

OUR DAILY BREAD

Sewickley United Methodist Church
Lenten Booklet for 2009

Dear Lord, you are the strength in my life.

I lift my hands in total praise to you.

(from "Total Praise" by Richard Smallwood)

Many thanks to everyone who submitted passages for this booklet.
Please consider any errors as extra blessings.

Wednesday, February 25 Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21 Jesus taught his disciples, saying: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites...”

Prayer----just the word elicits a wide variety of responses and feelings; everything from the most pious of responses and feelings. Most of us would have to profess fairly easily that we believe prayer is important. Most of us would also have to confess, perhaps not so easily, that we do not pray as we should.

The real problem is that most of us were never taught about what prayer is and what it can be. We grew up confusing the God above and our discourse with God and Santa, from whom we asked many gifts and favors. Well-meaning church theologians haven't helped much either.

Prayer is the only skill the disciples ever asked Jesus to teach them. They didn't ask how to heal, to teach, to ask for money, to run meetings, to do miracles, to manage crowds, or to organize a movement or start a church. They asked him to teach them to pray.

Prayer is being in communion with God, not something to be used when the needs arise. Prayer is being in relationship so that God can speak to us. Prayer is finding peace in the midst of troubles, calm in the midst of calamity, and love in the midst of our loneliness. It is not that we don't know how to pray; it is that we have lost what it means to be in relationship with a loving, forgiving and gracious God.

As we begin our Lenten Pilgrimage this day, let us begin with prayer. Let us begin where Jesus always seemed to begin every venture and effort, with prayer.

PRAYER: We confess O God that we do not always pray as we should. As we begin our Lenten journey may we ever so mindful of our relationship with you. We pray that we might take time to be still and to listen for your voice as we journey with your Son to the cross. Amen.
Pastor Russel

Thursday, February 26

Micah 6:8 “ The Lord has told me what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.”

In these difficult and uncertain times, I find it comforting to remember just what God needs from us. We ask so much of him; shouldn't we be able to do these three things? Yet it is so challenging to do what is required of us, even in our own neighborhoods with our friends and family, let alone on a larger scale in the world! I hope and pray that all people can find a way to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, no matter which religion they practice. Wouldn't that be heaven on earth?

Prayer: Lord, help me do what is required of me today. Help me to see the way to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen.
Maggie Wilkinson

Friday, February 27

Genesis 17:3-5 “Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.’”

A beautiful song by D. J. Butler speaks to how God can change the name of anyone who seeks him.

“I will change your name;
You shall no longer be called wounded, outcast, lonely, or afraid.
I will change your name;
Your new name shall be confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one.
Faithfulness, friend of God, one who seeks my face.”

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your love and your protection. Keep me in your care always. In Jesus your son, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, February 28

1 Corinthians 7:15 “God has called us to live in peace.”

Palestine cannot be found on any current map yet when people ask where my family originates from I still say "Palestine". My father was born into a country that many say is the holiest place on earth; yet even after nearly 70 years of turmoil there continues to be unrest in the Holy Land, known today as Israel.

In 1993, I had the opportunity to travel to Palestine. It was during a time of peace yet there was still a sense of uneasiness in the air due to the presence of armed Israeli soldiers in all public areas. I had the opportunity to visit the birthplace of Jesus and Mary; walk in the same olive groves where Jesus' walked; swim in the Dead Sea; well, just float really. I saw the Wailing Wall and walked around the ruins of King Herod's castle, ride a camel and see the country my dad calls "his beloved home". No political grandstanding here - I'm just praying for peace. God asks for it in this verse and I pray for it daily.

Prayer: May the grace of God's peace shine down in the Holy Land and everywhere. Amen.

Sandra Lane

Sunday, March 1

John 11:35....”Jesus wept.”

Only two words: “Jesus wept.” Many of us turned to this passage when we were youngsters and were required to memorize a verse from the Bible. It was an easy out.

These two words are found in the story of Jesus’ good friend Lazarus. Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus to come because their brother was sick. By the time Jesus arrives Lazarus has been dead four days. The grief is overwhelming and Jesus is so touched that he too weeps. Jesus’ love for Lazarus and Mary and Martha is so deep that he to breaks down, even though he knows he will call him back to life.

I came across the following poem many years ago. I find it very helpful.

TEARS

There is a time for tears when your heart is too full of sorrow.
They begin to flow as naturally as rain form heaven.
There is a beauty in tears, a rightness about them.
They should be shed proudly,
for they show how much you have lived, loved and lost.
Tears honor our loved one.
There is a sacredness about them.
For each one is a prayer that only God can hear.
The soul can have no rainbows,
if our eyes could have no tears.

Prayer: We thank you Lord for the gift of tears. Amen.

