

Lenten 2008 Devotional Booklet
Mt. Fern United Methodist Church
443 Quaker Church Road
Randolph, NJ 07869

Diane Ruth Gilbert, Pastor

LENTEN AND HOLY WEEK OPPORTUNITIES

Ash Wednesday - February 6th

6:00 a.m. - Devotions
7:00 a.m. & 7:30 p.m. - Distribution of Ashes
& Holy Communion
11:00 a.m. - Morning Study

All Sundays

Sunday Worship: 9:00 and 11:00 a.m.
Sunday School: 9:00 a.m.

All Wednesdays in Lent

6:00 a.m. - Early Morning Devotional Time
11:00 a.m. - Wednesday Morning Study .
6:00 p.m. - Lenten Simple Suppers
7:00 p.m. - Wednesday Night Study

Holy Week Services

Palm/Passion Sunday, March 16 - 9:00 & 11:00 a.m.
Holy Thursday, March-20 - 7:30 p.m.
Good Friday, March 21 - 7:30 p.m.
Easter Dawn Service, March 23 - 6:00 a.m.
Easter Worship Celebration
9:00 & 11:00 a.m.

Mt. Fern United Methodist Church

Lenten Devotionals 2008

Greetings from the Pastor

You hold in your hand this year's Lenten Devotional Booklet; a collection of devotions prepared by the members and friends of the Mt. Fern United Methodist Church for each day of Lent. The Lenten journey is designed to enrich our relationship with our Lord and with each other, and this devotional booklet helps us to do just that. By spending time with the scripture lesson and the short story or message prepared for us we are drawn into the Word and encouraged with bread for the journey of faith. Some of our friends have included prayers at the close of their devotions, and some have not, inviting you to close with your own prayer. May we be in prayer together for each other, for the Mt. Fern United Methodist Church and all its ministries, and for the Church in the world and all that it does to bless and change lives for the better.

Once again we cannot forget to thank those persons who have gone the second mile in preparing this devotional booklet. Pat Hintz is responsible for the Cover design, front and back. Ed Daniels started to distribute the lessons and Linda McElroy finished up with assistance from Jane Boschen. Jane also typed and folded with the help of her ever handy folding assistant, husband Hank. Dottie Gilbert proof read the booklet and selected the verses. Thanks to all who wrote devotions and share in this blessing.

Ever filled with hope on the journey,
Diane

Ash Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Psalm 51:1-17

To get the full impact of this Psalm, you need to read II Samuel 11:1 - 12:25 and learn the reason why David wrote this Prayer for Cleansing and Pardon. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba; and when he learned that she was pregnant with his child, he maneuvered to have her husband Uriah the Hittite killed in battle. Nathan was the “court prophet” and he pointed out David’s sin by telling a story about a prize lamb and then to make sure David got the point he said, “You art the man!” David was repentant after the baby was born but God predestined the death of the child. David used four Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer, Fasting, Worship and Sacrifice. And when they failed to change God’s mind and the child dies, he pleads with God with a repentant spirit for mercy and a washing away of his sin. God answers his prayer. Bathsheba bore David another son, and he named him Solomon – the future king and wise one.

One of my sins is procrastination. God speaks clearly to me of what I need to do, but I have a way of putting things off. I am too busy to do the right thing. I take short cuts for the easy way out of not listening and responding to God’s call. Dick wanted to prepare me in the event of his death. He wanted to tell me and show me what needed to be done. He carefully kept records and files. But I was too busy to sit down and listen. He complained that I was doing too much church work, and needed to spend more time with him. Now I have time to listen for his advice, but his voice has been silenced.

John the Baptist called us to repentance at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. “Repent!” and be saved. Psalm 51 is concerned with the heart. “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord.” How do we do that? How can we purify what has been contaminated? How can we be forgiven for all our sins, and be saved? Jesus made it easy. Perhaps, too easy so we do not get the impact of the words, “I believe! Help thou my unbelief!” Walk with Jesus on the whole journey from today, Ash Wednesday to the cross on Good Friday.

Then prepare yourself for the Good News at dawn on Sunday: “Christ has risen. Yes! He who was dead is now alive. Christ is risen indeed! Praise the Lord!”

Prayer: O Lord, forgive my sins and grant me your amazing grace! “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Put a new and right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10). **Amen.**

by Dottie Gilbert

Thursday, February 7, 2008

Matthew 4:1-11

These verses are about the temptation of Jesus. Isn’t it encouraging to know that Jesus, as perfect as He was, was tested by God just as we are, and knows how it feels to have to make a decision between right and wrong. Jesus has become the savior of all who receive Him for He was tested too and can give us guidance when we are tempted by the devil. He can understand how we feel and lead us to the right decision. In the notes of my Bible it states that God tests us to confirm our faith and the devil tempts us to weaken our faith.

Prayer: Please, Father, help us to overcome the temptations we are led to and to always use Jesus as our example of how to deal with temptation and remind us that Jesus is always there to help us if we ask. **Amen.**

by Jinny Dench

Friday, February 8, 2008

Joel 2:1-2,12-17

Israel’s location on the major trade routes between Egypt and the nations of the Middle East naturally and unfortunately also put it on invasion routes of armies from Egypt and the Middle East and later Europe. The Jews were well acquainted with the passage of armies into and through their country so the analogy with swarms of locusts is not surprising. As armies would confiscate food and livestock so would the locusts devastate all growing crops and

forage for livestock leaving behind the possibility of starvation and disease in the weakened population.

Joel calls for a return to the Lord with fasting, weeping, mourning, rending of the heart, sacred assemblies and prayers from all to spare his people, but then he ends by challenging God. What will the world say if God does not protect them. “Where is their God?” And God answers by driving away the locusts and restoring the land. There are a number of places in the Old Testament where the Jews challenged, tested, or argued with God, sometimes successfully. There may be places in the New Testament but I cannot recall any. I think that I would be reluctant to challenge God and will just go along with Joshua 24:5 “But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord” and trust in His judgment and his help in the dark times.

by John Dench

Saturday, February 9, 2008

II Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

The Book of II Corinthians is a follow-up letter by Paul – the most personal of any of his writings, and the focus is a defense of his ministry. It is an insight into the preparing for the coming of Judgment.

When I first read a passage that has been given to me for a devotional, I sometimes feel that the best way to interpret it, is to consider the first thing that comes into my head after reading the passage through. When I saw this passage for the first time and read “We are Christ’s Ambassadors and God is making his appeal through us” – my first thought was “Wow” we have been given a tremendous responsibility. God is asking us to be his messengers here on earth. What a great gift that is, and what trust he must have in us – to allow us to be his messengers, and to be trusted to spread his teaching and good word. I really do feel very privileged to be given this mission. It is a great responsibility, but also a great joy.

So when you hear God’s word or his message in your prayers, don’t ignore it, but use his message to go out and spread his word, to your friends, to your colleagues, or even to people that you do not know each day. When you do a good turn for someone – whether it be offering them a smile, or something far more dramatic, you reap the benefits 10 times over. So go on - go out today and live and spread Gods word – it really does feel good.

Prayer: Dear God, please give me the patience to hear your word, the knowledge to understand it, and the courage to go out into the world and spread your love to others as you would like us to do.

Amen.

by Melanie Bateman

First Sunday in Lent, February 10, 2008

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

I love this part of Matthew where Jesus gives specific instruction to my life. I really need direction, especially in the areas of worry, prayer and money. Matthew 6:1-6 seems to state over and over again that God does not want us to do good deeds just for the recognition. He wants us to have a real relationship with Him and He wants us to serve Him. When we are serving Jesus, we are not looking for acknowledgement. We are simply doing what is right. God wants us to serve Him and would rather we give Him our heart in secret than shout His name from the mountaintops only for the credit.

