

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2025



GOD ON THE MOVE

SOUTHPORT
United Methodist Church



Dear Southport UMC Family,

Lent is a sacred season in the Christian calendar—a time of reflection, repentance (turning away from sin), and renewal as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of Easter. It is a 40-day journey (not counting Sundays) that invites us to draw closer to God through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, worship, and acts of service. As we walk this path together, we are reminded that Lent is not merely about giving something up, but about making space for God to move more fully in our lives.

This year, our theme for Lent is “God on the Move.” As we encounter the life and ministry of Jesus, we are reminded that God is not distant or passive but actively engaged in our world and in our lives. God’s movement challenges us to grow, encourages us to trust, and compels us to follow. Throughout this journey, we will reflect on how God is constantly at work—guiding, transforming, and calling us to join in the divine mission of love and redemption.

This devotional has been lovingly crafted by members of our congregation, along with our pastors, previous pastors and staff, offering daily reflections that align with the themes of our Lenten worship series. Each week focuses on a specific aspect of God’s movement, from the wilderness to the cross and ultimately to the empty tomb. Each daily entry is designed to help you deepen your faith and connect with the God who is moving in our midst.

I invite you to use this devotional as a companion on your Lenten journey. Make it part of your daily routine—whether you begin your morning with it, read it during a lunch break, or reflect on it in the quiet of the evening. And let this be just the beginning. Lent is a season of intentionality, so I encourage you to explore other spiritual disciplines, participate in worship, and seek ways to serve others.

As we begin this journey together, let us open our hearts to the movement of God. Let us be willing to grow, to be challenged, and to follow wherever God leads. I am excited to see how God will move in our congregation and in each of our lives this season.

Blessings,

Rev. William G. Nickrand

Senior Pastor, Southport UMC

MARCH 5, 2025

MARKED FOR THE JOURNEY

PSALM 51:1-2

Are you looking forward to Lent?

Our word lent comes from Old English (lencten), Anglo Saxon (lencton), and some Germanic words meaning that time of year in late winter when the hours of daylight lengthen or grow longer. Our ancient agrarian ancestors knew this time of anticipation of the coming of spring, warmer days, and looking forward to the new planting of crops season.

Christianity has celebrated the season of Lent since the first century AD as a period of 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter (not counting the Sundays). Tradition has evolved for these 40 days as a time of prayer, fasting, and giving to the less fortunate of our fellow humans. This is a time for our personal spiritual renewal. A time for turning away from our short comings, egocentrism, and material possessions obsession. A time to turn toward God.

The 40 days of Lent is a biblical reference to the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil to sin (Matt. 4:1-11). There are some other significant references to 40 day periods in the Bible: Noah (Gen. 7:4), Moses (Exod. 24:18), and Elijah (2 Kings).

For us, the 40 days begins with Ash Wednesday (a time for penance) and continues through the Holy Trinity of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and finally Easter.

So the question is: what are you/we looking forward to this Lent? A spring break vacation to the sunny south or a time of renewed relationship with and commitment to our Lord?

PRAYER:

O Lord we often think of ourselves first. During this time of Lent, let us turn our focus to an ever increasing devotion to you and to others. Inspire us to meditate, pray, fast and to be generous and joyful in giving to others that we very often ignore.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Gary Davis

MARCH 6, 2025

THE WEIGHT OF ASHES

JOEL 2:12-13

The “imposition” of ashes will usually include the words “*you are dust, and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3:19). Those ashes upon my head are framed by grey hair. And there is an unmistakable whisper, “time is short!” As I get older, I certainly feel the weight of the brevity of life. Not just the brevity, but the substance of my life. “Have I spent my time on this earth in a way pleasing to God?”

Traditionally, the ashes are made from the Palm fronds used on last year’s Palm Sunday. This adds an additional urgency so that the question is now, “Have I spent the last year of my life in a way pleasing to God?” I remember on Easter Sunday singing with complete conviction, “I serve a risen Savior.” Then came Monday, and somehow my conviction seemed less convincing. Living our lives, as imperfect flesh, means we will fail. Romans 3:23 can be summarized, “*we all have fallen short of the glory of God.*” Ugh!

But Jesus offers us grace, “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). The dark ashes, the brevity of life, the sins and sin, can all be cleansed, lifted and forgotten. Through my journey this year, in the valleys and the mountaintops, I did not walk alone. God journeyed with me. Many times, whenever I asked, he carried my burdens.

The ashes aren’t very heavy because there is someone who wants to carry them for you.

PRAYER:

Jesus, you loved me. Jesus, you will love me. Jesus, you love me right now!

Amen.

Chaplain David Mark Owens

MARCH 7, 2025

A LIVING SACAFICE

ROMANS 12:1-2

Childlike Faith “Trust”

I first heard this story in Sunday school class when I was a child, that Jesus loved the little children. That meant that he loved me! Mark 10:16

This truth was fortified with the son we would sing. “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Matthew 19:13

I realize that I have always carried this truth in my heart, that childlike faith, that I am loved and take care of by Jesus! Luke 18:16

I know that he is real, and my faith in believing this has kept me from fear and of losing my mind in some dark and scary moments of lives trials.

In know that he is real in my heart, mind, spirit and soul. I am so thankful for his love, mercy and grace! Oh, how I love Jesus, because he first loved me.

PRAYER:

I thank you Lord Jesus for the opportunity to love and trust you instinctively, and to have joy restored in my life and to share this truth with others.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

Carolyn Keegan

MARCH 8, 2025

A NEW HEART AND SPIRIT

EZEKIEL 36:25-27

In difficult times, especially within family relationships, we can feel overwhelmed by tension and misunderstanding. Perhaps you've experienced this with a family member, where the relationship seemed hardened by unspoken hurts or differing perspectives. It's easy for hearts to become like stone, unyielding and distant. But God offers hope and renewal, even in strained relationships.

God's promise in Ezekiel is not only for our personal transformation but also for restoring what seems broken. When we invite Him into the situation, He can sprinkle the "clean water" of His grace on both hearts, washing away bitterness, resentment, and hurt. Just as He promises to replace a heart of stone with a heart of flesh, God can soften even the hardest hearts in a family.

Through prayer and trust in God's power, He can renew your relationship with a family member, giving both of you new hearts and a spirit of understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. God doesn't leave us to figure it out alone. His Spirit will guide and empower you to move forward, offering love where there once was tension.

Trust in His ability to bring renewal. What seems impossible to heal, God can restore. Surrender your heart and the relationship to Him, and let Him work His miracle of transformation in your family.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." —Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NIV)

Allyson Ball

MARCH 9, 2025

GOD MOVES INTO THE DESERT

LUKE 4:1-2

One of my favorite words for unexpected surprises is "GODIDENT." Who knew that I would discover in this short scripture such relevant inspiration for currently troubling times?

The prompt word, "desert" took me to Joshua Tree National Park in the Mojave Desert, where my daughter is going tomorrow. I was amazed at the diversity of plants and animals there. My intention here was to focus on Jesus' strong connections to Nature, to Earth: Recount his many references to Nature, its importance, one of the main things he talked about.

We had been working on plans for the Creation Care Team and wishing for more members. Protecting and defending Earth, our home, seems more vital now, with CLIMATE below a low priority. "Drill Baby Drill" has kept me awake.

I wanted to focus on this fragile but remarkable planet. I dream of our kids and grands dazzled by God's amazing, sustaining gifts. I wanted to help them love it! Then I want to protect and defend it. Must trust.

But this scripture is actually about Jesus just beginning his ministry. How would he go about his mission? For 40 days the Tempter challenged—perform magic, turn stones into bread, dominate the kingdoms of the world, use POWER instead of suffering and a cross. There is no mention of gaining wealth, leaning on the rich, ignoring the poor and downcast, building bridges across barriers.

In fact, I discovered the book of Luke to be timely! So NOW. Scholar Wm. Barclay wrote that the book of Luke is "a loving book that broke down barriers between Jew and Gentile, saint and sinner, elevated the view of women, of outcasts, of lowly shepherds. The only gentile writer of the gospels, he was a doctor who wrote for all. As pastor Derek Weber taught—that means ALL Y'ALL.

PRAYER:

Creator God, who sustained Jesus through his many wilderness experiences, grant us the grace to turn to you in our challenging times, to sing about your "awesome wonder." Guide us to accept things that we cannot change, but to earnestly work with courage to change the things we can. As we watch our world changing, manipulated by wealth and power, give us strength to trust.

Amen.

