

MANY STORIES

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022

ONE BODY

ROSWELL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WELCOME

God is a God of seasons. In Ecclesiastes 3:1 we are told, “to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” The past couple of years have been a season that changed the way we live and relate to one another. One thing this has produced in us is a deeper understanding of the importance of being united in Christ. Recognizing that we are uniquely created by God with different gifts and perspectives, and yet are united in the Body of Christ. It is our faith and trust in Jesus that helped us learn this lesson.

This year’s title, *Voices of RUMC: Many Stories, One Body*, is inspired by 1 Corinthians 12:12: “For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” At RUMC, we desire to be a place of community and faith where many parts of the body can be united through Christ’s love. We desire that our different gifts and stories inspire others to discover and share their gifts and stories. Through them, we hope we all discover how the variety of gifts and stories build up the body of Christ and help strengthen the bond that unites us.

The devotion begins on Ash Wednesday, a day when we are keenly aware of how we fall short, and then moves through the six weeks that lead us to the cross and to the joy of resurrection. The devotions are written by members and staff of the RUMC family. They represent people of all ages who share their gifts and stories to help us draw near to Jesus during this season, and hopefully, inspire us to spend time seeking to know what fruit God desires to produce in our lives.

We hope that each devotion will be a helpful part of your Lenten practice. We also invite you to visit rumc.com to learn more about opportunities for worship and growth during this season. If you have questions, you can contact me at mkimehall@rumc.com.

Peace and Blessings,

Rev. Melissa Kime-Hall

Rev. Melissa Kime-Hall
Associate Pastor

Psalm 51:1-13

Psalm 51 is one of my favorite Psalms. We get to see how human King David, the author of this psalm, really was and his desire to “make things right” with God after he messed up big time. David quickly acknowledges that there is nothing he can do to make things right with God; it requires God’s mercy, love, and forgiveness to wash away our sins and cleanse us. God is the one who makes things right again.

Today is Ash Wednesday—the beginning of a forty-day journey called Lent. The season of Lent is an intentional time set aside for us to examine our own failures, sins, and mortality. And let’s face it, no one likes to talk about our failures, our sin, and death. It’s not fun! But, in order for God to make things right again, we need seasons like Lent that allow us to confess our shortcomings and seek God’s mercy and forgiveness in our lives. As David puts it, the ultimate desire and result of our confession is joy. God restores the joy of our salvation when we realize our humanness, when we acknowledge God’s Divinity, and when we accept God’s mercy and forgiveness that is readily available. Not only does God make things right through the gift of mercy and forgiveness, God allows us to know and experience joy—a double blessing!

As we walk through this season of Lent, may it be a time of personal examination and confession. But may this season ultimately lead to joy.

Dr. Michael Cromwell

Psalm 91

I sat in our pediatrician’s exam room during my baby son’s 2-month appointment with dark circles under my eyes and my unwashed hair pulled into a messy bun. My baby boy could barely lift his head while the doctor tested his tummy time strength. I shared, “It’s been hard to get tummy time in. I’m terrified his older sister will step on him, and he cries miserably every time I put him on his tummy.” The doctor smiled

as she said, “It happens. You have two children now, and you only have two arms.” My involuntary response: “But do I?”

When reading in preparation for writing this devotion, I must admit that my review of this beloved text brought humbling feelings of discomfort and defeat. Too often in this season of my life, I find myself refusing to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, refusing to rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I get so caught up in trying to remove obstacles—to remove harm—from all those entrusted to my care—my husband, my children, my coworkers—that I forget that all I must do is call on the Lord.

In this Psalm, which Moses wrote during the 40 years of wilderness wandering, we are reminded that because we simply love the Lord, He will be with us in trouble. When we call on His name, He will rescue us. He has promised to be our refuge and commands all the angels to guard us in all of our ways. As we wander through our Lenten days, may we each remember that our Lord is faithful, and with our trust in Him, we will always find refuge.

Catherine Roberts

March 4

John 12:23-26

Jesus, knowing his time on earth was ending and being followed by thousands of followers including some Greeks, began to teach and explain why He must die. In verse 24, Jesus tells those listening that “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed, but if it dies it produces many seeds.” Our Lord is not just speaking of His own death on the cross but also telling us that unless we allow the “shell” that we surround ourselves with to be broken for Christ, we cannot expect our faith to grow.