Pastor Russel

Monday, March 2

"I Can Only Imagine"— (Bart Millard) From the first time I heard this song on the way to Nags Head, NC, it stuck in my mind, as I thought about the fact that, one day, we really will be able to stand in his presence. I'm pretty sure that while I would like to dance, I imagine that I will probably be so dumbstruck that I will, more than likely, fall to my knees.

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by your side.
I can only imagine what my eyes will see, when your face is before me.
I can only imagine...I can only imagine.
Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still?
Will I stand in your presence or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah; will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine...I can only imagine.

I can only imagine when that day comes, and I find myself standing in the Son.
I can only imagine when all I will do is forever, forever worship you.
I can only imagine...I can only imagine.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, let me sing for you, let me dance for you, let me forever worship you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 3

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Fear can hold us captive in many ways. For me it was the anxiety of having the first of two biopsies in 2008. Many times a day the anxiety would take over my mind and hinder my everyday life. Before the hospital visit, I memorized this verse and spoke it out loud every time my fear would occur. While in the grips of a mammography machine and with only local anesthetic this is the verse I recited to myself as the biopsies were taken and tears were flowing. This verse serves as a reminder to me that no matter what the source of the fear, God is there to hold me in his hands and give me strength.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me the strength to cope with the fears that I face here on earth and for the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus, that through his stripes I can accept your healing touch. Amen. Eva Houser

Wednesday, March 4

Psalms 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

I learned this Psalm when I was a girl at my home. It has always made me feel good. It always makes me think of my grandmother. I don't have to fear anything so long as I remember that the Lord will take care of me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for protecting me everyday. I know that I can count on you to care for me. Amen. Meg Mayo

Thursday, March 5

Hebrews 13:5-6 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

I think in these economic times this verse is especially poignant. The country's finances are in turmoil, and to be honest, the idea of where we are going to be in the next few months scares me. This isn't the first time I have been nervous about money, and it won't be the last, but this verse gives probably the best description of how I've learned to deal with it. It has always seemed that the more I worry about money – where it will come from, where it will go, will we have enough – the longer it takes to resolve itself. Without fail, the moment I let it go and stop freaking out, something comes through for me. And I can't help but wonder, “Why didn't you just give it up in the first place instead of losing sleep?”

In the past few months I have become all too familiar with the prospect of the lack of money. However, as hard as it is to remember, life is not about that. It's about enjoying your family, your friends, and all the other gifts that God has given you. We all are guilty of letting that get away from us. Outside of money, this is the happiest I have been in a long time, and I owe that to all of the things I named above. I have truly discovered

that the only way I can successfully live my life is if I let God take the reins, and I take incredible comfort in knowing that He is there.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that you are my refuge and my guide. Help me to let go of the worldly things that occupy my mind, and make me focus instead on you and your light. You will never leave me, and it is through you that I may achieve true fulfillment. Amen.

Sara Lamb

Friday, March 6

John 1:12 “Yet to all who received (Jesus Christ), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

I recently was reading an article in our church library that I would like to share with you. “Receive Him” by Darren Adams

In football, think of all that has to happen for a pass to be completed. The center and quarterback have to handle the snap correctly, the offensive line has to block the defenders, the receiver has to run his pattern, and the QB has to make an accurate throw. The timing has to be right. And, of course, the receiver has to catch the ball or the team gains nothing.

We can relate that entire offensive scenario to our spiritual lives. John 1: 12 says, “yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God.” Like the wide receiver or tight end, we must receive — we must receive Jesus into our lives by believing in him. But there’s more. When a receiver catches the ball, he doesn’t stand there; he tries to gain as many yards as he can! Similarly, once we receive Jesus at salvation, God wants us to “do something!” He wants us gain new ground spiritually.

Receive him and keep going. That’s a good offensive strategy.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to receive Jesus Christ and to keep gaining in my faith. Amen

Warren R. Kinneer

Saturday, March 7

Proverbs 31:30 “...but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

Throughout my life, many women in the church have been my inspiration. I remember wonderful women who were my Sunday School teachers, my mentors, and my friends. Now several who sit in our pews continue to inspire me because of their faith, their wisdom, their enthusiasm, and their compassion. As I grow older I pray that God keeps finding new jobs for me to do. Age certainly isn’t a hindrance in working for him.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for always keeping me in your loving arms. Give me courage to always work in the name of your son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Donna Bell

Sunday, March 8

John 12: 1-8 “Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.” (John 12:4)

A few years ago in a Dear Abby column there were letters from women on the subject of pallbearers and how they broke from tradition of all male pallbearers.

One woman wrote that her mother carried her for nine months; the least she could do was bear the weight of her mother as they carried her to her grave. She said, “I positioned myself second in line, so I could be as close to my mother’s heart as possible.” The other women that wrote told similar stories of wanting to be able to do one last thing for their loved one.

I often share at funerals; there are two expressions of love....giving and grieving.

The story of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with the expensive ointment is a reminder to seize the moment in demonstrating love. We often get busy and we fail to say I love you or show some expression of our love. Living with regrets and ‘if only’ is heart breaking. It is important to seize the moment so that our lament is not a litany of ‘If Only.’”