It is very simple - God knows what is in our heart. He knows our motivations for everything we do, big or small, good or bad. And the good news is that He forgives us every mistake that we make. He does not expect our actions to be perfect but will reward us for trying.

In this passage it is also stated over and over again that God will reward you. That reward is eternal life with Jesus. In the world, it is easy to be recognized for our good works, and to be rewarded in worldly ways. Jesus promises us the real reward of heaven if we serve Him.

Jesus is telling us, reminding us that our priorities need to be heavenly priorities, not earthly ones. I don't know about anyone else, but I need a constant reminder that I am only living in this world but for a short while and that my real home is in heaven with Jesus - where a whole different set of rules apply. Thank God for this daily reminder!

Prayer for the day: Dear God, may I serve You and You alone. May I be reminded in quiet ways today that You are in charge of my life. The world may reward me for my action in the here and now, but may I make the choices that will give me the ultimate reward, a lifetime in heaven with Jesus. HE > ME. **Amen.**

by Jennifer Mahoney

Monday, February 11, 2008

Genesis 12:1-4a

This devotional awakens my sense and beliefs towards a continual faith - true faith in God. God asked Jesus, told Him, selected Him to be the son of God. He did have a choice - we all do as humans. Jesus chooses to believe that God, His Father, would guide and protect him.

In this reading, Abraham is asked and is told by God to go into the desert and start a new nation. He gets up and leaves, knowing in his heart that God, his Lord, will ground him in his faith. In fact, Abraham chooses to do the pilgrimage to a better world of God's making.

This is just as Jesus did throughout His life as a mortal. The question now is: Does this apply to my life? Simply I must pray first, listen and then put into action the answer I receive in meditation. How do I do that? I start small setting an ideal that I am one with God. Then, I believe in that God, knowing that He can help me in all I do. Next, I make daily decisions to give God my words, stresses and joys. Lastly, I continue to pray, make adjustments and most importantly - to help others.

Prayer for the day: I pray to you God that I may have the strength to realize that all I do in life is a gift from you and that you have a plan just for me. I ask that you give me the faith and strength that you so freely gave Jesus and Abraham so I can go out and carry your word, helping others, loving others and being in fellowship. Praise God! **Amen.**

by Kevin Mahoney

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

John 3:16

If we are all dead-honest with ourselves, we probably have looked at life's personal and more cosmic tragedies and wondered, "How could God let this happen?" Or, "If God is so wonderful and good, why doesn't He just stop evil, injustice, disease and unfairness in the world?"

Yet, if a survey were taken among those who have memorized at least one Bible verse in their lifetime, I suspect that John 3:16 would handily come out on top. And why not? It contains the most succinct rendering of what we call the "Good News" in all of Scripture.

But does this beloved verse answer the questions posed above? As I write this on 1/28 (late, as usual), my wife is rehabbing from her second joint replacement surgery in nine months. Tomorrow I'm going to a funeral mass for a family friend who died from cancer and, less than three months ago, was vigorous, healthy and full of life with no symptoms that anything was wrong with her.

Romans chapter 8 (which I would ask you to read--especially verses 18-25) don't necessarily answer *specifically* why my family's long-time friend died the way she did or why millions of people, like my wife, suffer from arthritis, some to the extent that joints deteriorate and degenerate and need to be replaced. But it does answer the question in a general sense, and for now that is good enough for me.

And *why* are we promised (in Romans 8) that the creation will be restored, that suffering will be followed by glory, that bondage will be followed by freedom? **Because of John 3:16!** Everything that was lost by Adam's sin—our natural closeness to God, a paradise-Earth, perfect innocence, a life without disease and death—all of this was restored by Christ when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. But we must await its complete fulfillment with patience.

That which we could not do—or even hope to do—for ourselves, God *did* for us by sending Himself—His one and only Son. “One and only” or “only begotten” signifies the uniqueness of Jesus—the God-man—fully God and fully man. There is no one else who could have redeemed the world.

So, the next time you find yourself questioning God's “fairness” as I've often done, think for a moment about what kind of love it took for God to do what He did. The suffering which Jesus endured is incomprehensible enough. What about the suffering the Father endured watching His Son die? This was not some “twist of fate” or “accident”. It was predetermined by the sovereign hand of God! Why? Because He loves the world! He loves you!

The question is, “Will you welcome His love? Will you welcome Him into your life?” Will you be one of the “whoever believes in Him”? Can you honestly, humbly and gratefully say today, because of what Christ has done for you and your belief in Him, that you won't “perish” but have “eternal life”?

I will get through that Mass of Christian Burial and Resurrection tomorrow because the promise of John 3:16 was and is true for my friend and it's true for me. I pray that it's true for you, too.

Prayer: Oh God of incomprehensible love, forgive us when we question life's unfairness. Forgive us when we get so caught up in the “here and now” that we fail to see the glory that awaits us

because You gave Your very Self for us in Jesus Christ. Help us to love each other with the same kind of love You have for the world. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

by Jeff Evans

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Psalm 121

What a great Psalm! I love the Psalms! You can't help but love the Lord after reading this Psalm. It says “I lift up my eyes until the hills . . . My help comes from the Lord.”

I bought a beautiful book on Oscar Hammerstein's and Richard Rodgers' “The Sound of Music” with outstanding pictures of mountains and hills – the beautiful mountains of the Austrian Alps. Maria sings “The Hills Are Alive with the Sound of Music” and so they are - the music of the Psalms and the Lord. It is during this period of Lent that we take a reflective look at the Lord and what he does for you and me and what he will continue for us.

In this Psalm it keeps reminding us that the “The Lord is our keeper . . . will keep you from all evil . . . keep your going out and coming in.”

I can't help thinking how wonderful the Assisted Living Homes, Nursing Homes, etc., are for people that need keeping. I have visited friends in Sunrise Assisted Living, Cedar Crest Village, Bristol Glen and Andover Nursing Home in recent weeks. How wonderful these people are cared for. How can one help but pray that “The Lord is your keeper.”

My favorite hymn leads us during this beginning of Lent. “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee. Take my moments and my days let them grow in ceaseless praise.” This is my fervent prayer for you. To know, to love, to share. **Amen.**

by Ed Daniels

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Romans 4:1-5

God honors faith; and great faith honors God. This passage in Romans speaks of Abraham who believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. It wasn't as if Abraham had performed great works for God and so God owed him a blessing. Abraham simply believed that God was and that God was to be trusted and obeyed. He followed God's instruction to leave the place he lived and go to an unknown place with his family and all his servants. For this God told him that through him and his seed all families of the earth would be blessed.

On this Valentine's Day, how appropriate that we should acknowledge God's great love for each of us and without hesitation obey all that we know of His commands—thus honoring the Almighty. How many times have we let fear creep in or discouragement weigh us down? Where is our faith? God wants us to put our faith in Him and to rest in Him. Remember Jesus in the boat during a storm asked the disciples, "Where is your faith?" And in the book of Hebrews we read, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Even though it's typical of church people to get so busy doing things for God and others that they sometimes begin to feel exhausted, in the last few years I've been learning to rest in God's love—to let His Spirit minister to me. It's overwhelming to realize how much God loves us to have given His only son, Jesus, to die for us. God wants us to believe and be comforted by our belief in Him. Sometimes it's harder for us to graciously receive love than it is for us to give love to God and to others. Only when our spirits are at peace, steeped in God's love, can we really experience the joy God intended and truly share that joy with others.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for loving us, for giving us Jesus to teach us how to believe and how to live both here on earth and eternally with You. Help us to rest in You. **Amen.**

by Cindy Richards

Friday, February 15, 2008

Romans 4:13-17

In the United Methodist tradition a person's faith journey is timelined from their birth through what we hope is a mature faith. Also, we as United Methodists are always striving to go on to perfection. Not a perfection in the sense of doing everything correctly, dotting all "i"s or crossing all the "t"s, but perfection in the sense that we want to understand all the mysteries of our faith.