Rosie Bishop

MARCH 10, 2025

STRENGTH IN THE WILDERNESS

EXODUS 16:1-5

As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, their faith wavered. Hunger and discomfort clouded their trust in God. Yet, in the barrenness of the desert, God met them with provision, sending provision from heaven to sustain them daily. This miraculous bread wasn't just nourishment for their bodies; it was a tangible reminder of God's unwavering presence and care.

Life's wilderness moments can feel overwhelming. Recently, I experienced one of these moments when I was laid off from work. The sudden loss left me questioning my purpose and direction. In that season of uncertainty, I leaned into my core values: Faith, Family, Purpose, Service, and Gratitude. Each day, I asked God to guide me and show me the path forward. I found strength in trusting Him and rediscovering my purpose, even in the face of challenges.

The wilderness is not a place of abandonment but of transformation. Just as God provided for the Israelites, He meets us in our barren places. In these moments, God teaches us to rely on Him daily, strengthening our faith and trust in His provision. His provision may not look like what we expect, but it will always be exactly what we need. When we open our hearts to see His provision, even in the wilderness, we find strength to keep going.

PRAYER:

Faithful God, thank You for meeting us in the wilderness. In times of doubt and difficulty, help us trust in Your provision and guidance. Teach us to rely on You daily and to recognize Your grace even in barren places. Strengthen our faith so that we may walk confidently through life's deserts, knowing You are with us.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Mindy Bennett

MARCH 11, 2025

TEMPTATION AND TRUST

PSALM 91:1-6

Throughout my life as a Christian, God has often communicated with me through mental pictures. Sometimes He'll bring to mind a scene from my childhood or a picture of someone I love. In prayer, I often "see" the person for whom I'm praying cradled safely in God's hands. Pictures seem to be a powerful way of conveying the essence of what I am thinking and feeling and receiving impressions and insights back from the Lord.

One of the beautiful things about Psalm 91 is that it is full of these pictures. When the Psalmist speaks of "dwelling in the shelter of the Most High" and "resting in the shadow of the Almighty", we understand that God provides protection and relief from the searing heat and burning rays of life's hardships. He is also a "fortress...in whom I trust" - thick, strong walls that will never fail to keep out the enemy, as long as we seek protection within them. He is a rescuer, capable of plucking us from a hunter's trap and protecting us from disease. He covers us with the soft feathers of his wings, just as a warm, down comforter might do on a cold winter night, allowing us to rest in peaceful security. Notice that it is HIS faithfulness (not our unfaithfulness!) that is our shield, protecting us and never giving way.

What great love the Father has for us, his children, that He would care for us so tenderly! Let us always remember that He is the one (the only one) who is truly able to protect and provide for us.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the way you use pictures to share your truths with us. Please help us to understand and trust you more, so that we turn first to you and to your goodness whenever we feel vulnerable or afraid.

In your Holy and beautiful name, we pray.

Amen.

Dana - Lynn Hiller

MARCH 12, 2025

GOD'S SUSTAINING WORD DEUTERONOMY 8:2-6

We all go through seasons that feel like a wilderness—times when life feels uncertain, prayers seem to go unanswered, and we're just trying to find our way. It's frustrating and lonely, and it's easy to wonder where God is in the middle of it.

The Israelites knew this struggle. They spent 40 years wandering in the desert, relying on God for everything—food, water, direction. It wasn't easy, but God never abandoned them. He provided for their needs and used that time to teach them trust and dependence on Him.

I think we all want to get through hard seasons as quickly as possible, but sometimes, those barren places are where God does His best work in us. When things are stripped away, we're reminded of what really matters. We learn to lean on Him in ways we wouldn't if life was smooth and predictable.

If you're in a wilderness season right now, take heart—God hasn't left you. He's walking with you, even if you can't see the whole path yet. Trust that He is working, guiding, and preparing you for what's ahead.

PRAYER:

Lord, I don't always understand the wilderness seasons, but I trust that You are with me. Help me to rely on You, even when the path is unclear. Strengthen my faith and remind me that You are working in ways I can't yet see. Thank You for never leaving me.

Amen.

Kelley Lego

MARCH 13, 2025

THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

ISAIAH 58:11

God offers Israel a powerful image of hope in Isaiah 58, using the metaphor of a "well-watered garden." This comes after He rebukes the Israelites for their fasting, which only resulted in conflict and fighting; they sought their own desires instead of aligning with His will. Instead, God invites them, and us, to live like a flourishing garden, reflecting His goodness and righteousness.

Isaiah 58:11 reveals four key promises from God to those who have obedient hearts. First, He promises constant guidance: "The Lord will guide you always." God never leaves us to navigate life alone; He guides us faithfully every step of the way.

Second, He promises to meet our needs, even in the most difficult circumstances: "He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land." Even when life feels empty and we are confronted with mountains that seem impossible to climb, God remains the wellspring of our hope, quietly providing for us in the most unexpected and beautiful ways.

Third, He promises to give us strength in the midst of our struggles: "[He] will strengthen your frame." When we are weary and worn, God will restore and empower us, preparing us to face whatever lies ahead.

Lastly, God promises to refresh us like a spring: "You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." Just as a garden flourishes when given enough water, God will constantly nourish and strengthen us, turning us into a source of life and hope for others.

All four of these promises are closely tied to our obedience. While the Lord longs to bless us, He also calls us to follow Him and reflect His love to a broken world. God will fulfill His promises to us; we need only to trust Him through the process and live in a way that honors Him.

PRAYER:

Lord, Thank you for your faithful promises to guide, satisfy, strengthen, and refresh us. Help us to trust you fully and follow your will, reflecting your love to those around us. Strengthen our hearts to obey, and let us be a source of hope and life to others.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Sydney Lemler

MARCH 14, 2025

A TIME OF TESTING

MATTHEW 4: 1-4

When I go through times of testing, I just want my suffering to end. If the devil gave me a way to end my suffering as he did Jesus in this passage, I'm certain I would fail the test. Jesus had to be so hungry, yet he resisted the devil's attempt to turn stones into bread so that he could eat. Jesus showed his trust in God and how strong his relationship with God was. He also showed how well he knew God by quoting Scripture. There were no human witnesses. The only witness was God. Jesus passed the test. His relationship with God and his trust in God were more important to him than ending his suffering was. Jesus trusted God to use this testing for good. He also knew that the spiritual food that God could provide was better than bread.

Jesus provides such a beautiful lesson to us that if we get to know God, develop a relationship with him and trust in him, we can resist the most tantalizing temptation. We can accomplish these ideals by reading and studying the Bible and spending time with him in prayer and listening for his voice.

PRAYER:

Dear heavenly Father, help us to resist temptation during the tests and trials we face in life. Help us to get to know you and lean on you in times of trial. Help us to hear your voice and follow your will. Help us to see that even though it may not seem like it, our times of testing are being used by you for our good.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Kathy Campbell

MARCH 15, 2025

ANGELS IN THE WILDERNESS

LUKE 4:10-13

I don't remember a time when I didn't believe that God was real, and that Jesus was his son. But I didn't accept him as my savior until I was in my late twenties. Up until then to say I was running from God is an understatement. I didn't ignore Satan's temptations and sure didn't think about consequences for me or others. Looking back, I know God was ALWAYS with me and watching over me, putting people in my life to show me examples of God's love and faithfulness. My mom's boss who would go out of her way to take me to church, hearing my grandma singing the old hymns that still touch my hear, my Director of Nursing who came and offered to pray with me when my dad died, my godly husband and his family. God always provides what / who we need in HIS time. We just must be patient and realize that what we want is not always what we need.

PRAYER:

God, I thank you for always loving me even when I am not being very loveable or running from you or even being defiant. Thank you for your many blessings and comforting presence in my life. I am truly thankful for you placing angels in my life to protect comfort, guide and teach me to be a better follower. Please help me as I continue my walk with you.

Amen.

Edie Sell

MARCH 16, 2025

GOD MOVES PAST ALL OBSTICLES

LUKE 13:31-35

During Sunday Service in December of 2019 at Southport United Methodist Church my right leg swelled twice as big as it should have. I was sent to the ER at St. Francis Hospital. Upon x-rays they found a clot going down my right leg. They did emergency surgery to fix the clot. When they finished, they did a Cat-scan, and they found some cancerous cells.

So, in January of 2020 I started a chemotherapy routine. One day appointment for a 6-hour drip. Off for 21 days. Then back again. I ended up being off work for 7 months with no pay. The only money coming in was Debbie's paycheck. We are very faithful, in that God was our focus on getting through this cancer. We also had help from our (church) family and friends. The cancer kicked my butt. It was very strenuous.

In the meantime, in November of 2020, Debbie and I sold our home moving in with my sister and brother-in-law. Hoping to have plans of building on the back of our daughter and son-in-law's house. Now of course this is when the COVID hit. And the price of lumber went through the roof. We had our vision of moving into our new home in the Spring of 2021, but that did not happen.