Prayer: We confess O God that we find ourselves too busy...too busy to love you; too busy to love our families; too busy to love ourselves. Help us to seize the moments that come our way that we might not have to live with “if only.” Amen. Pastor Russel

Monday, March 9

“He Reigns” (Peter Andrew Furler and Steve R. Taylor) - This is on a CD that Sandra Lane made for me, and I just love the poetry of the lyrics, reminding me that I am part of a “family” that extends the world over. We listen to it while we’re driving, and by the time we hit the chorus, Grace and I are singing with all of the gusto we can muster.

It’s the song of the redeemed rising from the African plain
It’s the song of the forgiven drowning out the Amazon rain
The song of Asian believers filled with God’s holy fire
It’s every tribe, every tongue, every nation
A love song born of a grateful choir.

It’s all God’s children singing: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!
It’s all God’s children singing: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!

Let it rise above the four winds caught up in the heavenly sound
Let praises echo from the towers of cathedrals to the faithful gathered underground
Of all the songs sung from the dawn of creation some were meant to persist
Of all the bells rung from a thousand steeples none rings truer than this

It’s all God’s children singing: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!
It’s all God’s children singing: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!

And all the powers of darkness tremble at what they've just heard
'Cause all the powers of darkness can't drown out a single word

When all God's children sing out: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!
All God's children singing: Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns!

Prayer: Father in heaven, how wonderful to know that we are part of your world family. Let us always sing out "Glory and hallelujah!" Amen.

Tuesday, March 10

Fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:21.23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness..."

Recently I was forced to change my daily activities because of a foot operation. The doctor said that I was not to put any weight on my left foot for six weeks! Needless to say, I found it very difficult to give up my activity level. My husband helped me a great deal, and though I expected that, I was nonetheless very appreciative. And the outpouring of support from my friends and Church family was wonderful! They phoned and chatted which cheered me up. They came to visit, brought soup and treats, made dinners, held meetings in my house and kept my spirits up. I treasured all of these gifts! And I learned some things about dependency – I gained an appreciation for how the physically disabled must see the world – how great small kindnesses really are! And how difficult achieving patience really is! And all this from a temporary condition!

Two things came home to me out of this experience. I saw the fruit of the Holy Spirit in action, and I gained perspective on the awesome patience of God.

Prayer: Thank you God for teaching me so much about patience and support during these past weeks. What awesome blessings you have given me. Amen. Pam Wright

Wednesday, March 11

Joshua 1:9 "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

I have many favorite Bible verses but recently the above verse, Joshua 1:9, became a favorite. Because Bill, my grandson, is serving in the Army National Guard, I was inspired to join an organization called "Soldiers Angels". I adopted a Marine in Afghanistan and wrote and sent packages of "treats" to him. Through this group I also began to make and send "Blankets of Belief" to our soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. To me this is a very worthwhile organization that lets our soldiers know that we are so proud of them and care for them deeply.

Now, I have an even greater reason to remember that verse. I will pass it on to all service men and women when I write, so they are aware that the Lord is with them at all times. This verse applies to every one of you and can be recited daily. Trust in the Lord, he will take care of you in so many ways. Jesus trusted in God, so that we are now able to be free from our sins.

Prayer: Father in heaven, please help us to remember that we can trust in you as we take this journey through the Lenten season. Amen.

Put Jesus first, others second, yourself last. This is JOY.

Sandy Kuriger

Thursday, March 12

Isaiah 40:31 “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.”

First, this verse is simply so beautiful. Secondly, it is a reminder that with God we can soar like eagles. He will give us the strength and courage to get through anything when we rely on him and his timing.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, help us to trust you in all circumstances and to rely on your ever-present strength. Amen.

Joyce Gates

Friday, March 13

PSALM 150 (NKJV)

Praise the Lord!

Praise Him in his mighty firmament!

Praise Him for His mighty deeds;

Praise Him in His sanctuary!

Praise Him according to His surpassing greatness;

Praise Him with the sound of trumpets;

Praise Him with the tambourine and dance:

Praise Him with strings and pipe!

Praise Him with clanging cymbals;

Praise Him with loud clashing cymbals!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

I like the Psalms and I really like this one because:

1. We're singing this Psalm in choir right now!
2. "The Last Psalm" is the name of the other choir I sing in!
3. We read this at Camp Allegheny last summer!
4. I love music!
5. It reminds me to praise the Lord!

I can praise the Lord with music everyday because I love to sing! Every night, my mom sings a song with me, like "Kumbaya," "Into My Heart," or "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam." If we don't sing before I go to bed, I have trouble falling asleep.

Mom says I started singing almost as soon as I learned to talk, and you know something? I haven't stopped since, and I don't think I ever will!!!