Romans 4:13 says "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come... through the law but the righteousness of faith." For instance, it came not because there was law that prophesied it, not a law that is written in stone, but a true, honest faith. It goes on to say in verse 17 "...in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that did not exist." How powerful is that verse? When I read that, I was almost moved to tears because that is the bottom line. Right there in that very verse my faith is justified. How amazing is it to have access to a God that can give life to the dead and call into existence the things that did not exist? I think that having that faith to believe that we worship a loving, and just God is beyond all transgressions of the law that are made. That is not to say that the laws that are written are not important, but it is our faith, our true and honest faith that brings us closer to inheriting the earth from the God who transgresses all things by bringing the non-existent to existence.

Prayer: Today, God, allow me to see Your call to me in my faith journey. Allow my ears to be opened and my soul to be still. Allow all things that I do not understand, all the mysteries,

all those challenges in my faith journey may they be lessons in understanding those things that I once thought to be non-existent to be brought to life so that my journey toward perfection is understood. It is in Your Son that I pray. **Amen.**

by Erin Snyder

Saturday, February 16, 2008

John 3:1-10

In this passage, Nicodemus comes to meet Jesus. It's late at night and Jesus talks about the miracle of being born again, being born of the spirit.

Part of me sympathizes with Nicodemus. He's a Jewish leader who can obviously tell that Jesus is much more than just another man. Although he waits for the cover of the night to come and speak to Jesus, he did come, which I think speaks of a deep need inside of him to hear the truth. Although, in reading the text I can't help but feel that Nicodemus is trying to find a way out of what he knows to be true. Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and Nicodemus doesn't seem to understand how that can be possible. "Can a grown man re-enter the womb?" he asks. Almost sounds like he's trying to make light of this very powerful truth. And here is where I sympathize with him, because I, too, find myself many a time trying to escape what I know to be a Christian truth. It is sometimes easier to pretend we don't understand such powerful teachings – prayer, forgiveness, self-denial, sacrifice – and continue with the behavior that is comfortable to each of us. More than once I've found myself trying to explain away my weaknesses in the secret of my heart. But in those moments when I dare to seek His presence, even if it is in the dark of the night, I can hear Jesus' patient voice speaking to my heart: "You call yourself a Christian and yet you don't understand this?"

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for always being there for us. Even when we come to you ready to fight what we know to be true. Shine your light on our hearts that we may always be re-

minded of your truth, of the path that Jesus laid out for us. Strengthen us to follow Jesus in the way that he taught us and give us the wisdom to never stop coming to you and seeking your presence. **Amen.**

by Ian and Alexandra Dodds

Second Sunday in Lent, February 17, 2008

John 3:11-17

How much do you really believe in Jesus? Have you devoted any time and effort to learn, serve, and teach the ways God has taught us? Have you shown any hospitality, honor, truth, love, humility, and kindness to physically show that you are a Christian? These are some of the burdening questions that we endure throughout our lives. Some would answer truthfully; others would lie, while others cannot or are unable to answer.

It's up to you and God to decide through prayer.

Jesus had taught his disciples that believing God here on Earth will ultimately give us the entrance to Heaven. How much we should give to God is something that we must decide. There may be instances when we have a lot to give and devote much of our time to Him, while on the other hand, we may not have any time or resources to give at all.

This does not mean that God has not accepted you as his children. We all know that Jesus came and died for our sins to save us here on Earth. God had sent His son for He loves us all and wants us to keep our strong faith in Him! We must continue our best to believe, learn more about His ways and teachings, and go forth to serve and teach others about Him. And in conclusion, we will look forward and be honored to enter the gates of Heaven.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, you have given us so much and we want to give you our love and faith in return. Please continue to teach us so we can continue to learn and serve others

who are in need, lost, or hurt. We love you and thank you, in your name we pray. **Amen.**
by Dean Matienzo

Monday, February 18, 2008

Exodus 17:1-4

Here it is only a matter of months after the Lord had rescued the people of Israel out of their slavery to the Egyptians, when they are complaining again and not trusting in the Lord to provide. So soon they have forgotten how God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could pass through on dry land and escape the Egyptians who were pursuing them. So soon they have forgotten how the Lord satisfied their hunger with manna in the morning and quail at night. Now in this passage of Exodus 17 we read how the people of Israel are camped at Rephidim where there is no water for them to drink. As they thirst their anger with Moses increases and they grumble to him demanding that he give them water. So soon they have forgotten how powerful their God is and they rebel against Him again.

We have the opportunity during this Lent to reflect on our own lives to see if we have grumbled like the people of Israel, because we have forgotten all the powerful things that God has done in our lives. Although we pray for God's plan in our lives, things do not always turn out the way we think they should because we do not see God's full plan. We can commit to using this time of Lent to walk closer to the Lord in our worship, our prayer, and our study so that our grumbles are dissolved into joy.

Prayer: Lord, help us always remember the powerful ways you have touched our lives and to walk closer to you each day. **Amen.**
by Linda McElroy

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Exodus 17:5-7

"Is Yahweh with us or not," grumbled the Israelites, because they were thirsty and there was no water in the valley of Rephidim, which is in the Sinai desert. Directed by God, Moses struck a rock and water flowed from it at a place called Massiah and Meribah, which translated means trial and contention. As a type of Christ, the striking of the rock pictured Christ being struck and crucified when he was on earth more than 2000 years ago. What an awesome picture God has given us in Exodus 17.

Years ago Dick and I saw David Copperfield, an illusionist, perform in New York City, quite impressive. God, on the other hand, is not a illusionist. He is our Father and wants what is best for us, just as he did for the Israelites. How often do I grumble and ask God "Why, why me, why now?" Most times it is over little inconveniences that are part of life.

Many reading this devotional are like me with no real-life altering tragedies. Yet, we still say, when situations do not meet our expectations, "Is God listening?"

Prayer: God, Help me to stop grumbling and to trust that you are with me always. **Amen.**
by Gerry Zeich

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Psalms 95

After reading this verse, I think it is a wake up call for each and every one of us to look around and really see all that God has given and provided for us. The Psalm calls for us to, "Come into his presence with thanksgiving." It tells us that God holds the world in his hands, "from the depths of the earth to the heights of the mountains, to the sea and all the dry land—his hands have formed." How often we take for granted the beauty of a sunrise or sunset, the miracle of birth and a child's innocence, or the ever present gift of God's love for each of us.