In verse 25 we receive what, at first glance, is a confusing message. “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Jesus is not wanting us to hate ourselves but to not “love” our lives, being only consumed by our own needs and desires. Our Lord does not want us to ignore our own needs as humans to the degree that we become physically or emotionally ill, but rather, to look outside ourselves making Jesus and His love for others our priority.

Verse 26 is another challenge to all of us. “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am my servant will also be. My Father will honor the one that serves me.”

“And where I am, my servant must also be...” This instruction from Our Lord is a challenge to us to look outside our comfort zone to serve him. That means serving and having compassion for all God’s children: even if they do not look like us, believe as we do, are of a different religion, or do not even follow Jesus. In this time of great division in our country, these words offer hope and healing.

Allan Kennedy

March 5

1 Corinthians 12:12

Everyone Is Important

My wife and I first began participating in the life of RUMC about a year ago. We had moved from rural North Georgia to the urban city of Roswell. We had come from a church with an average attendance of fewer than twenty persons. We were not certain how well we might be assimilated into a congregation of more than five thousand members. We were awed by the size and complexity of this church organization and its physical plant. This congregation constitutes a very large body.

But as we began to worship here, many people who were strangers greeted us in the Sanctuary and in the hallways, invited us to their Sunday School classes, invited us to join them in volunteer opportunities. Though each acted individually, through them the whole congregation caused us to feel embraced and enfolded within the body of Christ in this place. As a result, we were glad to become members here and to join those who had reached out to us in reaching out to others.

Paul told the Christians in Corinth that every member of that congregation was very important to Jesus and his ministry. He reminded them that, like a foot or hand, each of them was a vital part of the body of Christ in that place. Not one of them was unimportant. In verse 13, Paul told them, “God’s Spirit baptized each of us and made us part

of the body of Christ” (CEV). Every time you extend hospitality to a church visitor, every time you invite someone to your Sunday school class or small group, every time you tell someone how you have been strengthened and blessed by Christ, you constitute the Body of Christ in redemptive mission.

Do not miss those opportunities.

Prayer: Cause us to seize every opportunity to embrace and enfold others within your church. Amen.

Rev. Richard Long

March 6

1 John 4:7-21

Imagine being John near the end of his life and reflecting on what had just happened with the first persecution under Nero’s rule. Noticing that what had happened was a brutal and unjust, killing thousands of Christians. That was not Christlike, at all. Then, remembering the love of God and the teachings of the early church. Feeling regret and shame for what had just been done.

John wrote then what we should hear now to refresh our minds and remember that we are ALL so very loved by God. We need to extend love, patience, and kindness to everyone around us. Yes, this includes our loud neighbors, the stressed-out mom, the screaming child at Kroger, and yes, even the angry man that cut in line at the gas pump. Yes, this also includes the people that speak all the languages, have all the hairstyles, and have all the skin tones. In Christ, we are all brothers and sisters. We were all made in his glory. We should not fear our brothers and sisters, nor should we fear or become anxious about challenges in life.

Yes, I know this is easier said than done. In the past two years, everyone’s life has changed. We never could have imagined things would change this much this quickly, but they did. Now all we can do is love God, love our family, and think about John 4:18. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.” Breathe in, breathe out, remember what you know, and pray to God. Look around you. Who in your life can

you extend love and kindness towards? Imagine what effect that will have on the people around them? Let us make the best of this crazy time by going back to the Word of God, appreciating others, treating them well, and working together with God to the greater good.

Theresa Moore

March 7

1 John 2:1-6

John (the Apostle John, member of Jesus' inner circle, the disciple whom Jesus loved) wrote to believers in western Asia Minor; however, I believe he is writing to us today as well. He writes so we will not sin, but if we do, we have an advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ, who is the atoning sacrifice, not only for our sins but also the sins of the world.

During Lent, we celebrate the fact that Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...by being the atoning sacrifice that satisfies God's wrath. We also celebrate His rising from the dead, His victory over death, and the eternal life we now have simply by believing or trusting in Him.

John then goes on to make clear that if we know Him, we will keep his commands. This certainly does not mean we will never sin. It means the more we get to know Him, the more we will keep His commands. And by being obedient, love for God or God's love will be made complete in us. What better way to be at peace, than to experience God's love and forgiveness now during Lent and forever!

Prayer: Father, thank you for your love! Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice and thank you that we have forgiveness for our sins because of what you did for us and simply by our believing in you!