Prayer: Dear God, we praise you for everything, especially for music. It helps me get to sleep at night and keeps my heart happy, especially when I sing to you. Amen.

Victoria Grace Rogansky

Saturday, March 14

Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

A number of years ago, Dr. Donald Scandrol, current Pittsburgh District superintendent, was our pastor and off-handedly asked me if I was going to be my son’s mentor while he worked on his God and Me award. How hard could it be to work through a workbook along side a child? That workbook called upon me to reflect on my childhood memories that opened up a whole can of “worms”. I went to Don and told him that I did not think that I could complete the mentoring. While he indicated that it was fine, I never the less started meeting with him to discuss many issues in my life.

I was “raised in the church”, had been active in Youth Fellowship, and had even walked to church for worship and fellowship while a student at IUP. My husband and I had returned to Coraopolis UM C upon graduating from college and attended Sunday School and worship with our children. I helped with some little things at the church but was not a very visible participant. But, the counseling that I did with Don led me to feel that there was a larger part that I was supposed to play in sharing God’s love. Kathy Troccoli, a Christian vocalist, performs a song “Go Light Your World” that must surely be inspired by Matthew 5:14-16. She sings, “There is a Spirit who brings a fire, ignites a candle and makes His home. So, carry your candle, run to the darkness, seek out the hopeless, confused and torn. Hold out your candle for all to see it.” Truly, how can we make sure that all God’s children come to know Him if we hide our light? Many times, I find it hard to be out where people can see me. Those life-long insecurities in how I might be received get in my way, but I try to remember that it might be through me that someone comes to know God and His love for us.

Prayer: Help me to be a light to someone who might otherwise remain in the dark.

Martha Boward

Sunday, March 15

Revelation 21:5... “And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’”

I buried my brother on my 47th birthday. Tommy was only 48 years of age. Tommy was a Type 1 Diabetic and had suffered greatly. Tommy had survived open-heart surgery and as a result of failing kidneys was on kidney dialysis. The most devastating thing for him and for those of us who loved him was his struggle with mobility. We thought our hearts

would break as we watched helplessly as he crawled across the floor. Both of his legs had been amputated because of the diabetes.

Tommy had a dream several months before his death. He dreamed of our dad. Our father had died in June of 1997. In this dream (I believe God gave him a sneak preview of what he had to look forward to) Tommy saw our dad standing in a green field. Tommy said it was the most beautiful green he had ever seen. Our dad from a distance told Tommy he would have to go back because it wasn't quite his time. Tommy told us he had no desire to come back. "Oh how I wanted to stay," he said.

I find great comfort in these words from Revelation; "And he who sat upon the throne said, 'I make all things new.'" Tommy is made new. He is whole in God's Kingdom. He doesn't have to crawl anymore!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, often age and disease ravage our earthly bodies. But we know that in your Kingdom we will be made whole. Thank you! Amen. Pastor Russel

Monday, March 16

1 Samuel 7:12 "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.'"

In the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," we sing: "Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come." Ebenezer means "stone of help" and was raised by Samuel to glorify God at the site of a victory over the Philistines.

Ray Vander Laan explains that standing stones were used as monuments. Travelers would see them and say, "What happened here?" This gave people the chance to say, "Let me tell you what my God did here." We also know that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, your time and attention tell what you really value.

To whom or what are we building our monuments? Our job? Our family? The Steelers?

Prayer: Dear God, let my time and my attention glorify you. Amen. Mark Benjamin

Tuesday, March 17

Psalm 27:13-14 "I am still confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

The days are short, and it is cold. Right now it seems as if I have been a prisoner of the house for a long time. Gee, I do not like winter! But as in all of God's creation there is something good to be said about this time of the year. It is a time for serious reflection. It is a time when I can seriously meditate on who God is and my relation to him. Spring is on its way with the season of rebirth. Once again, the birds will be singing their songs early in the morning and throughout the day. The trees will begin to bud and leaves will form to give shade from the hot summer sun. Flowers will bloom and nature's beauty will once again be revealed.

When I am discouraged, I must remember that this is truly God's world and I must trust him to give me the encouragement and strength to be the blessing that he wants me to be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the winters in my life. Help me to use them to learn how you want me to live the springs and summers of my life. Amen. Atleah Grubb

Wednesday, March 18

John 1: 6-9 "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

In this short but rich passage, John touches on two important points.

First, John explains to us that John the Baptist was a man sent by God to bear witness to the light. John goes on to explain that the "true light" that enlightens every one was coming into the world. The "true light" is Jesus. What does it mean to bear witness to Jesus? I think one way is to like the things that Jesus likes and to dislike the things that Jesus dislikes. Learning Jesus' likes and dislikes takes a lifetime of prayer and Bible reading, but even after just a short time of study one can conclude that Jesus likes our compassion for those in need and dislikes our sin.