The Psalm ends by warning the reader not to “harden his heart.” It’s easy to see only the negative in the world and focus on our daily trials. In this passage. I feel we’re asked to be aware of all our blessings and find a way to be thankful to our God each and every day.

by Karin Ruppel

Thursday, February 21, 2008

Romans 5:1-5

Through Jesus, “...we have gained access by faith into the grace in which we now stand.” Barclay’s translation puts it that through Jesus, “...we are in possession of an introduction to this grace in which we stand...” This word, “introduction” (or “gain access”) in the Greek has a meaning of ushering someone into the presence of royalty or ushering them into the presence of God. And what do we find when we get there? God’s grace – the unfathomable, unlimited love and kindness of God that offers us forgiveness instead of condemnation. But this word for introduction has a secondary meaning – it can also be used to describe a harbor, a safe anchorage for ships. Taken that way, it means that as long as we try to do things ourselves, we are condemned to a life and death on a cold, storm tossed sea, but that when we listen to and respond to Christ, we reach a safe haven and know the calm of depending not on ourselves but on God. It is this hope that enables us to make sense out of our suffering. Note that the passage does not say that we rejoice because of suffering, but that we can rejoice during suffering because of what God will bring about in the end.

A number of years ago a dear friend and man whom I looked to as a spiritual mentor lay dying of cancer. I last saw him a couple of days before his death. He was in a great deal of pain and his medications clouded his awareness, but I remember him saying, “It’s all good.” He wasn’t saying that he was happy for the suffering, but rather that he had his ultimate hope in God. Don was in that safe haven provided by God’s grace. He knew

that no matter what happened his hope in God would never be betrayed, but instead that it would be fulfilled. And it was! As much as his family and friends grieved, there was no doubt that Don had reached that ultimate safe haven of everlasting life with God. May we all be able to say with Don, “It’s all good.”

Prayer: Lord, as I am reminded once more during this Lenten season of the sufferings of Jesus and prepare to celebrate his Resurrection, build within me that hope in you that will sustain me during times of suffering and trial. Bring me to that safe harbor of hope that you provide through your grace. I ask this in Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

by Dave McElroy

Friday, February 22, 2008

Romans 5:6-11

These verses bring us directly to the heart of the Easter season and the remembrance of Christ dying for our sins on the cross. “...One will hardly die for a righteous man ... But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us ... we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.” Christ’s willingness to die for us when we were sinners is unmistakable proof of God’s amazing love.

The steps of God’s plan for our lives are shown in these verses. They are: (1) Christ dying for us, (2) The sacrifice of Christ to satisfy the judgment of God, (3) The propitiation or God’s acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice for us, (4) Reconciliation or our acceptance of Christ, (5) Forgiveness of sins or justification that our sins are blotted out, (6) Our redemption from the grave, and (7) Finally our glorification in heaven.

Every Easter is special because it reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice for us. How can we repay someone who has died for us? The only way I know is to hold that person’s memory and life close to us and choose to emulate the best part of the person’s

life. Emulating Christ's life is very difficult, what with the business of everyday living and the time constraint that we all feel, but what Christ asks is that we continue to grow closer to him. Growing closer to Christ is accomplished by learning more about him and his teachings by reading and studying the Bible and then by doing those things that Christ would do. Although it may seem a little trite, the simple phrase, "What Would Jesus Do?" or WWJD, can go a long way to help us act more like Christ and help us move closer to what he would have us do. As we approach Easter this year think about Christ's life, his teachings and what he wants us to do to be more like him. Shall we pray.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we fall short of your expectations for us. We do not do what you want us to do and we are not always faithful. Please help us to know your will for our lives and help and guide us to be more like Christ. We pray in Christ's name. **Amen.**

by Bill Schneider (from 2005 Lenten Devotional with permission from Bill Schneider)

Saturday, February 23, 2008

John 4:5-26

This is a very familiar passage to many of us, the story of Jesus with the woman at the well. The woman was a Samaritan, and if you remember the story of the Good Samaritan, you will remember that the Jews and the Samaritans did not really mix their cultures together. So it was surprising to the woman that Jesus chose to speak to her and to ask her for a drink. The scripture lesson never says she actually gave Jesus his drink, and many believe that she never did, which I thought was interesting. To me, that drives the lesson home that Jesus does not need water the same way we (our bodies) do, because He is the living water. He is our salvation, our one sacrifice. Before Jesus, the Jews practiced continual sacrifices to atone for their sins. Now, all of us who believe in Him can rely on Him as our sacrifice. Jesus uses many phrases to try to help us understand

this change (living water, bread of life). I think He really wants us to rely on Him for what we need, because He gives us more than we can ever imagine. His one sacrifice covers all of us, forever! That's the miracle! There's nothing we can do that would be any greater or more precious than that. I pray that on your Lenten journey, you will find this truth for yourself, as the woman at the well did. If you read a little further, she says that Jesus told her everything she had ever done. He knows all about you and me, and yet sacrificed Himself for us! Praise God!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for being the living water by which I am sustained. Thank you for your great sacrifice, so that I can live forever. **Amen.**

by Linda Westenberger

Third Sunday in Lent, February 24, 2008

John 4:27-42

I would like to look a little bit at where Jesus talks about harvesting and reaping. How do we go about this? Some people have the gift of eloquent speaking. Others are easily able to share their faith. Many live their faith in their daily actions and deeds.

However we do this, Jesus says we may not see the results. Sometimes though we'll see the results of what others have started. It really shouldn't matter who does what. We all should be sharing our faith in how God leads us. Each in our own way, so others may come to faith in Christ. We never know how some little word or deed may stir someone to seek God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for allowing each one of us to serve you in our various ways. May we always be looking for opportunities to where our faith is leading us so we can lead others to you. **Amen.**

by Jim Prommel

Monday, February 25, 2008

1 Samuel 16:1-5

In the Old Testament, God is always telling his people to follow his instructions, and he asks some pretty unreasonable stuff, like telling Samuel to go up against the King. When Samuel points out to God that this could get him killed, God tells him not to worry and lays out His plan to Samuel. Samuel, now feeling protected and reassured, follows God's directions.

What I found interesting is that Samuel questioned God's wishes, and this made me think of all the times I have questioned God's will in my life. I always feel as though my faith should be enough and that questioning God is sinful; a sure sign that my faith is not as strong as I'd like it to be. Reading that Samuel questioned God, made me realize that as long as I try to follow God's will for me, it is okay to have questions. And, as long as I go back to Him with my questions and not try to answer them myself, I will be graced with His love and His reassurance. When I am in prayer and if I listen carefully, God will always find a way to let me know He is looking out for me. He has made the ultimate sacrifice for me through Jesus, so I should never doubt the direction He offers.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for offering me peace and joy through my faith in you. Thank you for always being there to walk with me and to guide me through the difficult times. Bless all your children throughout the world and help them to hear your uplifting message. Please help me to be the person you want me to be. In Jesus Christ, I pray. **Amen.**

by Jill Harding

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

John 9:1-41

People are not easily convinced of any truth if it's outside of their current belief system. In Jesus' time, even though there were no news reports and talk show hosts to "spin" the issues, there were

still different perspectives to any issue. The Pharisees saw Jesus as a challenge to their established ways and to their personal power. The blind man saw Jesus as his savior, the person who gave him sight. The general population saw the blind man either as a person miraculously healed or a person who could always see that looked surprisingly like the blind man. The people also felt their faith being challenged and either stuck by their traditions, therefore believing Jesus to be a sinner for acting on the Sabbath, or excited about prophecy fulfilled and a prophet walking among them. Jesus of course knew that those who chose not to believe in him would not be convinced no matter what miracles he performed.

The parents of the blind man were afraid to tell the church officials what they truly believed, and the blind man (who is no longer blind) keeps telling the officials "though I was blind, now I see" but the officials remain deaf to his words.