In July of 2022, we moved into my aunt's home while she moved into a nursing home. And stayed at her home while finally our home was being built.

Debbie and I went through a lot of turmoil or maybe trials but never doubted our Faith. When someone would ask us how we were doing? We would always say, "IT IS IN GOD'S TIMING."

Luke 13:31-35 Tells us that we must overcome some or "ALL" of our barriers. The cancer was not fun by no means, but my wife, my family, my church family got me through it. The selling and building of our new home were another trial. But with (church) family and friends we got by. Some obstacles in life are a challenge, but it is how we handle them that is the answer. Go to God first. Listen for his answer. No trials are an easy task. But they are doable tasks. Believe in yourself, and if not call on others to lift you up.

MOVE PAST YOUR OBSTACLE.....

Jerry Kidwell

MARCH 17, 2025

THE COURAGE TO PERSERVERE

PHILIPPIANS 3:2-14

Christian life is like a marathon, it is not a sprint. We are constantly on a journey of spiritual growth. For some, it comes quickly. For others, it may take a lifetime. If you are one that feels it is taking a lifetime to have a relationship with God, don't be discouraged. Just acknowledge the shortcomings and strive for progress. Even small advances are progress!

We all make mistakes, some much bigger than others. Do not dwell on these past mistakes but learn from them. Don't let them define you. You may be the only one that sees them as a mistake. Keep focused on the future and on the goals, God has set for you.

A Christian life focuses on effort, determination and perseverance. We must strive to keep moving forward. Even by the smallest step, even when things get difficult.

These things I try to focus on:

- Be humble and acknowledge my need for growth
- Learn from the past but focus on the future
- Persevere in my faith journey
- Keep my eyes on the eternal prize

Keep running the race with your eyes fixed on Jesus and you will reach the finish line!

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are not yet perfect, but we strive daily to grow in our faith and to become more like Christ. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on the prize, to run the race with endurance, and to finish strong. May we be encouraged by the hope of eternal life and the promise of Your presence in our lives.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

Kathy Smith

MARCH 18, 2025

GOD AS OUR REFUGE

PSALM 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give away and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with the surging.

On a cloudy weekday at our cabin, I had decided to take a ride on the jet ski. Within an hour or so the jet ski began to run a little rough as if it were going to shut down, very soon after it did. I was able to push the jet ski to an island that was near to where I was. As I sat resting and contemplating what to do next, I could see from a distance a storm brewing that was headed my direction. At that moment fear and uncertainty began to creep in, I immediately began to pray to my life's anchor, the God who shelters me and is ever-present in my life. As I prayed, I could feel the calmness come over me and the fear subsiding. I knew I was not alone. Prayers were answered that day I was rescued before the storm reached me.

God is always reliable. He is our sanctuary and protector in times of distress, turn to your faith to overcome fear and despair.

PRAYER:

O God Our Savior, In times of uncertainty, guide us to find shelter in you, help us Lord to lean and fully trust in Your infinite wisdom and care. In our time of weakness may we come to you for strength, peace and support.

O God of Heaven, help us to always remember that you are ever-present in every challenge we may face and that you sustain us. Thank you, God for your reassurance of never being alone.

In the precious name of Jesus,

Amen.

Jerrie Snell

MARCH 19, 2025

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

EPHESIANS 2:14-18

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."

Relationships often have moments where barriers arise—moments of misunderstanding, frustration, or emotional walls. These barriers can prevent us from connecting and experiencing the peace God intends for us. But as believers, we are called to walk in Christ's peace, breaking down those walls with love, patience, and grace.

In my marriage, I used to feel anger when my husband said, "Don't go there." I saw it as a wall of rejection, shutting me out. But over time, I realized it was a call for space—a time for him to process. Instead of letting anger build, I now turn to the Lord in those moments, asking Him to calm my spirit and help me see the situation clearly. This act of surrender allows God to break down the barriers in my heart and guide me toward peace.

As I pray, my husband has the time he needs to process, and we can later come together to discuss the matter with clearer minds and hearts. What once felt like a source of division has now become an opportunity to grow closer. I've learned to be thankful for those words, "don't go there," because they remind me to pause, pray, and respond in love.

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MARCH 19, 2025

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Ephesians 2:14-18 reminds us that Christ is our peace. He has destroyed the ultimate barrier between humanity and God, and through Him, we are reconciled. In the same way, Christ empowers us to overcome the barriers in our relationships, replacing hostility with unity and love. By seeking His guidance, we can build bridges where walls once stood.

REFLECTION:

- What are some barriers in your relationships that God might be asking you to address?
- How can you invite Christ's peace into moments of frustration or misunderstanding?

PRAYER:

Lord, thank You for breaking down the ultimate barrier through the cross and reconciling us to You. Teach me to follow Your example by responding to conflict with grace and peace. Help me to trust You in moments of frustration and to seek unity in my relationships. Thank You for turning barriers into opportunities for love and growth.

Amen.

Maggie Lucas

MARCH 20, 2025

LOVE THAT OVERCOMES FEAR

1JOHN 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

This passage reminds us that Jesus is our peace—peace between God and humanity, peace between ourselves and others. Jesus' work on the cross has made a way for all to be reconciled to God. Even in moments of grief, His peace is available to us, and it is a peace that surpasses understanding.

For many years I've held onto the hope that my grandma could make a choice before she passed, I believe while our understanding of time and choice is limited, God is not bound by that. The Holy Spirit is still at work in ways we can't fully comprehend. The peace that Christ offers is not confined to this earthly life alone but extends into eternity. Even now, my grandma had the choice to be within God's presence, and his peace surrounds her, just as it does me.

The hope of the Gospel is that, through Jesus, there is always a way to be reconciled to God. His sacrifice offers us the ultimate peace—peace with God now and forever.

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MARCH 20, 2025

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PRAYER:

Heavenly Father,

I come before you with my heart still mourning the loss of my dear grandma. I thank you for her life, for the love she shared, and for the moments I got to spend with her. In this time of sorrow, I cling to the truth that you are our peace, and that you have made a way for all to be reconciled to you through Christ.

Lord, I place my trust in your perfect knowledge and your loving presence. Though I don't understand all the ways you work, I believe that you are with my grandma now. I trust that your peace, which transcends all understanding, is surrounding her. Thank you for the assurance that, even in death, your love and grace are not bound by time.

Holy Spirit, comfort my heart today. Help me to rest in the hope of the eternal peace that Christ offers—peace that is beyond this life and into eternity. I know that my grandma is in your hands now, and that you are a God who brings peace, restoration, and hope, no matter what.

Help me to trust in your goodness, to rest in your peace, and to find comfort in knowing that nothing—neither life nor death—can separate us from your love. Thank you, Lord, for being with me in my grief and for your promise of peace, now and always.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Maggie Lucas

MARCH 21, 2025

THE POWER OF HUMBLE SERVICE

JOHN 13:16-17

"Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus knelt to wash His disciples' feet—a task reserved for the lowliest servant. It was an act of love, humility, and a call for us to follow His example.

I once worked for a CEO who embodied this kind of servant leadership. She didn't just lead—she served. At my wedding, she not only attended but catered the meal herself, ensuring my guests were cared for. When my father passed away, she came to the funeral home, not as a guest, but as someone determined to cook and serve my grieving family. Even though I haven't worked for her in over a decade, she still checks in, offering kindness and hospitality to her former staff.

Her actions remind me that true leadership is found in service, and true love is shown through sacrifice. Jesus, our King, took on the role of a servant, demonstrating that the path to greatness is humility. As we walk through Holy Week, may we not only remember Christ's sacrifice but also strive to embody His love in how we serve others.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, You humbled Yourself to serve those You loved. Teach me to follow Your example, to love through action, and to serve with a willing heart. Help me to see opportunities to care for others in both big and small ways. May my life reflect Your grace and humility.

Amen.

Mindy Bennett

MARCH 22, 2025

GOD'S UNSTOPPABLE MISSION

ROMANS 8:38-39

REFLECTION:

There are several people at SUMC who serve inside prisons with Kairos Prison Ministry. A Kairos weekend inside a prison is structured much like spiritual retreat weekends on the outside. Inside participants are seated with outside volunteers at family tables. We listen to talks given by the outside volunteers and then discuss the talks.

During one of the early talks, "You are Not Alone," the inside participants hear that God has promised to be with us. They learn that we have free will though and must make the choice to be open to God coming into our lives. After this talk, participants are shown expressions of love (agape) that have been prepared for them from all around the world. We show them a prayer chain so long that it drapes around the meeting room. Each link in the chain represents someone praying for them.