John 1:10-13 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Secondly, John tells us that the world was made through Jesus and Jesus was in the world, but the world did not receive him. Some people did receive Jesus and some did not. To those people who received Jesus and believed in his name, Jesus gave the power to become children of God. What a marvelous gift--the power to become a child of God. I have to think that receiving Jesus, believing in his name and becoming a child of God is something that Jesus likes, and therefore would bear witness to him. What do you think?

Prayer: Jesus, we praise your holy name and thank you for coming into the world to die so that we might live. Thank you for giving us the power to become children of God. Help us to faithfully bear witness to you even when it makes us unpopular and out-of-step with the culture in which we live. In your name we pray. Amen.

Kristine Swaney

Thursday, March 19

PSALM 71:18 "Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come."

My parents always had a very strong faith in God. Their commitment never wavered no matter what came along in their lives. They always trusted, and never gave up hope, that God was there beside them to get them through whatever came their way. Both of my parents became very ill over the past 3 years and both of them never worried or doubted that God would take care of them.

My parent's devotion to God, and their example has been a blessing in my life, and the lives of my five siblings. We all have faced our own trials and tribulations but realize that with prayer and faith we will get through whatever comes our way. This entire PSALM is a reminder that if we "Trust in the Lord" he will give us the strength to lead righteous lives. The following prayer are excerpts from this PSALM.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thou art my hope, thou art my trust, and thou art my strong refuge... let me never be put to confusion. Amen.

Diane Lally

Friday, March 20

Psalm 18:31-35 [31](#) For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God, [32](#) The God who girds me with strength and makes my way blameless? [33](#) He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places. [34](#) He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. [35](#) You have also given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand upholds me; and your gentleness makes me great.

"He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and sets me upon my high places."

When life becomes hard and our troubles overwhelm us, we are able to choose to be still and listen to God, who gives us the strength to rise up above our earthly problems and glimpse a vision of our personal high places. It is the strength that comes from these moments of clarity that guides us and provides the spiritual nourishment to continue.

"Your gentleness makes me great."

We walk not in the way of the world, but in the way of inner spirit. God's paradox is this: gentleness is strength. The world would have us be strong, using our own strength, which exhausts us in the end. God's gentleness, which we tap into through prayer and meditation, fills us with energy, love, and compassion. This gives us a new perspective: seeing anew, we act anew, and the difference sets us free.

Prayer: God, guide me as I become still and meet you in prayer and meditation. Let my feet be as hinds' feet, and my gentleness be my strength, through your love and grace.

Andrea Lewis

Saturday, March 21

Psalm 118:24 “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Each day is a gift from God and as the bible verse says, we should “rejoice and be glad in it.” All too often, people find too many reasons to whine and complain which becomes contagious. We should instead be finding reasons to rejoice and be glad for each day and let that behavior become contagious. There are so many ways we can rejoice and be glad each day and at the same time show others the love of God. We can lend a shoulder to someone grieving, invite someone to lunch, do a good deed for a stranger, greet someone with true happiness, or volunteer our services to help others in need.

As Christians, we are walking “billboards” for God. We need to approach each day thankful to God for his love and forgiveness. We need to display that love and forgiveness to others so they will see what a joy it is to carry God in our hearts.

Prayer: Loving God – Thank you for giving me today! Let me use today as an opportunity to rejoice for all you have done for me. Please help me to show your love to others and to remember that I am an example for you. Amen. Pam Hess

Sunday, March 22

Luke 15: 8-10... “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

When I was in the first and second grades my family had the task of landscaping the property on which my father had built our new home. Day after day we picked up stones and filled wheel barrel after wheel barrel.

One day in the midst of our labor my mother got this look of horror on her face. She suddenly realized her diamond engagement ring and diamond wedding ring were not on her finger. Immediately we went to the rock pile back in the weeds where we had been dumping the stones. My mother was frantic. She dug through that pile of rocks; moving one stone after another. I thought the chances of finding her rings were quite slim. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. My mother would not give up. She dug and she dug and she dug until finally something sparkled. There were her rings! The look of joy and excitement on her face was evidence of how much those rings mean to her. They were symbols of my dad’s love and commitment to her.

How much more our Father in heaven loves us. God does not give up looking for that which is lost.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for never giving up. We would still be lost if not for your tenacity. Amen Pastor Russel

Monday, March 23

Romans 5:1 “So now since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with Him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.”

You learn as a child raised in a Christian family and going to Sunday School and church to love God. As you grow older you see what amazing miracles he performs, and you really feel his love.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, you have given me so many blessings for which I am very grateful. My love for you never falters, and may you bless many more as you have blessed me. Thank you. Amen.

Eleanor Milligan

Tuesday, March 24

II Corinthians 4:18 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...”

"Hosanna" by Hillsong United. The lyrics to this piece are very poetic. I am drawn (like a lot of people) to lyrics that speak volumes in just a few short phrases. This song is full of these, and here are a couple that stand out to me. In the bridge the composer writes, “show me how to love like you have loved me.” You could write a book about what that means. Also in the bridge, “open up my eyes to the things unseen,” is very moving.