It's so easy to shake my head and to think that I know the truth, but not so easy to see the same small mindedness in myself that I dislike in others. This story reminds me that truth can come from some unlikely sources, perhaps even from people I think are blind.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help open my eyes and my heart to my neighbors and to remember not to judge others. Please help me to be a better witness through kindness and respect. Help me to remember whose footsteps I should follow and to forgive myself when I stumble. Help me to stay on the road you have put before me. **Amen.**

by Jill Harding

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

1 Samuel 16:6-13

While Samuel may have wanted to select someone impressive looking and handsome to be king, the Lord chose David, son of Jesse, as Israel's next king. Saul was initially considered to be

quite a notable king who obeyed God, but became rebellious, arrogant and evil. God took away his kingdom and appointed Samuel to anoint David in secret. David was publicly anointed much later after Saul's death. God did not choose David based on his outward appearance but because he had a heart for God and obeyed him.

How often have we based our opinions of people we see or meet by their outward appearance? Whether someone is shabby or chic, bizarre or stunning, awkward or self-assured, we can surely make a mistake when we presume that a particular superficial image accurately has a bearing on what a person is really like on the inside. And would we want these same unmerited and mistaken opinions to be made about us by others?

What is in a person's heart is the message of this scripture. Thankfully, God sees us for our innermost beauty, faith and character, and not our external features.

Our society, media, and culture place so much importance on a person's outward physical beauty, and time and again, our human nature wrongly concludes prejudiced impressions about people.

May we endeavor to concern ourselves with spending as much or more time working on our inner character, as we do on enhancing our outer appearance. God knows us and loves us, and His desire is for us to develop a heart for Him.

Prayer: Dear Father, forgive me when I misjudge others based on their appearances. I pray that you will sustain me in developing a heart for you and one that seeks to recognize the good in others. May you offer me an opportunity, as well, to share the gospel message of your son Jesus Christ with them. Thank you for your good gifts. **Amen.**

by Walt Hoffman

Thursday, February 28, 2008

Ephesians 5:8-14

I guess now that I call myself a Christian, this passage calls me to act like one! Drunkenness is a sin that never goes alone. I have many. It is my vices that hold me back. The things in my life that go against His will, must be rooted out. They have no value; it is time to get rid of them. I must not have only a sight and a knowledge that sin is sin, and in some measure shameful, but see it as a breach of God's Will. Now that I have a glimpse of the light, I need to walk in it. I need to constantly put His kingdom first. Not only that, I need to show others that I believe in the Kingdom of God.

There is a song we sing that says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." It does not say they will know us by our car(s), money, property or clothes. It is our love and all that that word means, that is the true measure of our faith. If I allow myself to love these things of the world, how can I belong to the kingdom of grace? All God's people have reason to sing for joy. Though we are not always singing, we should be always giving thanks. Do I have the strength to really walk in the light and let everyone know that I am a believer? How can I do this in this world?

Prayer: God, your light is wonderful. I have only seen a small portion of true grace. Please grant me the ability to show all that I meet that I am a true believer in your Son and all of your glory! I pray that I am humble in your glory and reflect all the light that you shine on me! **Amen.**

by John Crandall

Friday, February 29, 2008

Psalm 23:1-4

As we journey through the season of Lent, we may be reminded at times of bad or uncomfortable times. The Lenten process involves deep soul-searching -- a process that can bring forth

memories of times when we have been sinful, reminders that we must repent. At those times, we are walking through the valley of death. Yet even there, God is with us. We can be comforted by God's presence, confident that with repentance comes forgiveness and peace, in green pastures, beside still waters.

Prayer:: We journey on through this time of ashes and soul-searching, praying for the peace and forgiveness you have promised us. Lead us to the green pastures and still waters where we may rest in your blessings. **Amen.**

by Regina Heater

Saturday, March 1, 2008

Psalm 23:5-6

How often do we instantly question God and His devotion to us when something bad happens? And how many times do we forget to thank Him when something good happens? Generally we believe that most of us fail to realize that the Lord is always on our side. Too often, however, we substitute faith with fear and worry which blinds our eyes with needless stress. This portion of Psalm 23 tells us to turn all of our decisions and worry to the Lord and He will provide for us.

Each and every day we go through our lives without taking risks because we are often fearful of the outcome. No one ever plans to die, except for Jesus, but this is always a distinct possibility. It is imperative for us to just focus on accomplishing everything that God intends us to do, constantly keeping one eye to the future. It is evident that we should not undertake foolish acts involving foolhardy risks to test God's meddle, but we should not be afraid to make a difference in this world because of fear. Here we are reminded that God will always have us back.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us to remember that you are always by our side through the good times and the bad times. Give us the reminders to thank you when you are constantly

there protecting us. **Amen.**

*by Chiazam Onyenso, Dominick Esposito and Kelly Forshay
(Sr. High)*

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 2, 2008

John 9:35-41

Everyday, Christians are faced with others who cannot see Jesus and His grace in our schools and work places. There are always people who do not understand the ways of Jesus, just like the Pharisees in Biblical times. We must help these people, through our good words and kind deeds, to see Jesus as we see Him. The majority of the time, Christians and non-Christians cannot see Jesus through the worldly eyes. Material goods, earthly goals and monetary rewards cloud our vision of the right path.

These verses remind us of our yearly sojourn on the Appalachian Service Project. Each time we go we are always forced to open our eyes to the way God wants us to live. Aiding others is a constant reminder of how grateful we should be for the possessions and people we have in our lives. The relentless faith and compassion of the people of Appalachia is always inspirational.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see You in our everyday lives. Guide us down the Christian way. Thank you for our Appalachian Service Project Team and the spirituality we find by being a part of it. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

*by Kristen Minno, Robby Willersdorf and Tony Kmush
(Sr. High)*

Monday, March 3, 2008

Ezekiel 37:1-3

Ezekiel 37:1-3, The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very

many in the open valley and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man can these bones live?" So I answered, "O Lord God, You Know."

Then God instructs Ezekiel to "Prophecy" to the bones and say "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" The word of the Lord to the dry bones was nothing less than to come together again, regain their flesh and finally receive back the breath of life. This vision that Ezekiel had was for the benefit of the children of Israel because they were feeling that their hope was cut-off and that their spirits were like the dry bones - lifeless.

In the New Testament the disciples hear a similar message of God's power occurring just after Jesus tells the disciples that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The astounded disciples, believing that the rich were favored by God, ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replies, "This is impossible for man but not for God, with God all things are possible."

With all of the demands of life - the personal loss of financial security when I lost my job and with too often the experience of failure to love God or my fellow man - there are many times when I feel overwhelmed and that the life of my spirit has dried-up. I feel sometimes, like the children of Israel, that my hope is cutoff. This verse from Ezekiel and from the New Testament provides the hope that keeps me going in all circumstances whether loss, temptation or failure I know that God can breathe new life into my dry bones.

by Rene Dussault

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Ezekiel 37:4-14 "Dry Bones"

Most of us learned the spiritual about "DRY BONES." It is a fun song to sing and one that sticks in the memory bank. Suddenly, fragments of the song have been going through my head. "The neck bone is connected to...." So...I read the Scripture

and...spent a lot of time pondering what to write. My husband Pat suggested I use the DRY BONES to write about those DRY times in our Spiritual life. Everybody has times when we feel "DRY" spiritually. Sometimes we are the ones who hold God at arm's length - or try to stuff Him into the back of the closet. Sometimes we are just "too busy with our lives" to take time for God. Then...we become DRY and brittle spiritually. Then...something happens...a health crisis, family issues, job problems. WE need God. But, we feel so DRY. Maybe...we have not allowed God to be part of our everyday lives. Is He still there? Will He listen? Will He really help me? The amazing thing about God is that He is always there. Even though we feel as parched as we can be Spiritually...just calling on the name of the Lord will give those DRY BONES all the hydration that they need. So...if you feel DRY at some point in your life...just say the name of Jesus, tell Him all your troubles...and just feel those DRY BONES come alive.

