Amen.

by Kathy Murphy

Christmas Eve, Monday, December 24, 2007

Luke 23

It is Christmas Eve and we are all gathering with our families and friends. On one hand it is a joyous occasion as we await the birth of Jesus. And on the other hand it is a calm and spiritual and heavenly night where "all is calm" and "all is bright."

At this writing I just learned of the passing of Dick Gilbert. This is a sad moment for me as he gave such wonderful words at my Mom's funeral in 1989 at the Little Falls United Methodist Church where he was pastor. He was certainly special to my Mom.

I am sure both of them on their passing could have said as it says in this chapter "As Jesus said in a loud voice, 'Father into thy hands I commend my spirit' and having said that he breathed his last." Dick died in October 2007 and my mother in November 1989.

As we look forward to Christmas Day let us bring hope to our lives. Dick and my Mom left us but remained with us with many wonderful memories that remain with us. Let us have these memories lift us up as we await the birth of our Lord

Jesus Christ. Come share in the celebration of Mt. Fern UMC wherever you are awaiting this great night.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let the hope in this night and the memories of those who lived in the past and guided our lives be examples of our expectations this day. **Amen.**

by Ed Daniels

Christmas Day, Tuesday, December 25, 2007

Luke 24

Every Christmas Eve, I hope it will be a clear night so that I might see the stars. I love to look up at them and imagine that I might have seen the Angels and followed their instructions to the Christ Child on that long ago night.

Today, as we wake to the glory of the Christ Child born, our Scripture lesson tells us of why Christmas means so much. On that first Christmas morning, I wonder how many people gathered at that cave knew what the road ahead would bring, a road that led to these stories from Luke 24 – the ultimate reason Jesus Christ was born. We read about the Resurrection, giving us the hope we need for life everlasting. We celebrate the communal meal with Jesus one more time, and we are fed by his teachings for forty more precious days. And finally, we come to the day when Jesus must leave us to resume His place in heaven. Before he goes, he promises us a great gift – "power from on high". This is the Holy Spirit, coming to guide the disciples, and us, in the next step of the journey. Confident that we will be faithful, Jesus is carried into heaven, and once again our eyes rise to the skies for something glorious! The story has come around full circle.

I'm certain those gathered in Bethlehem weren't quite sure what they were seeing, or what it would mean for them, and I'll bet the disciples in Bethany had more than a little fear mixed in with their hope that Ascension Day. For us, we can embrace the whole story from beginning to end, knowing that it never

truly ends. Instead, we continue to walk the journey as we worship, serve, give, and grow in faith.

Merry Christmas, brothers and sisters!

by Regina Heater