I see the king of glory coming on the clouds with fire
The whole earth shakes; the whole earth shakes.
I see his love and mercy washing over all our sin
The people sing; the people sing.

[Chorus]Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna in the highest [x2]

I see a generation rising up to take their place
With selfless faith; with selfless faith.
I see a near revival stirring as we pray and seek
We're on our knees; we're on our knees

[Bridge]

Heal my heart and make it clean
Open up my eyes to the things unseen
Show me how to love like you have loved me
Break my heart from what breaks yours
Everything I am for your kingdom’s cause
As I go from nothing to eternity.

Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna in the highest

Prayer: To you, Lord, we give all the love and glory. Keep my eyes open so that I may love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Hurst Bartley

Wednesday, March 25

Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Amy Grant sang a beautiful song using this verse. This Bible verse means to me that the Lord will lead me through evil where I walk with his guiding light. Believing and studying the Bible teaches me and helps me through each day. Studying these verses has eased my problems.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I confess my sins and feel you in my heart leading in your way. Gracious Lord, I pray in your name. Amen. Bonnie Stoicovy

Thursday, March 26

Romans 12:9-13 “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

As you pray for your pastor and church, ask God, “Is there some way I can share the load and help meet people’s needs?” The pastor alone cannot deal with every situation. In some circumstances, you may actually be more suited to empathize with and encourage fellow believers because you have experienced challenges similar to theirs. The church is a community of faith. We must all become part of a “network of shoulders” supporting each other’s troubles.

Prayer: Lord, help me to do all that I can to show your love to others. Amen.

Friday, March 27

John 12:32 “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

This is the well-known Legend of the Dogwood published in the Ohio Grange paper. There is a legend that at the time of the crucifixion the dogwood had been the size of the oak and other forest trees. So firm and strong was the tree that it was chosen as the timber for the cross.

To be used thus for such a cruel purpose greatly distressed the tree, and Jesus nailed upon it, sensed this, and in His gentle pity for all sorrow and suffering said to it: “Because of your regret and pity for My suffering, never again shall the dogwood tree grow large enough to be used as a cross. Henceforth it shall be slender and bent and twisted, and its blossoms shall be in the form of a cross—two long and two short petals. And in the center of the outer edge of each petal there will be nail prints, brown with rust and stained with red, and in the center of the flower will be a crown of thorns, and all those who see it will remember.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, let us never forget that you died for us on the cross. Let us remember that you have mercy for us as you did for this tree. Amen. Pat Rudy

Saturday, March 28

"Shout To The Lord" – (Darlene Zschech) – This is one of the songs we sang this morning, and it has always been a favorite - particularly the second part that reminds me that when I am feeling weak or troubled, God has promised to be my comfort, shelter and strength.

My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like you.
All of my days I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength,
Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship you.

Shout to the Lord; all the Earth, let us sing
Power and majesty; praise to the King.
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of your name.

I sing for joy at the work of your hand
Forever I'll love you; forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, my Savior, I praise you for your mighty love. Thank you for the promise of eternal life that you have given me. Amen.

Sunday, March 29

Psalm 118:24 "This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Are you an optimist, one who see the glass half full or are you a pessimist, one who sees the glass half empty? Why is it that some people can maintain a positive and hopeful attitude, even in the face of a dark situation and others are drowning in despair in the face of a dark situation and quite often adopting a negative attitude towards life in general? There are those who choose to live in despair even when life is good.

I ran across the following story that helps with this point. It is a story of a lady who is part of the "glass brimming over crowd."

Helen Boardman likes to say that she robbed the cradle when she married her husband, Bill. Bill was just a spry 79-year-old when Helen caught his eye. She was 99 years old. The two of them have been happily married for the past 8 years. At 87 and 107 years of age; Bill and Helen like to go dancing and they act in plays at their retirement center----plays that Helen frequently writes and directs. At age 90, Helen tried white water rafting for the first time.

Helen claims that she stays vital by learning new things and keeping a positive attitude. As she says, "You can tell I am an optimist---grateful for everything every day. The cup is always full. Everything's good. After reading my memoirs, my nephew asked it there had ever been anything bad in my life. MY answer, 'If there was, I forgot.'"

It may be that Helen is a good "forgetter", which is a wonderful attitude to adopt.

We each have a choice. When we wake up each morning and greet the new day we can choose to be happy and positive or we can choose to be negative and unhappy. We can receive each new day as a gift and be thankful. We can focus on all the happy memories and adopt a positive attitude. Or we can greet each new day as yet another day that must be endured---another day filled with despair. The choice is ours.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to choose everyday to be thankful that I am living in your wonderful world. Amen. Pastor Russel

Monday, March 30

Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd --that's a Relationship!

I shall not want -- that's Supply!

He makes me to lie down in green pastures --that's Rest!