Prayer: God, when troubles come and I feel DRY, help me to remember to call upon You. Help all of us to remember that no matter how far away we may feel from You, You are always right beside us. **Amen**

by Karen Hintz

Wednesday, March 5, 2008

Psalm 130

This is such a straightforward prayer to me, an honest plea for help. This is very different than the "fox hole" prayers I use to say. They were so conditional and sounded like, "God, if you get me out of this mess I'm in now, I will not do IT again." It was not until I recognized my sin, and completely trusted Him unconditionally, that He helped me with my uncontrollable drinking. My prayer wasn't fancy or long, it was just an honest plea for His help in any form He saw fit. I tried many other things prior to finding God thru AA. All offered themselves as remedies, but in the end were just distractions and diversions from the simple fact that the Lord alone can heal. My path of

faith leads me to our Lord, Jesus Christ, thru the basements of many churches and for that I am forever grateful. I now know the only way of relief for this sin-entangled soul is by applying to God alone. The hard part is doing this all the time. Why do I have such trouble practicing this? Why can't I "get it" in everything I do and everyone I meet? I want to be a good Christian, what is my problem? I still have a long way to go.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I cannot justify my sin or plead "not guilty". My trust and faith in You alone is the only strength I need to overcome my weaknesses. Alone I am weak, with You I have all the strength needed to rid my life of sin. I pray today for humility and your grace. I pray that I may be strong enough to accept this, one day at a time. **Amen.**

by John Crandall

Thursday, March 6, 2008

Romans 8:6-8

These scriptures verses talk about the mind of a person. The Message writes the verses as: Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.

We can't focus on ourselves and focus on God at the same time. It just doesn't work that way. We need to wake up everyday with the mind set to center our life on Christ. It is just as the saying goes, "What Would Jesus Do?" not "What Would I do?" If we start our day, everyday by saying, "God, today is for you," life just makes more sense. We are more fulfilled in

God's spirit. We need to TRUST in God. He never gives us more than we can handle, although at times it may seem that way. But the key word is TRUST! If we trust in God and what God throws at our way, we will get through the rough times. If we don't trust in Him those rough times just get harder.

More Scripture References: Romans 6:6-8, Ephesians 4:22-24, and Colossians 3:3-15

Prayer: God, may our lives be centered on you. May we wake up each day ready to focus our lives on You. Even though it may seem hard at times, help us to trust in you and your timing. Guide us through this Lenten season to become Christ-centered people. In Jesus' precious name. **Amen.**

by Casey Crandall

Friday, March 7, 2008

Romans 8:9-11

This entire passage speaks about how the Holy Spirit works through us to overcome our sinful natures. The Holy Spirit wants to have control over that sinful nature, but sometimes we seem to have so much trouble letting go to allow him to do this. The Holy Spirit is another gift of God's grace, one that he freely gave to us to help us live as the kind of people he wants us to be. We should constantly be asking for the guidance of the Spirit in our lives. We don't ever have to make difficult decision alone; we have the Holy Spirit. I think that the more we invoke guidance of the Holy Spirit, the more we allow him to have control, and then it becomes more a part of our nature to do the right thing. Like all things, it takes practice. We must remember this tremendous gift, and use it to grow and develop the god-like qualities, so we can be an example to others. Praise God for this wonderful gift!

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Help me to rely on him for guidance in both the great and small decisions in life, to be a force in overcoming my sinful nature.

Thank you also for the gift of Jesus, who had to pay such a high price for my sins. Thank you for loving me enough to send him to die for me. Help me to be worthy of these gifts. **Amen.**

by Linda Westenberger

Saturday, March 8, 2008

John 11:1-27

What these verses mean to me.

You and your loved ones may be very sick and dying, but if you believe in Jesus you will never die, for he said, "I am the resurrection, he who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives, and believes in me will never die."

Do you believe this?

Prayer: Remind me, God, of the dust from which I came and unto which I shall return. Let me treasure every breath and every moment you have given me. Help me live full each day as if it were my last. Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit confident I shall one day see you face to face. And on that day, this dust will once again be glorified to form Your holy temple forever. **Amen.**

by Barbara Wilson

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 9, 2008

John 11:28-45

In our lives, we are so, so busy, that we sometimes forget to listen to what God is saying. Forgetting to listen and praise God is common place in this, the craziness of our lives. This is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Mary and the rest of Lazarus' friends were grieving for his death, but as we see from the scripture, Mary still believed through her grief that God and Jesus were there for them.

In my life, I seem to sometimes forget that God is there for me

no matter what. I remember a time that everything was going very, very wrong. My grandmother was dying; I was in the hospital and needed to have surgery; my parents were on the road trying to get to my grandmother before she died; I was scared and mad at everything and everyone. After my surgery, I started bleeding internally and could have died. I found out that my grandmother had died, and I wanted my parents to be there. I was laying there and that was when I realized that God was there and all I had to do was pray and believe. That was when things started to get better.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for being there no matter what. I know that we haven't always trusted in your presence, but you are always there and trust in us, expecting nothing but our love. I pray that we will remember that you are the Prince of Peace and when we are going through the worst times of our lives, we will remember that you are there for us and that you have us in the palms of your hands. **Amen.**

by Steve Foley

Monday, March 10, 2008

Matthew 21:1-11

What a great line: Next time you ask a co-worker or family member for something and they question you, just say "The Lord has need of it!" If you can ever make that work, please let me know!

Actually, there is at least once in my life when I knew the Lord had need of me. One day I innocently asked a co-worker at her desk what she was doing with the classified ads from across the country. "Our adoption attorney told us we should put ads in rural newspapers, because there are often girls who've gotten themselves 'into trouble' and don't know what to do." I knew that she and her husband had tried every available medical procedure to conceive, and were unsuccessful. I said, "That sounds like the area where I grew up. You oughta put an ad in the Medina, Ohio *Gazette*. She did.

That was fifteen years ago. Every year I get a picture Christmas card from her of their two adopted daughters. This year she wrote: "I haven't forgotten that you were a major part in Gina coming into our family. We'll always be thankful and remember the friendship we had."

Gina was found under just those circumstances, from the ad in the *Gazette*. It remains a real thrill for me to consider how that two-minute conversation impacted so many lives for the good. But what's really exciting is knowing that I was merely a messenger – the Lord had need of me, and I responded so off-handedly that I can't honestly even take credit for what I said! I try to remember this in some way every day, in case the Lord has need of me again.

Prayer: Father in heaven, when You have need of me, please call. And if I don't answer, you might remind me that it's You. **Amen.**

by Paul Breda

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

God is good all the time, all the time God is good.

I give thanks to the Lord every day! I have so much to be thankful for.

Just when I think everything is going wrong he hears my prayers and things always seem to get better!

His mercy does endure forever!