Through this talk and the ones that follow, they hear about God's unchanging love for them. Paul wrote about "God's Unstoppable Mission" when he wrote to the Romans saying, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, or any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

For some Kairos participants, hearing about God's unstoppable, unshakeable, never-changing love is brand new. Throughout the weekend, many begin to understand and believe that God loves them no matter what – that nothing can separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. **God's unstoppable mission and gift of Grace include them and all of us.**

PRAYER:

Holy Lord, thank you for the unstoppable love you have shown us through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Connie Klipsch

MARCH 23, 2025

GOD MOVES OVER THE FENCE

LUKE 13:1-3

In today's passage, Jesus was told about a terrible event. Pilate had apparently killed some Galileans and had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. Jesus used this occasion to address a couple of misconceptions that we have about sin.

The first misconception is that the level of suffering people endure is related to the depth of their sin. This is somewhat like the eastern idea of "karma," which states that good things will happen to good people and bad things will happen to bad people. While the natural consequence of our actions can lead to positive or negative outcomes, Jesus rejects the notion that suffering or tragedy is a sign of God's judgment. There was no link in this situation between the suffering of the people and any special sort of sin in their lives. This was simply a result of the evil and brokenness in the world, and all of humanity must deal with the tragic consequences.

But there is a second misconception. While some people find an unwarranted connection between sin and suffering, others don't take sin seriously enough. These people may acknowledge that they do things are wrong, but they don't believe it is a big deal, because they don't commit the "really bad" sins. As a result, they see themselves as pretty good people who don't need to worry about God's judgment. Jesus rejects this view as well. He tells the whole crowd that unless they repent, they will "all likewise perish." Although they may view their sins as less serious, these sins are still offenses against the holiness of God, which is a very serious matter indeed. Fortunately, the remedy is given in the same verse - repentance.

So, there are really three lessons here. First, it is wrong to automatically associate suffering with sin. Second, any sin is serious enough to cause eternal separation from God. Third, no sin is so serious that it can't be forgiven.

PRAYER:

Lord, I acknowledge that I have sinned against you. I am grateful for your mercy and forgiveness, both in this life and in the life to come. Please help me to accept your forgiveness and to extend that same mercy and grace to others.

Amen.

Chris Hiller

MARCH 24, 2025

A CALL TO REPENTENCE

ISAIAH 55:6-7

Repentance is more than just an apology or a passing regret. It is a heartfelt turning away from sin and a sincere desire to align our lives with God's will. In Isaiah, we see a call to repentance, urging us to seek God while God is near and to turn from our wicked ways. The beauty of this call lies in the promise of mercy and forgiveness.

In my own life, I've had to repent for moments where my actions, whether intentional or unintentional, hurt others. I remember a time when my words, spoken out of frustration, caused pain to someone I deeply cared for. The weight of knowing my words had wounded them hit me hard. I sought forgiveness, not just from God, but from the person I hurt. That moment wasn't easy, but it led to healing, both for me and for the relationship.

As we journey through Lent, this season invites us to lean deeply into repentance. It's a time for self-reflection and renewal, a reminder to turn away from the things that separate us from God and to draw closer to God. Repentance is not just about acknowledging our wrongs but about embracing God's invitation to experience God's mercy and transformation. Lent is a call to realign our hearts, to let go of what holds us back, and to fully embrace the new life God offers.

REFLECTION:

1. In what areas of your life is God calling you to repentance this Lent?
2. How can you embrace God's mercy more fully in your daily life?
3. With only a few weeks of Lent behind us, what steps can you take in these remaining weeks to deepen your journey of repentance?

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for your endless mercy and grace. As we walk through this season of Lent, help us to lean into repentance, recognizing the areas of our lives where we need your healing touch. May we turn away from sin, draw near to you, and experience the transformation you desire for us.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Rev. William G. Nickrand

MARCH 25, 2025

THE GARDENER'S PATIENCE

JOHN 15:1-5

I am always on the lookout for new tomatoes to grow and my customers at the market know that. The scripture spoke to me and reminded me of an experience I had years ago with a certain tomato. My nephew David also grows tomatoes, and he had some spare plants he had given me, and among them were two Violet Jasper plants. This was a tomato I had wanted to try for a while, the fruit is 1-3 oz, and the color is purplish red with beautiful dark green stripes and I thought it was just beautiful. As luck would have it I had two customers desperately looking for that variety after they had seen its picture, and I sold my only two to them so they could have them but decided to grow it the next season.

Fast forward to the next year and I have a couple dozen Violet Jasper plants for sale and see the same two customers and I let them know I had plenty this season, and they told me they would not be buying them, they tasted horrible and were mushy. I then asked my nephew, and he told me the same thing. I thought surely with my superior gardening knowledge that I would have better results, so I planted one in my garden to see how it would turn out. I was horrified to find out they were all correct—no matter what stage I picked them they were bland and mushy. I had a huge plant cranking out sometimes two dozen tomatoes every week that I could not sell, because they had no flavor and were all mushy. Even the squirrels had no interest in them.

I ended up doing something I have never done before or since, I pulled up a perfectly healthy productive tomato plant halfway through the season and tossed it on the compost pile. For me this ties in with the scripture, sometimes in our life we have to make some difficult decisions, there may be things we have growing in the garden of our life that do not produce fruit that have to be cut away. Like my tomato patch though, once the branch was cut away, the others in that part of the garden had more space and sun and grew and flourished producing wonderful fruit.

PRAYER:

Let us pray that we accept God as our gardener, so he can help guide us to be more fruitful, we just need to listen to him and his guidance. If we can do this, we will reflect God to the rest of the world with the beautiful garden he has produced with our life.

Amen.

Allen Davidson

MARCH 26, 2025

BEARING FRUIT IN FAITH GALATIANS 5:22-23

Several years ago, under the guidance of Rev. Mark Dicken, we became a church of small groups. The plan was for approximately nine, what we called WEB groups meeting in homes for study, prayer and to journey in faith together. Of course there were refreshments, fellowship and fun too.

The WEB groups were named Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. If this sounds familiar, you have read Galatians 5:22-23 from the New Testament. Our focus was the Fruit of the Spirit, qualities that are a result of living in a way that is guided by the Holy Spirit. These are not personality traits but the Holy Spirit's transformative work in each believer's life and in harmony with God's will.

WEB groups were very successful in many ways. As often happens after a length of time with family and personal circumstances, all but one ended. However, we had many successes that continue to transform us and encourage us to live knowing the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

I remember many discussions in our Gentleness WEB group when we challenged each other about God's grace. Is it freely given; don't we have to earn it? It is difficult to imagine that God's grace is ours without earning it. So, do we do the same and extend grace to those when we have different views on issues or choices? Can we change their minds, so they think like we do? Should we try? Or because we differ, do we build a wall? If I believe the Fruit of the Spirit and know I have been blessed by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, then I have no doubt that to be in harmony with God's will is to extend grace in all situations and to all people.

Galatians 5:22-23

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

PRAYER:

Gracious God, thank you for offering us grace without question. May we learn to be as gracious in giving to others so that every person may know your love and be transformed.

Amen.

Sherry Davis

MARCH 27, 2025

GOD'S PERSISTENT LOVE

PSALM 86:15

We all have moments when we put up walls—whether it's out of guilt, fear, or simply not wanting to deal with something difficult. Maybe we've messed up and feel like we need to get our act together before coming to God. Or maybe we avoid repentance because it feels too heavy, too hard.

But Psalm 86:15 reminds us that God isn't standing at a distance, waiting for us to have it all figured out. He is *compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love*. Repentance isn't about guilt—it's about grace. It's about letting go of whatever is keeping us from fully experiencing God's love and stepping into the freedom He offers.

When we hold onto pride, shame, or unforgiveness, we create barriers that make us feel far from Him. But those walls don't have to stay up. God isn't asking us to be perfect—He's just asking us to come to Him as we are.

If there's something weighing on your heart, know that God's love is bigger than any mistake, any failure, or any fear. His grace is already there, waiting.

PRAYER:

Lord, reveal the walls I've built between You and me. Give me the courage to repent and embrace Your grace. Thank You for Your endless love and patience.

Amen.

Kelley Lego

MARCH 28, 2025

SECOND CHANCES

JONAH 3:1-5

How often has this happened to any of us? We're given a task to complete. A task that is easily doable and well within our abilities, but we don't complete the task. We may not even start the task. Our excuses could be fear, apathy, busyness, or even laziness. The task could be of importance, but we don't get it done. Sometimes there are consequences for our failure to complete the assignment. Other times, we come to realize that we should have completed the task, and we wish we had another chance to complete it.