He leads me beside the still waters --that's Refreshment!

He restores my soul --that's Healing!

He leads me in the paths of righteousness --that's Guidance!

For his name's sake --that's Purpose!

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death--that's Testing!

I will fear no evil --that's Protection!

For Thou art with me --that's Faithfulness!

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me --that's Discipline!

You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies--that's Hope!

You anoint my head with oil --that's Consecration!

My cup runs over --that's Abundance!

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life--that's Blessing!

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord --that's Security!

Forever --that's Eternity!

Prayer: On you, my shepherd, I lean for protection and love. Amen.

Tuesday, March 31

I Samuel 3:8-10 "Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'"

Listen to God. Paying attention to how the Lord is directing you is essential to walking with him and remaining in the center of his will. When you discover how to hear his voice, you will be able to trust him fully.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I will always keep you in the center of my life. Help me to listen to your directions. Amen.

Wednesday, April 1

Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

This Psalm served as Martin Luther's inspiration when he wrote "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Prayer: God, our Father, wrap me in your strength. Help me to remain confident and courageous in the face of every obstacle. Amen.

Thursday, April 2

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

It’s always surprising to see how God chooses us to serve him in jobs we never knew we could do. Here at SUMC for example, we have cookie bakers, turkey carvers, pumpkin rollers, bread breakers, bell ringers, candle lighters, blanket knitters, salad makers, anthem singers, casserole bakers, homeless feeders, offering counters, silverware setters, and on and on.

Prayer: Dear God, fit us into the jobs you choose for us. Let us spread the fruits of your spirit throughout our lives. Amen.

Friday, April 3

Daniel 6:16 “May the God you serve all the time save you.”

Look at Jonah in the fish belly-surrounded by gastric juices and sucked seaweed...he prays. Before he can say amen, the belly convulses, the fish belches, and Jonah lands face first on the beach.

Such are the stories of the Bible—one near-death experience after another. Just when the neck is on the chopping block, just when the noose is around the neck, CALVARY comes.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being my rescuer. Thank you for that assurance that you are watchful, that you care, and that you are my protector. Max Lucado

Saturday, April 4

A song by Eleanor Farjean is one of our beloved hymns. What a wonderful way to think about the Lord.

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them springing fresh from the word!

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning!
Born of the one light Eden saw play.
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God’s recreation of the new day!

Prayer: God in heaven, I will sing your praises every morning and give thanks for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday, April 5 Palm Sunday

Mark 15:1-39 (Liturgy of the Passion)

We are not surprised that the Jerusalem crowds enthusiastically welcome Jesus, because they mistake him for a military/political leader cut from the same cloth as King David—who is explicitly named in the story.

We are invited to find ourselves in this story. Can we step into this story? Can we let it step into us?

The best way we can step into the Palm/Passion Story is to ponder the many questions that Mark invites us to address in his gospel. The crucial question we all must answer is: who is Jesus and what will we do with him? Is he your Savior? He is your Lord?

PRAYER: Jesus, Savior of the world, we bow before you on this day of triumph which quickly turned to a day of passion seeking to find our place in the crowds. We confess O God that there are days we shout our Hosannas! But too many days our actions scream Crucify him! Help us to understand our place as your children, saved by grace called to serve and not to parade ourselves as some king or queen. Amen Pastor Russel

Monday, April 6

A blessing from an unknown author.

May there always be work for your hands to do
May your purse always hold a coin or two
May the sun always shine upon your windowpane
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain
May the hand of a friend always be near to you and
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

Prayer: My Father in heaven, let me always be ready to serve you wherever you need me. Amen.

Tuesday, April 7

If Jesus Came to My House is a children's book where a little boy hopes that Jesus will come to visit him and play with him. I'd love to have Jesus come have a cup of tea with me. Wouldn't you love to have him come to your house?

Prayer: My table, Lord, is small and my voice seems smaller still. But I know that when I pray to you, you come and sit by me. Amen.

Wednesday, April 8

Our choir sang a strong and glorious anthem at the Ash Wednesday service. It is called “Total Praise” by Richard Smallwood and is based on Psalm 121. The choir’s voices grew stronger and more powerful with each line.

You are the source of my strength;
You are the strength of my life.
I lift my hands in total praise to you.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the gifts you have given to our music ministry. They guide us into deeper faith with every song and every selection. Amen.

Thursday, April 9 Maundy Thursday

John 13: 1-17, 31b-35 “A new command I give you, Love one another as I have loved you.”

The name Maundy Thursday derives from the Latin word for “commandment,” recalling the new commandment that Jesus delivered on the night before his death. When Jesus has departed from his disciples and is no longer there in person to offer guidance, this commandment of love will help them to find their way and to walk in the footsteps of their master.

Within a few hours, Jesus will offer one final lesson in the meaning of love. As he hangs on the cross, stripped and humiliated, drenched in his own blood, his suffering will reveal the depths of his love for us, the strength of his claim upon us, and the divine redemptive power in the heart of love.