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for... (name those things for which you are thankful). **Amen.**

by Betty Rice

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Isaiah 50:4-9a

I received this passage for the devotional just before the holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr. It speaks of the good we must pass on, the conviction we need to do the work of the Lord. Being a Christian can be daunting, but it is a worthy task. Dr. King knew this and fought hard for the "right" to win out over the "wrong". God has given each of us so very much and it is our duty, our charge to spread the good word and reflect our Christianity in our behavior. It is a hard thing to turn away from bullies, fight injustice, refuse to gossip, and do the right thing. But it is the only action that is right and true. God will always be there for us, our guardian, so there is nothing we can fear. Neither the hand of a bully nor the word of a liar can bring us harm. And in this knowledge we can rejoice. It is the moment you do "the right thing" that you realize the compassion and love God has for us all. It is indeed a wonderful feeling.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the lessons we receive that make us stronger in the knowledge of your Word. It is through our trials and challenges that we truly learn the love of the Almighty. Help us grow and learn. In His Name we pray. **Amen.**

by Sue Forshay

Thursday, March 13, 2008

Psalm 31:9-16

This verse, in our opinion, simply states that we need to control how others in society impact our actions. We often see in school how peer pressure and wanting to fit in can cause some to make poor choices and do things that God would not approve of. Christ is the best guide for us to use to make logical Christian decisions and we need to constantly remind ourselves of that so that when the moment comes, we use Him to help us.

it is important for us to not listen to the sometimes persuasive voices of some of our peers that pressure us to make wrong decisions. These verses help us to understand that we must make choices for ourselves and let Christ guide us. In very difficult situations when you feel unhappy and can't seem to get out of your rut, you must turn to God and the Bible to give you advice and help you succeed in your lives.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for Your constant assistance in drawing us close to You. If it were not for You we would be lost in a haze of deceit and greed. Help us to see Your light through the haze and make strides each day in making it through to the clear fields that lead to eternal life. **Amen.**
by Oliver Bateman, Brian Smith and Bryan Coward (Sr. High)

Friday, March 14, 2008
Philippians 2:5-11

Wherever we go we see different kinds of people. In today's society, people who look different, act different, talk different, are homeless, have dependency problems - all are prevalent. We must remember to never be quick to judge. When you see a homeless person you think they are on drugs, or see a popular girl at school and assume she is snobby, or a smart person and assume they probably are a nerd. The verses here remind us to never be too quick to judge because as the Bible says: What you do to the least of the people you have done unto Me.

At one point in time, God was of us. Jesus Christ lived as a person even though He was in the form of God. In Philippians 2:5-11, the Lord humbled himself and didn't discriminate. In our lives today, we cannot judge people on the way they look or where they come from, but instead only love all of them unconditionally. Even as a human, God gave Jesus the "name that is above every name so that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father". Each person we don't show love to could be God and we do not want to treat our Lord poorly.

Prayer: Lord, give us the strength to earn and give equality to others. Allow us to get through each day with a kind, open and loving heart. Help us not to put ourselves above others, no matter what the circumstance is. Thank you for being in our lives.

Amen.
by Melissa Coward, Meghan Forshay and Emma Breda (Sr. High)

Saturday, March 15, 2008
Matthew 26:14-56

Are you a good friend? Would you have been a better friend than the disciples of Jesus? Jesus had just days on earth which he wanted to spend with his disciples, those individuals who put Jesus first before their own lives and that of their family. Did the disciples live up to their promise?

We have Judas who for 30 silver coins agreed to betray Jesus amongst a crowd of people by placing a kiss on his cheek. During the Last Supper, Jesus gathered his friends for a Passover feast and the chance for a disciple to admit his sin of betrayal. Instead the disciples all responded, "Surely Lord, you do not mean me?" when Jesus confronted the group. Then, the night before Jesus' arrest, the disciples went with Jesus to pray in Gethsemane. They were to keep watch with Jesus as he prays throughout the night. "How is it that you three were not able to keep watch with me for even one hour?" (Matthew 26:40). Lastly, upon Jesus' arrest, the disciples all fled and ran away just as he expected.

Friendships are very important in our daily lives. You might be tired when a friend calls you on the phone, but take the time to spend even a few moments to talk. Your schedule might be too busy when a friend asks a favor, but work it out to lend a hand. Not all of our friends might have the tolerance Jesus had with his disciples but we want to make sure that we emulate the friendship Jesus has with us toward others.

Prayer: Everyday we are faced with many temptations whether it is an urge to do something good or that will mislead us from the road to salvation. Please help us to stay faithful to you and please forgive us for the many times we've engaged in acts that display faults such as Judas and the disciples. **Amen.**

*by Sarah Ritter, Chidimma Onyenso and Tami Haupt
(Sr. High)*

Passion/Palm Sunday, March 16, 2008

Matthew 21:1b-11

How busy are you? If you are like me, there are probably hundreds of things on your list to be completed this morning. It seems no matter how much we worry and stress about these things, when we finish them there will be just as many waiting to replace them. Clearly, it is not getting our tasks done that is the issue, rather, we must understand that worrying about getting them done is not productive. We must learn to turn them over to God and through Him we will accomplish all tasks and not worry about their completion.

When I read these verses, it has a two-fold message for me. First of all, by showing a rare bit of anger, Jesus drives home the point that His world and His house should be solely to bring others to the kingdom and worship Him. Too often the problems of the world and self-centered interests bog us down in our daily lives and causes us to veer from the intended course. It is as if Jesus is turning over the tables of our mind and body telling us to wake up. Secondly, by healing and performing tasks on the Sabbath, Jesus calls us all to use our time wisely and never take breaks in doing His will. By "wisely", of course, I am not talking about the menial tasks that we frequently stress about. We should spend our time showing love to others, bringing Christ to those who do not know Him, helping those who are in need, and building ourselves into an acceptable vessel for God's calling.

If we awoke every morning and heeded the messages from

these verses as we go on our way, the world would be far better off. Let each of us on this day keep our minds free of stress and our hearts full of that which God deems important: loving everyone the way God loves us.

by Jim Haupt

Monday, March 17, 2007

Isaiah 42:1-9

Leading by example. Our greatest teachers on earth, those who impress us the most are often people who have guided us by their actions. These verses underscore the fact that God wants us to be people with wisdom, strength and courage to lead by example and "do the right thing". We can do this only with guidance from God. "I, the Lord, have called you, and given you the power to see that justice is done on earth." (vs. 6) We can make sure everyday, through our actions, that we treat others with fairness and kindness. On a more global scale, we can pray that our world leaders follow these scriptures. "... he will bring justice to every nation. He will not shout or raise his voice ... he will bring lasting justice to all ... he will not lose hope or courage."

As America elects a new leader, let us pray that our leader has the strength and courage to follow God's words. And, let us pray that we, as individuals, can conduct ourselves as true leaders through our right actions daily, by looking to our Lord for guidance.

by Sue Goglas

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Reading this passage reminds me of a familiar quote I'm sure we have all heard; "The best laid plans of mice and men often

go astray”. My own experiences have taught me that no matter how much you believe you know, there is always more to learn. No matter how carefully you plan for the unexpected, the unexpected often happens. Of course if you planned for the unexpected, it really wasn’t all that unexpected in the first place. Hence the folly that this passage speaks of. I Corinthians 1:18-31 tells us that compared to the wisdom and power of God we are all created equal. No one of us, no matter how smart, is significantly smarter than another. No one of us, no matter how powerful, is more powerful than another. The Scottish poet, Robert Burns, makes the comparison between mice and men. This passage in Corinthians makes a similar comparison between men and God and reminds us that those who fail to recognize this are foolish.

This passage also contains a message about faith. It is written “in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom”. Our wisdom comes from the word of the cross, the teachings of Christ who was crucified. This is a stumbling block to those who seek proof or a sign of some sort. The notion that the King of kings could be crucified leads some to believe that this was just a man and his word not that important. For those who have faith, Christ is wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to understand the wisdom of your way. Help us to recognize that we are all the same in the eyes of the Lord. Help those who are lost to find faith and recognize that the word of the cross is the wisdom of God for all people.