God gave Jonah the task of going to Nineveh to preach against their wickedness. Jonah runs away from God's commission and eventually is swallowed by the fish. We know this part of the story, but we shouldn't neglect the real point of the story. After his ordeal with the fish, God again calls Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time, he obeys and goes to proclaim God's message. And, upon hearing God's message from Jonah, the Ninevites believed and repented of their wicked ways.

Too often we find ourselves being like Jonah and the Ninevites. We stray from the way God wants us to live. We run away from a righteous, God-centered life. And although these transgressions disappoint our Lord, we can rejoice knowing that God still loves us. Our God is a God of Second Chances. God rejoices when we return to him.

This Lenten season as we prepare for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, let us focus on following the path of righteousness, the path God has for us. Even if we need a second chance, God is waiting for our return to Him.

PRAYER:

Pray for those who might need a second chance!

Ron Boyll

MARCH 29, 2025

CULTIVATING NEW GROWTH

HOSEA 10:12

Rest, Restore, Sow, & Grow

In Hosea 10:12 it speaks of fallow ground. We often take this to mean unplowed ground (and in some versions of the Bible it even says this). We see this as a metaphor for untapped resources or a corner of our heart yet untouched by the Holy Spirit. Yet, I don't think that is quite it. I don't think this is a message of do more, more, more. No, I think this is a message that we need to take time to rest and be restored.

You see, fallow ground is not just ground that has never been plowed. It is ground that has previously been productive. It is ground that has reaped many crops for many seasons and in turn has fed many people. This ground was then allowed a period of rest and rejuvenation. This ground has now been restored and refreshed. It is now recovered and revitalized. It is only fallow after it has gone through these periods of production and then restoration. It is when the ground is ready to be sown again that it is fallow.

Just like the earth we all need seasons of rest and restoration. Sometimes just time can help, yet other times we need to lean on others to help us be revitalized. But, at some point we must be ready to be sown again. We must open ourselves up and allow the seeds of righteousness to be sown, so that another harvest can be had.

So, here's to sowing, growing, and to resting and restoring. Listen to the Holy Spirit to guide you in determining which season you are in, but remember you need both seasons of rest and restoration and sowing and growing.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many willing fields that we find ourselves surrounded by. Help us together find the combination of sowing, growing, resting, and restoring that reaps the greatest harvest of love for each other, our neighbors, and you God.

Amen.

Brandon Collins

MARCH 30, 2025

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

EXODUS 20:8

I have been attending church on a regular basis since age 5. I grew up in my maternal grandparents' home with my mother and older brother. The church we attended was cater-corner from my grandparents' house. We got up every Sunday and crossed the street corner to the church. I attended both Sunday school and worship services. My uncle felt the call to be a minister and graduated from Christian Theological Seminary and was ordained in the Disciples of Christ denomination. In 1959 the Billy Graham Crusade came to Indianapolis. At the end of each sermon by Billy Graham there was an altar call for persons who felt the call to come forward and make a personal confession to change their life and follow Jesus. My uncle signed up to counsel some of these people. I went with him to each of the Crusade nights for an entire week.

The church I attended in my childhood had a big disagreement and many members left. I don't remember the exact contentious issue (probably money, theology, or pastor misbehavior). So, my mother, my brother and I sought out a new church. We found Meadlawn Christian Church and started attending there. I was baptized there. I joined the youth group and met a young lady named Sherry (and the rest is history). Sherry and I were married there with my uncle performing the ceremony.

In 1978, Sherry and I built a home in Perry Township and began attending SUMC. Sherry took a job in the church office in 1986. We attended church 50 Sundays each year, missing two Sundays for family vacation time. Former pastor Bill Schwein would mention in his first sermon of every calendar year that everyone had perfect attendance for the year, and he encouraged all to continue that for the rest of the year. Sherry and I are both retired now but we still attend church every week. For both of us, it is where we want to be.

Choose this day who you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Exodus 20:8

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we have many distractions in our world. Inspire us to worship and praise you. Encourage us to be in corporate worship in a community of faithful believers. In Jesus name,

Amen.

Gary Davis

MARCH 31, 2025

WELCOMING THE PRODIGAL

LUKE 15:20-24

Being a high schooler, I often feel like I'm extremely busy. From sports practice to school to hanging out with friends I find myself on the go a lot of the time. However, while I love being involved in a lot of different things, I have noticed that it has sometimes led me to put my faith on a back burner. While I try to convince myself that I'm spending enough time with God, the reality is that I have struggled a lot with consistently spending time with God and getting into my Bible.

In this parable about the prodigal son, the main thing that stuck out to me was how happy God was when his son, who had sinned, returned to him. He harbored no resentment towards him and welcomed him with open and loving arms. He gave him the very best that he had, nothing less. Reading this made me realize that God won't be mad at me for missing one day of my devotional or forgetting to pray before a meal (though those are obviously good to do), he just wants me to spend time with him and to want a relationship with him. He would so much rather us miss a day every few weeks than miss one day and not spend time with him for a week because we are afraid that he will be mad with us or disappointed in us. Also, taking the pressure away from being super strict about when, where, or how you spend time with God might actually help you be more consistent because spending time with him will feel a lot less like a chore.

PRAYER:

Lord, please help me to realize that you want to spend time with me no matter what. Your love is unconditional and greater than anything else. Help me to be more consistent in getting into the word but also help me to know that even if I mess up you will still welcome me back with open arms. I love you.

Amen.

Lydia Hiller

APRIL 1, 2025

GOD'S LAVISH GRACE
EPHESIANS 2:4-7

"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus." — Ephesians 2:4-7 (NIV)

Life often feels like an endless balancing act—juggling responsibilities, battling guilt, and yearning for a village that seems absent. We have so many important components to our life's responsibilities including (but not limited to): Parenthood, Care Giving, Relationships, Friendships, Marriage, Education, Work, Sickness, Appointments, Meetings, and more. The pressure to be everything for everyone can weigh heavily, leaving you feeling isolated and inadequate.

But Ephesians 2:4-7 reminds us that we are not defined by our shortcomings. It reminds us that God's rich grace and hope meets us exactly where we are. Even when we feel "dead" in exhaustion, doubt, or guilt, He makes us feel alive again. His grace isn't earned through perfect parenting or a flawless to-do list; it's a gift, abundant and overflowing.

When you feel like you're falling short, remember: God's grace is there to fill in the gaps. You are seated with Him, not because you've done it all perfectly, but because He loves you immeasurably. Lean into His kindness, and let His grace be the village your heart longs for.

PRAYER:

God—Breathe into me your grace and remind me that I am more than my flaws and shortcomings. Wash over me with mercy, soft and vast, carrying away the heaviness of guilt I no longer need to hold. Give me the knowledge to remember that I am capable, and I am more than enough.

Amen.

Makyla Culp

APRIL 2, 2025

CELEBRATING REDEMPTION

PSALM 103: 10-12

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 130:7

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

For the first 40 years of my life as a non-believer, I found it very difficult if not impossible to forgive. It was only after accepting God into my life that I was able to learn how to forgive. And as we approach Easter, I'm reminded that he, Jesus, forgave us even while dying on the cross. That is, the unfailing love we receive from him. Forgiveness is not always easy. I learned I can't do it alone. Forgiveness can be a heavy load to bear, a load we don't have to carry ourselves. That load can wear you down, physically, mentally, and emotionally as well. I have found that unforgiveness is not a burden worth carrying. Why carry extra weight? Forgive!

And through forgiveness, you will find redemption. Which is good for the soul.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, just as you have forgiven us many times, help us to forgive those who have brought us pain and anguish. Help us to relieve that burden that weighs us down. And as we seek redemption, may we always remember your unfailing love.

Amen.

Paul Lucas

APRIL 3, 2025

GOD'S OPEN ARMS

ISAIAH 40:11

One of my favorite stories (which means many of you may have heard it), is about a little girl who goes to the beach with her parents. Feeling all grown up, she edges away from her mother and father, until she thinks she's kind of on her own. Suddenly, a big wave comes in and knocks her down. With the shifting sand making it hard to stand, she gets hit again as some more water crashes in. With water and sand everywhere, she tumbles about a little bit and is ready to give up all hope, when seemingly out of nowhere her father swoops in and grabs her up out of the surf in his big arms. "I've got you," he tells his precious little girl. "I've got you! Don't be afraid! I've been watching you the whole time. "

The prophet Isaiah told the people of Israel at a low point in their history – and he tells us – that God will gather us into his arms, as a shepherd gathers vulnerable little lambs, when we are fearful or in danger. He will feed and nourish us, and carry us and gently lead us along.