I appreciate the understanding of love as expressed by John Beck. John Beck used to be a football star for the University of Kentucky. Later in life, he served as chaplain of the U.S. Olympic Teams. He decided that these teams were a picture of what Christianity really ought to be, these sincere and devoted young people who were willing to pay any price for victory. Beck says that’s the day he finally understood the real meaning of the church as the place where broken people come together to pick each other up in love.

Then one day Beck visited the Special Olympics, where all the athletes have some kind of mental or physical disability. Beck watched eight runners race in the 100-yard dash. Halfway through the event one of the boys fell down, bloodied his knee, and started to cry. All the other runners stopped, went back and helped the boy to his feet. Then the eight of them walked to the finish line together.

May it be so as we walk hand in hand to the glorious finish line.

PRAYER: We thank you, holy God, for your love so great that you would send your son to die upon a cross. On that night before his death he gave us a new commandment, a commandment to love. Help us to love others as you love us. Amen.

Pastor Russel

Friday, April 10 Good Friday

MATTHEW 27: 1-65

As I get older I have discovered driving in strange cities is quite troubling, especially at night. I rely on the road signs to give proper warning of when I need to switch lanes in order to make the proper turn. Heaven forbid if a semi gets in front of me and blocks my view. All of a sudden, I need to cross over to the turning lane. Stress mounts as I feel the crunch of the cars around me refusing to give me entry into their lane. Everyone's on their own course and not really interested in being courteous to a "stranger" in their midst. Horns honk, and fists are raised. But I persevere.

As Nancy and my girls well know I don't like to stop when I am traveling. I am fixated on getting to my destination. Nancy continually reminds me we would all be better off if I would take advantage of the rest stops from time to time. It would give me an opportunity to regroup and calm my frazzled nerves.

That's what Good Friday can be for us, a rest stop in our journey down the road of life. Everyone feels life is speeding along too fast. Things seem out of control as we are bombarded with personal time crunches, financial struggles, health and family issues, as well as upheavals on all fronts in our world.

Certainly we don't need to be confronted in our faith. But that is what Good Friday and the cross do: confront! Some people refuse to stop at this day. They enter Jerusalem with Christ in triumph on Palm Sunday, may pause at the communion rail on Maundy Thursday in reverence, but then pass by the suffering of Good Friday because it makes them feel too uncomfortable, and exit on Easter Fay in glorious celebration, feeling "good" about our religious observations.

Jesus encountered many along the path to the cross who would wrestle with the cross of commitment, which now confronted them. We need to examine our commitment to Jesus. As we encounter the cross of Christ on the highways of our lives, will we always take the easy routes? Are we willing to endure the journey even when it becomes difficult? Are we willing to see what love costs? As we look at the cross we see exactly how much it cost our gracious God.

Good Friday and the cross are here, calling us to pull off the busy road of our lives for reflection. Have you read the road signs correctly? Is your destination Jesus?

PRAYER: Holy God give us the courage to stop our fast pace living on this most holy day and allow ourselves to be confronted with the cross of commitment in following in your footsteps. Amen

Pastor Russel

Saturday, April 11

A grace for Easter by Margaret Anne Huffman

We are celebrating today, Lord, a mixture of bunnies hiding colored eggs and angels rolling away stones. Join us as we gather to share a meal and ponder both, enjoying the one and giving thanks for the other. Bless those about this table savoring both the food and the message of this day. Remind us too, Lord, of unexpected appearances, that this also is the season of spring, a time when rebirth is not so surprising after all.

Prayer: Thank you, heavenly Father, for giving us your son who died that we may have eternal life. Amen.

Sunday, April 12 Easter

I Corinthians 15: 54-55... “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?’”

I have read these words countless times as loved ones broken with grief grasp for hope and comfort. The funeral service was about to begin for a young man who died Christmas Eve as a result of a car crash that plummeted his car into the Cheat River. His girlfriend, who was eight months pregnant at the time of the accident, took hold of my hand as the funeral was about to begin and said, “I must talk to you in private.” The funeral was delayed. We went off to a quiet place. As she sobbed she begged for some words of hope. “I can’t go in there until I hear from you, one-on-one of God’s love and grace.”

There is never a time we do not need to hear of God’s unconditional love. There are, however, those times when we are more desperate to not just hear them but to be able to embrace them and know the truth of God’s love evidenced in the victory over death.

One of my favorite hymns to sing at funerals is Gloria and Bill Gaither’s hymn: ‘Because He Lives.’ The third verse states: And then one day I’ll cross the river; I’ll fight life’s final war with pain; and then as death gives way to victory, I’ll see the lights of glory and I’ll know he reigns. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gift of love and grace. We thank you that we need not fear death. In your love we find victory and in your hands we comfort and strength for we know you hold our future. Amen

Pastor Russel