Mark Kramer

Zechariah 3:1-10

This passage is quite oblique; it is the fourth vision Zechariah receives in just the first three chapters alone. One of the more interesting things in this vision is the character that most English translations name Satan, but in the original Hebrew is written as ha-satan, which means “the accuser.” Rather than being the pitchfork-wielding horned devil that might spring to mind, in the Old Testament, ha-satan is actually a member of the divine council, someone who works kind of like God’s prosecuting attorney to point out where humans fall short and assure that God’s perfection is not sullied by our sinfulness (Job 1-2 is similar in this regard). It is understandable how someone who points out your sin, like ha-satan, might later become more associated with sin itself, leading to our modern conception of Satan.

But here, we see ha-satan ready to prosecute Joshua before being preemptively shut down by God. For a moment, put yourself in this scene; what would it feel like to stand before God in the shame of your own shortcomings, just as Joshua was in his filthy clothes standing before the angel?

Lent is a season when we are challenged to take an honest, hard look at our own sinfulness and ask for the grace to throw off everything which hinders, as the writer of Hebrews says (12:1). This is why folks give up vices or take on spiritual disciplines—not for their own sake, but as a means of replacing our “filthy clothes” for “festal apparel” in preparation for Easter. Just as the Lord reassured Joshua, so may we be encouraged by the same prophetic words: “I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.”

Matt Hall

Psalms 27

The words of Psalm 27 act as a mirror for us. They help us see our lives with God. The days when we are confident in our faith proclaiming, “the Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear?” (v1), and the ones where the words “Hear O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and

answer me!” (v7) resonate more. This psalm joins the experiences of our lives where we contemplate God’s goodness and when we actively call upon His goodness.

Are our experiences with God so varied because we live in a world that tells us to gather up lots of stuff so we can live “good lives”? We get so busy grabbing and holding these things that we fail to focus on what is most important. In our daily lives, this may look like putting so many things on our calendars that we find that things we once enjoyed are no longer fun because there is so much crammed around them.

This psalm tells us there is one thing needed to experience the good life. “One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple,” (v4). The word “asked” translates to “desired.” We are reminded there is only one thing we need to desire to have enough. The one thing is God. In January, I decided to start my day by praying these words. They remind me daily to set my sights on God and what God is doing. They call me to worship God constantly. They help me to let go of what the world says I need and pursue the one thing I know I need, nearness to God. This Lent, what are the things you need to let go of so you can pursue the one thing that is needed? As you set your heart and mind toward letting go, pray the words of this psalm and let them guide you toward God.

Rev. Melissa Kime-Hall

March 10

Philippians 3:2-12

Yeah! Go get ‘em, Paul! Give those hypocrites the “what for,” them and all their rules and special signs and fences to get past. We are the ones on the side of Jesus! They are wrong. We are right, and we will show them!

Paul warned his friends of the church in Philippi to watch out for those who twist the Gospel, imposing new restrictions that Jesus never heaped on them to be a part of the “in-group.” He reminded them that if you want to get serious about the Hebrew laws, he can tell it better than anyone. So what?

Paul says that, as valuable as he found the Law to be, his life in Christ now is far more valuable, full, and beautiful than his past life was.

Father Richard Rohr says, "What is the law really for? It is not to make God love you. God already loves you, and you cannot make God love you any more or any less by any technique whatsoever. The purpose of spiritual law is to sharpen your own awareness about who you really are and who God is for you. Then you will recognize your own radical insufficiency and, in that same movement, find God's fullness."¹

Recognizing that insufficiency, and then finding and growing into God's fullness is what John Wesley called Christian Perfection. By Perfection, he is not talking about a noun, a cold, crystalline, unchanging state. Instead, Perfection is a process, a verb. We are perfected only by recognizing how we fall short and then allowing Christ to reside within our lives, leading and guiding what we do, say, think, and feel. Then, can we become fully who Christ intends for us to become.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I get so frustrated by those who use your name in ways that make it so I cannot even recognize you. I just want to grab them and shake them. But help me to remember that they, too, are yours, created in your image. Help me to focus on my own imperfection, perfection, and maturation with you. Empower me. Fill me with your love to reach out to those who I think put up barriers to you and to show them the love you showed to all those around you. Amen.

Scott Dickson

March 11

Romans 10:8-13

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome sometime during the reign of Emperor Nero around 54-68 CE. He wrote to them about the gospel of salvation in Christ which included moral instruction and exhortation. The concordance in my Bible stated that some of Paul's exhortations were responses to developing "anti-Judaism among the Roman aristocracy that was beginning to penetrate the Christian community." There had been problems in nearby cities, and Paul was hoping to dispel those problems in Rome to prevent disturbances in the minority Jewish population.