PRAYER:

Holy God, merciful and mighty, our fortress and strength, gather us into your arms of safety and sustenance and lead us in the ways of goodness and righteousness. Help us to listen for your voice, follow your direction and draw close to you through every time of triumph or trial.

Amen.

Rev. Duane Thompson

APRIL 4, 2025

RETURNING HOME

ZECHARIAH 1:3

My wife and I love to travel and experience new things. Sometimes on these trips we find that we have become lost. We've made a wrong turn, went too far, or haven't paid attention to street signs. Being lost can be exciting, but more often it is frustrating, stressful, and possibly dangerous. We are always relieved to find our way again, to be on the right path or road. And we are always excited to arrive back at home, the place where we don't get lost because it is where we belong.

In today's scripture reading, Zechariah, a prophet, has received the word of the Lord. The people of Judah have lost their way. They seem to have drifted away from a closeness with God. The Lord tells Zechariah to call the people to repentance, to return to God. God wants the people of Judah to be closer to him.

Like the people of Judah, we sometimes lose our way, sometimes on purpose and other times unintentionally. When this happens, we often blame God for abandoning us. We feel he has left us alone. But God isn't the one moving away from us, we are the ones moving away from God. He wants us to return to Him.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we so often do things to make us lose our way. We move away from you. We ask for your strength to guide us back on the right path where we belong – the path you want us to be on.

Amen.

Ron Boyll

APRIL 5, 2025

A MOTHER'S PRAYER

PSALM 46:10

My mom became a widow in 1937. She had 7 children, and it was during The Big Depression of 1930. We had no money, no social security and no insurance. The baby of the family was only 6 months old, and my mother was only 35 years old. Mom would often tell us: "Be Still and Know God"!

I was two years old when the Depression began, and remember those years well. In 1941 our lives were completely changed due to World War 2. Through it all I would always remember, "Be Still and Know God"!

When I am down, I remember what my mom taught me to do, and I repeat Psalm 46:10:

*"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."*

Mildred Rebennack

APRIL 6, 2025

PEACE

JOHN 14:27

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.

Every year I pick a word to live by—within myself and to give to others. This year I chose peace. We live in tumultuous times and have for a long time. Peace during these times seems important. However, I have struggled with peace so far this year. How can I share peace when I don't have it inside of me?

Then I read Ephesians 6:13-18. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

I have read this many times but this time it hit me that I need to have the armor of God in order to have peace. I cannot do this on my own. I need to have the breastplate of righteousness, preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit are necessary.

Ann Ward

APRIL 7, 2025

HUMBLING OURSELVES

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

At the beginning of the new year, with the sermon titled, “Marked by the Water”, we had a wonderful opportunity to remember Jesus’ baptism and participate in renewing our own. Later in the service we were invited to choose a word to guide us through the year. Pastor William encouraged each of us to choose our own word or pick one that Pastor Brandon had placed in a small bottle.

Having a few minutes to think, I decided to choose my own word. There are so many that I would benefit from having as my guide. Very quickly I felt I knew the right one. When I shared the word, I had chosen with Gary, his question was, which one. This makes more sense if I say my word is “hear” and “here”. When I heard the word, I asked the same question and I knew it was, “YES!”

I am confident that my year needs to be guided by how I experience the different interpretations of the same sounding word.

HERE – am I being present in all circumstances or is my attention diverted to other thoughts or activities? Am I giving myself fully to whoever I am with so that they can know that I care? Am I patient, waiting for them to guide the discussion and feel they are heard? In times of prayer, I want to be completely tuned into what God is asking me to do and how to do it.

HEAR – am I listening, ignoring distractions and asking questions for clarification and understanding? Am I patient even when the conversation takes longer than expected? When I offer my thoughts, am I being humble remembering this is not about me? Do I take time daily and more often to not just talk to God but to invite Him into the conversation, and then listen?

HERE and HEAR – My hope is that I use these words to guide me in all situations so that I pour out the love and compassion God has taught us.

Philippians 2:5-8

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross.”

PRAYER:

Gracious God, help me to listen and be present in all settings. Let my goal always be loving and compassionate and others will know this is all to your glory.

Amen.

Sherry Davis

APRIL 8, 2025

GOD NEVER LETS GO

ISAIAH 41:10

I've never felt comfortable praying out loud. I've always felt my words weren't eloquent as those I've heard, I didn't know the bible well enough, etc. Oh, I knew the prayer, God if you'll get me out of this situation, I promise prayer. But not what I thought was a true heart felt prayer. Then I heard a man pray that moved me. (let's call him Joe) Many times when Joe would pray, I really listened and found that he was just talking to God. Nothing fancy, just a conversation.

So let me share my September 26, 2018, day with you. Pre-Retirement - My granddaughter was ill that morning so no carpool with Jess. On my own heading out at my normal time stopped for cheap gas since it was going up. Just a rainy drab day ahead. I'm a routine person, so as I headed north on US31 I'm in the middle lane as always – buzz through the light at 31/Stop 11 and I'm behind a small SUV type car who I noticed wasn't slowing for the next red light – now I'm talking out loud in the car, you're going to run the red light – and as he proceeded forward I'm saying – oh, oh, oh while watching him – then as another car slams into him – I'm saying OH OH OH

Once the light turned green, I immediately proceeded forward, parked, got out to check on the folks in both cars. Another driver stopped, calling emergency and I could see the man who ran the light standing by his car, so I knew he seemed ok, however, as I looked to the other car, I saw a woman clearly not the best shape and very upset. (now I've seen accidents prior, I called 911 and stayed clear) but she was alone, I went to her, reached in and touched her shoulder and asked if she was ok, she clearly wasn't, she sobbed and kept saying she was being careful. I told her she'd be ok, introduced myself and she took my hand and ask me if I would stay with her, WELL YES – as time passed, I learned her name was Barbara, 77, retired librarian who swims daily at the Y. I just kept talking to her, trying to take her mind off the accident – Barbara never let go – for 77 she had a power grip. I can't believe how calm I remained (clearly not me). Then it happened, I ask Barbara if I could pray with her, she was so excited that I would do that, so that morning around 6:20am in the drizzle rain standing on US31, I remained calm, I didn't panic and I prayed with my new friend Barbara. I'd like to say I'm not sure where the words came from, but I know. I'd like to think the prayer helped her, but I couldn't believe how the prayer helped me. Now, as Barbara's family arrived an emergency service, she would introduce me and say I prayed for her, and that I would stay with her – all this time, Barbara has not let go of my hand. I stayed with Barbara until she was placed in the ambulance and my last words to her would be that I would continue to pray for her. In meeting her children, they both confirmed, Barbara is a woman of faith.

(Continued on next page)

APRIL 8, 2025

(Continued)

I had been asking God to transition me to be the disciple I am called to be. I have been praying for the Holy Spirit to not only work in me, but through me as well. I ask him to surround me with people who want to grow like me in faith, who can mentor me, who will teach me so one day I can mentor. I have a fear of not hearing, seeing or knowing when God is talking or reaching out to me – sometimes I ask God to “dumb it down” so I’ll get it. Well, that day I GOT IT.

So, my thanks, first to God our Father who is willing to “dumb it down” for some of us. To those people and opportunities, he has put in my life to teach and mentor me. For the teaching and preaching of my church, as you all have taught me, and continue to teach me the plans he has for me. Small groups, bible study and 1-1 if I need it, it’s there for me. Is the fear of praying out loud still there, yes, but not as bad. Are my words eloquent, nope, but it doesn't matter, HE knows my heart and what I'm trying to say.

So, September 26,2018 was a pretty profound day. God like Barbara, never lets go.

Margaret Trammel

APRIL 9, 2025

HE MUST INCREASE

JOHN 3:30

One of the most important things about this verse is not the focus of decreasing but of increasing. It is not about humbling ourselves or denial of ourselves but should be on His increasing, then our decreasing just happens, and we can get out of the way of ourselves. It helps to keep the eternal perspective and fill our lives with **more** of Him. This has helped me to have less time for my own words and over thinking which has been an anchor to trust and surrender anxiety and depression. I used to spend a lot of time with what if's but now the what ifs are different and focused on Him. I have flipped the script.

What if we spend more time with Him in His Word? We'll decrease.

What if we spend more time talking to him in Prayer? We'll decrease.

What if we spend more time serving others? We'll decrease.

What if we spend more time in His house? We'll decrease.

PRAYER:

Let us start today and focus on His increase. Let's start adding more and more of Him every day and slowly shaping a mature faith where there is less of me and more of Him which is directly reflected in the light that others will see in our lives. Lord let us be a vessel for you to use in this world.

Amen.