Amen.

by Steve Redington

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

John 13:21-32

It’s the Last Supper and Jesus’ time with the disciples is quickly drawing to an end. It ends up being a rather confusing time for

the poor disciples. They’re celebrating Passover, Jesus has washed their feet—those are good things—but Jesus says some strange things: “One of you will betray me,” and “the time has come for me to enter into my glory.”

What is he talking about?

The disciples don’t seem to have any idea, and wonder who in the world would do such a thing. Jesus tells them it’s the one he gives the bread to and they still don’t put it all together when he gives the bread to Judas. He then tells Judas to “do it now” and they assume he’s talking about Judas paying their bill, since he’s the accountant of the group.

We’d like to think we’re not like the disciples, wouldn’t we? That we wouldn’t ever betray Jesus in any way; that we’d understand the things Jesus teaches us. But I think this story is here for a reason—to remind us that we often don’t see how and where we betray Jesus. If the disciples who knew him best, who lived, walked, ate and slept on borrowed floors with him didn’t always see how they were thoughtless and clueless about their betrayals of him, then who are we to think that we can do any better? We can’t. We will all do things to let him down and walk away from him and leave him as anguished as the disciples sometimes did.

However! (And this is the good part for us!) There’s always good news! When Judas betrayed Jesus it led to Jesus’ glory, which is God’s glory, which is to say that the wonderfulness of Jesus, of God, ends up being the point of everything, no matter how sad, lonely, lazy, nasty, even ugly things were before, things we may have done. This happens because the wonderfulness of God is that bad things turn out good, that forgiveness can always follow hurt, that wrong will be made right. And, as we shall see on Easter, even death will be life, when God has the final say.

by Christopher Hintz

Maundy Thursday, March 20, 2008

John 13:1-17,31b-35

Jesus had an amazing way of teaching his life lessons so that we disciples could understand his message. Jesus often spoke in parables, telling stories that are easy for us to remember and relate to. But Jesus also demonstrated His love for us in concrete ways that also were memorable. The Last Supper which has become our Holy Communion is one of those ways. Another way is in the washing of the disciples' feet. This was traditionally a job that only a household servant would do. However, Jesus, the Messiah, was willing to abase himself and wash His disciples' feet. He was doing this to show that one must lower oneself, and become like a servant, in order to be a true follower of Jesus. Jesus said that we needed to do this in order to be recognized by other people as followers of Jesus. Reminds me of the song "They'll Know We are Christians by Our Love." Jesus' command to us is to love one another.

I'd like to give an example of that love...When I went back to church again in my late 20's, I didn't truly know what church was about. I was pregnant with my first son when my husband had to have life-threatening emergency surgery. I told one person in that church about it. Soon I got a phone call from the pastor who was on vacation in Maine at the time. I was confused why he would bother to take time to call me. When I gave birth to my son, two church women wanted to come visit me. Again, I was confused. Why would two women whom I hardly knew, want to come visit me? Not only that, they showed up with gifts for my son! These Christians demonstrated to me the kind of sacrificial love that Christ was talking about.

I witness this love at Mt. Fern, too. There are some women who don't know me well but take it upon themselves to look for me during coffee hour and make sure that I am doing o.k. One woman from Mt. Fern, when I was suffering from depression, made a point of taking me out to movies, coffee, and a musical ensemble which helped make me feel better and get through a

difficult time in my life. I have also noticed how people reach out to visit the sick at home and in hospitals. I also notice how some women enjoy serving in the kitchen, preparing meals for Mt. Fern UMW events or funerals.

Prayer: Dear God, we are thankful for the love we find at Mt. Fern and how we serve one another. Let us take that same love and reach out to the world we live in so that we may make You real to others. **Amen.**

by Melanie Newton

Good Friday, March 21, 2008

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This section of Scripture is known as "The Suffering Servant." It is a prophecy of what the Messiah will endure when he comes. In conjunction with our Gospel lessons, we see how our God did not simply become a human on earth. He became a human who walked among the humblest, most lowly people and endured the poverty, diseases, oppression and injustices they dealt with. There is a song by Michael W. Smith called "Secret Ambition." One of the lines is "No one knew his secret ambition was to give his life away." Jesus walked among us, teaching us how to live in community, and in the end he gave his life for the community, freely and willingly. The transgressions he died for are not just individual sins but those that society commits against one another - by not working for peace and justice, to end poverty, and by not committing itself to better healthcare for all people. As we acknowledge the Crucifixion on this Good Friday, let us be careful to remember why Jesus gave his life.

Prayer: Creator God, our hearts are heavy as we consider the implications of that Good Friday so long ago. Thank you for the gift of your sacrifice, and help us to honor that by guiding us to commitments to changes in our community and throughout the world. Though we endure the coldness of the grave tonight, bring us hope for Resurrection Day. **Amen.**

by Regina Heater

Holy Saturday, March 22, 2008

Acts 10:34-45

“Peter opened his mouth,” and in these verses makes the point that, consistent with past promises, God chose Israel to receive his word through Jesus Christ. The word was first proclaimed by John through baptism, then demonstrated through the power of the Holy Spirit in “doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.” Throughout, he makes the point that it was “the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem” chosen to witness all that Jesus did; and his manifestation through death on the cross was revealed “not to all but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses.”

But in acknowledging Israel’s unique role in God’s plan for humanity, Peter is also stressing that this message of salvation was intended for everyone, not just the Jews. In fact, it was Jesus’ commandment to those fortunate witnesses that they “preach to the people, and to testify” that Jesus is the way to salvation. For God “shows no partiality,” only requiring that all nations respect and obey him.

And as if to sanctify this pronouncement, the Holy Spirit “fell on those who heard” Peter’s words, “even on the Gentiles.” So through these verses, one of the Book of Acts’ recurring themes is emphasized: Jesus’ salvation through his death is meant for all, and in fact we are commanded to share the good news of this salvation among all the nations.

Prayer: Lord, we live in times of divisiveness and conflict within our society, and among nations. Bless those who unselfishly seek to break these barriers with the power of your love, and strengthen me to this task. **Amen.**

by Paul Breda

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008

John 20:1-18

Easter Sunday! It has come again. Time for Easter bunnies, dyeing Easter eggs awesome vibrant colors. Time to wear our Easter best, time for Easter dinners with all the trimmings; and let’s not forget our hunt for Easter Baskets and hidden eggs. I know what most people are thinking, yes, those traditions are important but what about the Resurrection? That’s pretty important, it’s more important than Easter basket hunting. **The Resurrection is the most important day in the Christian calendar.**

I love the story of Mary Magdalene, it could be because my great-grandmother’s name happened to be Mary Magdalene, and my sister’s confirmation name was Magdalene. But I think it is more that Mary Magdalene is just such an integral part in the entire ministry of Jesus. She is always there, often not mentioned, but always there. But even Mary, the devout disciple did not recognize her Lord, not until Jesus spoke her name. I often wonder how many times I have not seen my Lord, how many times did I pass an opportunity by to lend a hand, because I was so busy in my own importance. How many times and how long did Jesus have to call my name for me to hear His voice?

The fantastic and humbling aspect of this is that Jesus does call our names, not just during the Easter season but always. He never deserts us nor does he ever leave us in our time of need, all that is needed is for us to be willing to hear and to believe in the miracle of the Resurrection story.

Prayer: Today, Resurrected Jesus, may your voice be heard to all that are able. May your story, the story of your devoted followers be ever present in our hearts and on our minds? May the sacrifice that you made a few days earlier be our understanding grace and the power that Your Father showed by raising you, may that be the clarity that we need at this Easter time. **Amen and Amen.**

by Erin Snyder