As Will Willimon, retired Bishop in the UMC and professor at Duke Divinity, wrote about these verses, "In Romans, Paul emphasizes faith. Our confession of faith from the mouth should come from the heart, and

this heart confession saves us.” In verses 12 and 13 Paul says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This says to me that God loves me and everyone and wants a relationship with all of us.

These verses remind me of the books I have been reading on racism during the pandemic. In a book study, I have been learning about the church and what we have done and not done for other people who do not look exactly like us. My classmates and I want to do better. Jesus DID tell us to love one another!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for your love, your presence in our lives, and your sacrifice. In this Lenten season, help us to remember that you died for all of us because your father God “so loved the world.”

Alison Stokes

March 12

Psalm 118:26-29

Psalm 118:26-29 starts in the form of a greeting between two parties. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” is the greeting that was given to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. The reply is that which might have been given by priest, although in this case the priest is most likely other believers in Jesus. The author then professes that our Lord is God and is above all others. The part that struck me most was verse 27. In some versions it says, “boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar” and others say, “bind the sacrifice with cords to the horn of the altar.” Boughs and cords are not ropes like we think of today, but rather branches and wreaths. The image of the wreath is one of adornment and more clearly represents the willing sacrifice that Jesus made for us and one that we are called to make. We are called to follow Jesus and be living sacrifices.

I grew up when WWJD bracelets were very popular. I had those along with a cross necklace. As I thought about both in the context of these verses, it struck me that they are forms of adornment that remind us that we are willingly bound to the altar. No one forced me to wear either of them; they are a sign that I am follower of Jesus and ready to make sacrifices for Him. Psalm 118 starts and ends with joy. Even though the

middle talks about the huge sacrifice of Jesus, the end result is joy and willingness to do what the Lord wants.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to be living sacrifices to you—ready to both praise you and endure hard times. We know you are a loving, merciful God whose love endures forever. Amen.

Ali McDaniel

March 13

Colossians 3:12-17

Mostly right! In many ways, the members of the church at Colossae were on the right path in following Christ's teachings. However, the apostle Paul heard that certain practices were misleading some of these Christians. He sent a letter emphasizing that belief in Christ is all that is needed for salvation and stressing the importance of a Christ-centered life. This passage begins with the assurance that through Jesus' love and grace, believers are part of God's beloved family. This comes, however, not as an exclusive membership but as a responsibility to become a new self, completely oriented to Christ. Jesus requires daily action to show and share His love for all. The virtues listed in this passage are to become such an integral part of a believer that they will be as obvious to others as clothes that are worn. However, even in a body of committed followers, Paul knew that conflicts would arise. He reminds the Christians that because they are forgiven by Christ, they should practice forgiveness to all. Loving others brings peace with justice and wholeness. Responding to God's love transforms lives making individual songs united and harmonious in thanksgiving.

Paul's words are still relevant to individual believers and to the church body today. The world doesn't always applaud the virtues of Christ. Instead, self-interest, power, and greed lead to oppression, marginalization, and injustice. As followers of Christ, we all can use a reminder of the need for greater consciousness, for daily putting on of the virtues of Christ, and for showing God's love to all. Christ's love, working through each believer and through the church body, celebrates everyone as created in God's image and uses our differences to bring a wholeness and reconciliation to the world. God made us to be in relationship and community as His beloved people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we enter the season of Lent, keep us mindful of your gift of love and salvation through Jesus. Dwell in our hearts and guide us daily to show this love to all. Encourage us to share in RUMC's service to the community and to the world. Help us to be more than "mostly right."

Susan Yeilding

March 14

Luke 13:22-31

My initial reading of this scripture made me feel uncomfortable, convicted, and grateful. Jesus is teaching as He makes His way steadily to Jerusalem. The majority in the crowds were the "church crowd" Jews. A bystander asks, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" The answer was pretty much, "Check yourself. Will YOU be saved? Are you following your only exit ramp to the venue of Heaven?" We all come from various locations. We come from the East, West, North, and South. Our individual roads merge with others as we journey. We must be careful not to get caught up in the traffic and miss our exit. The ramp is narrow and one way, and it is discovered sooner for some than others.

Like the religious leaders and good Jews, we assume we will be in Heaven. Accepting Jesus as Lord is our prepaid ticket to the venue. But then He says, "Follow me." "Take up your cross." "Make every effort/strive to enter through the narrow door..."