Melissa Hendricks

APRIL 10, 2025

YOUR MISSION SHOULD YOU ACCEPT IT

MATTHEW 5:16

The apostles and their disciples were tasked with what would to us seem to be a formidable undertaking. The tools Jesus had supplied them with to use appeared to be counter cultural to the people with whom they were to interact. And to be honest, considering the current culture in our society today, it would seem counter cultural in many instances now. They would be facing non-believers of other cultures – Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, and idol worshipers. Hopefully, the apostles had listened well even though at times it seemed they were preoccupied with manners of self rather than what Jesus’s messaged entailed.

The tools he gave them were of living in a world pleasing to God were not the norm for the cultures they were about to encounter. These involved being humble; turning the other cheek; going the extra mile under duress, loving your neighbor as yourself; loving your enemy; giving of your clothes off your back; acceptance of the least among everyone; and forgiveness.

However, despite the many difficulties they faced, they obviously managed to succeed in laying the foundation for the church we are fortunately able to be a part of today. They endured many hardships and sacrifices to the extent of costing most of them their lives.

Thankfully, they did the hardest part, but the unfinished mission continues both here and far. The message and the tools or methods are the same for expanding a world pleasing to God as exemplified by his son who even on the cross asked forgiveness for those who persecuted him.

As our body functions dependent on its many parts, the church community can function in carrying on the mission of reaching out. One part can’t do it all, but with all the many tools available we each can choose which tool or tools to use to further their mission of love. We just have to decide.

Bill Lindley

APRIL 11, 2025

LOVING WITH ACTION

1 JOHN 3:16-18

“Prove yourselves doers of the word, not merely hearers.” James 1:22

From childhood, I was always raised by a good family, friends, and church family. As an adult, I attended Southport church, but did not get involved in church. I came on Sunday and went home after service. BUT, I went through a rough time in 1991 and felt lost. I came to church and did the Equipping Ministries survey that helps list God given gifts. I was surprised at what my listing was. I was not a teacher (even though I had been teaching for many years) but a pastor!! What did that mean to me? **Luke 22:27 says... “Be one who serves.”**

Southport church helped me learn true joy in serving others. It started small in that I took on teaching a Sunday School class of 3rd graders. I was led by the whispers from God to read and believe in the verses from the Bible **Matthew 25:34-40**. You probably know these verses as well....“I was hungry and you fed me, ...etc”

That journey with God by my side led me to many opportunities of service. God was the head of my life and led me to be a doer!!! It was my transformation time with God leading me with a heart for service. Change NO to SURE how can I help others.

PRAYER:

Father God, help us to know how we can be bold servers to the world. God, find us a place that we can love on others. It might be a smile for someone, a listening ear, time to sit with someone, etc. God, show us how we can praise your name through service to others no matter our age.

Amen.

Sandy Tilton

APRIL 12, 2025

CHEERFUL GIVING CORINTHIANS 9: 6-8

Second Corinthians tells us God loves a cheerful giver.

In Leviticus, God tells us when we reap our field, not to make a clean riddance of our bounty, but leave the corners for the poor. (from Leviticus 23:22)

It reminds me of when I was a kid. My paternal Grandfather was a farmer. So was my mother's brother-in-law, my uncle. One time when I was at the farm and heard Grandpa say, "Well it is hot and dry, probably not gonna be a good harvest. So the next week I am with my uncle. Now, let me tell you, Grandpa said he believed, but never entered a church to my knowledge. My Uncle was at church every Sunday. When I saw my uncle next I made the remark, "Boy Uncle Lendall, it's been hot and dry. Probably gonna be a bad harvest this year." His reply surprised me. "It may be off a little but won't be all that bad." "So are you sure about that?"

He then told me, "You know young man, when you put it in God's hands, it usually works out. Years ago, your aunt and I started giving God 10% of what we earned. The Bible tells us to do so. You know since then, I've had some great years and some off years but never have had a terrible year. He takes care of us. You should always share what you reap."

He was a cheerful giver, and always gave without worrying about the harvest, So, you can always reap from what you sow. And sowing doesn't have to be seeds or money, it can be a kind word or a moment of your time just to listen with or chat with someone. Rewards are not always something you can carry in your hand or take to the bank. Sometimes it is just the warming of your heart.

Remember, don't give till it hurts, give till it feels good.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we pray that with your guidance and direction that we, if we are not at this time, will be cheerful Givers. Giving back to your work for the many blessings we receive. Each of us know what we give is just a portion of the value of our relationship with you is worth. May we continue to give with a cheerful heart.

Amen.

Pat Hulfachor

APRIL 13, 2025

PALM SUNDAY — GOD MOVES TO THE CROSS

LUKE 23:44-46

April 2, 2024, began as any other rainy April day. We didn't need to go anywhere, so Margaret and I stayed in doing a few things around the house. That evening at around 7 pm, I was watching TV and Margaret was knitting hats. She got up to get more yarn from the bedroom and noticed the cover had blown off a chair on our patio. She asked me to get it as I still had shoes on. I retrieved the cover and went back into the house. Suddenly, I felt extremely lightheaded and very weak. I started toward a chair to sit down but decided it would be better to lie down. I struggled to get to the bedroom. Margaret said I slumped against the door frame and then started for the bed. I never made it. I wobbled a bit and lost consciousness, falling and hitting my head on our dresser. I don't remember anything after that. Margaret called 911 but she couldn't tell if I was breathing. She ran next door and got our neighbor, who happens to be captain for the Greenwood fire department. I was unresponsive and had no pulse. He immediately began CPR. As the ambulance arrived, Josh got my pulse back. It took a few seconds for me to regain consciousness and figure out where I was. I still didn't know what happened. I got checked out and found that I was going to be transported to the hospital because my heart had stopped.

PRAYER:

As I lay there I prayed. Lord thanks for bringing me back. I am in your hands now. Keep me safe and watch over my family as I fight to recover. I will talk to you, soon my gracious God.

Amen.

Walter H. Trammell

APRIL 14, 2025

HE BORE OUR GRIEF

ISAIAH 53:4

In the fourth gospel, Jesus is introduced into his public ministry by John the Baptist who proclaimed “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. (John 1:29). It is now his final week, and as Jesus moves towards his crucifixion, death and resurrection, his role as the Passover Lamb of God moves towards its fulfillment. From the Mishnah (a collection of Rabbinical writings from the first two centuries), we know something about the practices employed in the sacrifice of Passover lambs during the period of Jesus’s life, and specifically the timeframe before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE. Once the blood of the sacrificed lamb was drained out, a wooden skewer would be run through its shoulders and a second skewer through its mouth and out its hip with the legs then tied to the second skewer to facilitate roasting. This method of preparation would have resembled a crucifixion and Jesus as a devout Jew would have well known this. Imagine how the imagery of thousands of sacrificed Passover lambs being simultaneously lifted up for crucifixion might’ve weighed on his mind. Consider how such thoughts may have steeled his resolve to be God’s Suffering Servant and our Savior. “Surely he has borne our pain. . .” (Isaiah 53:4).

PRAYER:

Loving God, as the darkness of the crucifixion closes in on us sear into our memories something of the depth of Christ’s anguish that we might better appreciate the light and joy of His and our Easter resurrection.

Amen.

Bill Holwager

APRIL 15, 2025

MY WILL

MARK 14: 32-36

Humility is a funny thing – it challenges us to be aware of our limitations. Admitting that we don't have total control over our destiny in life is both grounding and frightening at the same time. However, lacking humility is not good for us.

I can remember a turning point in my life when I thought I was the one in control and my life was in shambles. I was extremely unhappy, and I knew I was not the person I wanted to be. I knew there was something better for me out there, but I didn't know what. Reconnecting with the church and growing my faith was the game changer I needed to see the 'something better.' Growing my faith again helped me to realize that I have to trust in God, as He knows the life He wants me to live. I have struggled many times with what I wanted to happen in situations, and I have prayed about what I wanted, much like in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus wanted his will not God's Will. While grieving what he knew had to be, he put his faith in the Father, knowing that His Plan was what needed to happen, even though it was not what he wanted. Jesus showed humility that night in the garden. It is unimaginable how history might have been different, had Jesus not followed through with God's plan, following his own plan.

I am blessed to say my life is no longer 'in shambles,' and there is a lot to be said for the saying "If He brings you to it, He will bring you through it."

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for loving me. Please guide and direct me so I may work Your Will in my life. I am listening.

Amen.

Beverly Riddle

APRIL 16, 2025

HOPE

ROMANS 15:13 & HEBREWS 11:1

"It's terminal". These words shook my life in November 2007. The Doctor was speaking about my husband of 41 years. Our two adult daughters were in the room. We lost him four months later. There was "No HOPE"

I was afraid of what the future held for me. I still needed HOPE, that things would be ok for me, that I could live my life alone, that I would find joy and peace again. I needed to feel that our souls would connect again on some level, I needed to be strong, I needed NOT to be afraid.

I looked to GOD for answers. I did a three-year Bible study program at a community church, then started attending SUMC. The answer was always there, my comfort comes from GOD's promise that he is with me always.

PRAYER:

When you pray your hope is renewed.

Amen.

Marcia Sanders

APRIL 17, 2025

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

JOB 10:12

At the gym where I workout, I would oftentimes engage in diverse conversations with a group of guys who have lockers near me. Mostly we would discuss the previous day's sports highlights (baseball, football, etc.), although we occasionally covered local and world news events. One time during the baseball playoffs, I shared with my friends how some of my school classmates and I would sneak transistor radios with an earbud into school to listen to the baseball World Series during the 1960s. This was before baseball stadiums had lights so the games would start early afternoon. On one occasion, I noticed one of my friends was not responding and seemed withdrawn. After everyone had left, I went to my friend and asked if he was okay. A few minutes later he told me his brother committed suicide. I remained silent, and then after another short period of time he asked if I thought his brother would go to heaven. Having no answer at the time, all I could finally do was offer my condolences. After heading home, I turned to my Bible app and reread Job 10:12 (NIV), "You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit." I felt with my friend was suffering with the unexpected death of his brother texted this verse to him so he could find comfort in Job's words.

Although this message from Job would not be considered a traditional Lenten passage, it could act as a precursor for the suffering Jesus would undergo during the Holy Week. Nonetheless, there are some distinctions between Job and Jesus. Jesus knew He would be betrayed by Judas; brought before the chief priests, Herod, and Pilate; and then mocked by the crowds. Thus, Jesus was not accepted by the religious leaders as the Son of God culminating in His crucifixion for our sins and ultimately His resurrection. His overcoming of death is an indicator of God's grace for us.

Thus, does suicide prevent a person such as my friend's brother from going to heaven? After reading several sources, I believe even a Christian who commits suicide is saved by God's grace and is guaranteed eternal life in heaven.

PRAYER:

Lord, God it is humbling to know your grace is not earned through any effort of ours, but is freely given because of the death and resurrection of your son Jesus. Jesus freely died to reconcile our sin against you. For that selfless act of His we now look forward to eternal life with a loving God.

Amen.

Peter Stengel

APRIL 18, 2025

GOOD FRIDAY – THE DARKEST HOUR

John 19:39-42

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

In this passage, we witness two men showing remarkable strength and courage in the midst of grief. Nicodemus, who had once come to Jesus under the cover of darkness, and Joseph of Arimathea, who bravely took Jesus' body and prepared it for burial, both acted with purpose during a moment filled with loss and sorrow. In the midst of our own seasons of grief, where do we turn for comfort? Grief can come in many forms: the loss of a loved one, the end of a chapter in our lives, or the unexpected hurdles that challenge us along the way.

Have you ever faced a moment of opposition or fear? We all have situations in our past, or perhaps in the present, that have stirred feelings of darkness and uncertainty. The dictionary defines fear as "to be afraid of someone or something that seems dangerous, painful, or threatening." Just reading those words can feel heavy, and it's in those dark, heavy moments that we must decide what we will do. Will we remain in the darkness, or will we act, like Joseph and Nicodemus, to prepare a place for hope?

I wish I could always turn to Scripture and find peace in its words, but sometimes I need to seek the light in other ways: through nature, music, or moments of quiet reflection. Whatever your journey through grief may look like, know that you are not alone.

On this Good Friday, as we reflect on the darkness of Christ's crucifixion, I pray that you, like Joseph and Nicodemus, find the courage to bring light into the darkness and to prepare a place for hope, even in the most difficult of times.

(Continued on next page)

APRIL 18, 2025

(Continued)

PRAYER:

God, as we sit with the darkness of Good Friday, we ask for your strength and courage. Help us to be like Joseph and Nicodemus, willing to step into the dark places and bring light where it's needed. In moments of grief, fear, and uncertainty, may we seek you in new ways and trust that, even in the darkest hours, you are with us, guiding us toward hope and new life. We pray for courage to meet the challenges ahead, knowing that you will never leave us.

Amen.

Lindsey Nickrand

APRIL 19, 2025

WAITING IN THE SILENCE

MATTHEW 27:57-66

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting. The cross stands empty, the tomb is sealed, and silence fills the space between death and resurrection. Jesus' followers mourned; their hopes buried with Him. Yet even in the silence, God was moving.

I remember a time when I experienced a silence like that. In high school, my dad was diagnosed with bladder cancer. The doctors believed it had spread throughout his body, and the news crushed me. My dad had raised me, my brother and sister alone since I was an infant and he was both mother and father to us. As we waited for answers, the silence was heavy, but we clung to prayer.

Dad underwent treatment and was scheduled for surgery to remove his bladder. But when the doctors went in, they were stunned, there was no sign of cancer. The surgery went on as planned, but Dad lived another 20 years, cancer-free. Like Joseph of Arimathea stepping forward in faith to bury Jesus, sometimes we must act and trust even when the outcome is unclear. Holy Saturday reminds us that God moves in ways we do not see. If you are in a season of waiting, know this: silence does not mean absence. God is working, preparing for resurrection.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, in the silence of our waiting, remind us that You are near. When we cannot see Your hand, help us trust Your heart. Strengthen our faith to believe that You are working for our good, even in the darkest moments.

Amen.

Mindy Bennett

APRIL 20, 2025

EASTER SUNDAY - GOD MOVES OUT OF THE TOMB

LUKE 24:1-12

I've been an endurance athlete for much of my life, participating in long-distance bike rides and foot races. I'll never forget my first (and likely last) marathon. The last 3-4 miles were excruciating. I was running on empty, experiencing pain I had never felt before, unsure if I could finish. But through each painful step, there was a sense of joy and accomplishment—knowing I was pushing through something incredibly hard. When I crossed the finish line, I felt a surge of victory, despite the difficulty of the final stretch.

This sense of victory resonates with the Easter story. When the women arrived at the tomb, they expected to find death. Instead, they encountered an empty tomb and heard the angel proclaim, "He is not here; he has risen." Much like my marathon, the road to the tomb was difficult and filled with uncertainty. Yet in the moment of resurrection, God moved beyond death and brought new life.

In our lives, we all face moments where we feel like we've hit a wall—where hope seems lost, and the finish line is out of sight. But Easter reminds us that, even in our darkest moments, God is at work. Just as the stone was rolled away, the impossible became possible. The resurrection shows us that no matter how hard the journey, victory is always on the other side with God.

PRAYER:

Risen Lord, just as you moved out of the tomb, help us to move through our struggles with hope and courage. When we face moments of despair, remind us that you are always at work, bringing life from the hardest places. We celebrate your resurrection today and trust that you will give us the strength to finish the race.

Amen.

Rev. William G. Nickrand

Thank You

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to each person who contributed to this Lenten devotional. Your willingness to share your reflections, insights, and prayers has helped make this journey through Lent more meaningful for all of us. Thank you for partnering with us in this sacred tradition and for helping to guide our congregation through the season of preparation and reflection.

As we continue this journey toward Easter, we invite you and your family and friends to join us in worship throughout Lent. Each service offers an opportunity to grow closer to God and one another as we explore how God is on the move in our lives.

We especially hope to see you at our Easter Sunday service, where we will celebrate the victory of the resurrection and the hope it brings to us all. Please also pick up a worship guide for ongoing worship opportunities throughout 2025, as we continue to walk together in faith, fellowship, and renewal.

Thank you again for your participation and may this season of Lent bring you closer to the transforming power of God's love.

2025 LENTEN EVENTS & SPECIAL SERVICES

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner: March 4,
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Ash Wednesday: March 5, 7:00 p.m.

Psalm Sunday: Celebrated Thursday, April 10,
6:30 p.m. & Sunday, April 13, 9:00 a.m. &
10:30 a.m.

Easter Festival: Saturday, April 12, 2:00 - 4:00
p.m.

Maunday Thursday: April 17, 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday: April 18, 7:00 p.m.

Easter: Sunday, April 20, 9:00 a.m. & 10:30
a.m.

SERVICE TIMES

Thursday, 6:30 p.m. : Casual Service

Sunday, 9:00 a.m. : Traditional Service

Sunday, 10:30 a.m. : Contemporary Service

Sunday, 2:00 p.m. : Myanmar Service

Sunday, 10:30 a.m. : Children's Church, Nursery, & Youth.

Online Service: Sunday, 9:00 a.m. @ www.sumc.org



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