That word, strive, comes from a Greek word used for athletic contests and war, implying earnest, deliberate, sustained effort. And there's urgency because the door will be shut eventually. On this highway there are only multiple exits: one leads to Heaven and the others lead to "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

I said my initial reaction was 3-fold:

1. Uncomfortable: One of my weaknesses is avoiding conflict. Jesus' answer confronts the comfortable Christian. He did not save us for comfort.

2. Convicted: For my all too natural habit of procrastination. Our salvation is the most dangerous matter to procrastinate about. I know firsthand, today is all we are promised. I must be bolder in sharing my faith.

3. Gratitude: As I write this, our church has just experienced the culmination of AYL. 57 young people gave their lives to Christ. Our son, Josh Fonner, had the opportunity to participate in AYL in the early 2000's. He gave his life to Christ, largely because of those experiences and the leaders that shared their faith journey with him. In 2007 he was killed in a car accident. How eternally grateful we are to know that he had been travelling on the right Exit ramp, and he made it to the main event before the door was shut!

Prayer: Jesus, as we journey with you to the new Jerusalem, may we not get distracted by the crowd, but instead, by keeping our focus on you, show others the way through the narrow door as we "Follow the leader." In your Holy name, Amen.

Penny Fonner

March 15

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Habakkuk! Remember him? As it turns out, not only was he one of the 12 minor prophets in the Old Testament, but he was also a man who was trying hard to believe God was good in a time when hurt and tragedy surrounded him. Habakkuk's words are poems of lament—very similar to what you find in the book of Psalms. And because corrupt leadership, unjust economics, violence, and hardship are not unique to today, Habakkuk lodged a few complaints with God.

When God did finally respond, it was not with the desired answer. Habakkuk boldly brings his rebuttal, and God grants him a vision of the future. This vision holds perspective along with a promise, not just to Habakkuk and to Israel, but to future generations as well. Justice will be brought unto all, and the oppressed will be rescued. Habakkuk is given a glimpse into the heart of God that allows him to understand God's deep love and awareness over all of creation. And while the promises of God often go beyond human understanding, this encounter and this promise allow the poem to end on a note of hope and faith. These are two things not easily grasped by our author and not so easily grasped by us either. But it is the spirit of God, not our circumstances, that is our strength. Much like Habakkuk, we can take our deepest hurts, our

strongest rage, and most feeble of doubts straight to God, and He will meet us with those very same promises.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your promises. It is hard for us to wrap our heads around all that we see and witness in our world. Thank you for the hope and the strength you provide when our spirits need it most.

Shaunna Fretwell

March 16

Psalm 105:1-6

A Psalm of David, a man God called after His own heart. You would think that David was perfect, but he was far from it. He was like all of us, flawed, but he had one redeeming quality. He loved God with his whole heart. We can learn a lot from these few short verses. David had a special relationship with God that is open to all of us.

God has loved us from the beginning of time. We were created for fellowship and for worship. Part of worshipping is to be thankful for all that God has done for us. Worship is more than coming to church. There are many ways we can show our love for God. David danced before the Lord. One of the ways I worship is to sing praises while I am driving. Be aware of His creation and enjoy the beauty that surrounds you. Worship and praise are one way of building a relationship; the other is just spending time with Him. The psalm reminds us that our hearts will rejoice when we seek to be with Him continually.

David knew the blessings of spending time with God. As I follow his example, my faith grows stronger each day. God has become my rock where I can draw strength as I face the challenges that come my way. I am blessed being one of his children grafted into the family of Abraham by the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. My soul rejoices as I pray all Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen!

Rev. Bill Floyd

Psalm 63:1-8

Have you ever felt cut off? Lonely? In the wilderness? I find comfort knowing that biblical heroes, like David, felt this way too. Scholars think that when David wrote this Psalm, he was hiding from his son, Absalom, who was after the throne. I cannot imagine many situations feeling quite so lonely as David's.

During this time in the wilderness, David hungered for God's presence and comfort. When David felt cut off from his family, his friends, his country, he still reached out to God. In verse 1 of the Amplified version, he says, "My soul (my life, my very self) thirsts for You, my flesh longs and sighs for you." The next thing David does is praise God. He speaks of God's glory and his generous love. That praise turns into a communion with God that satisfies like nothing else.

Have you ever longed for someone or something in that manner? Have you ever cried out to God for rescue or solace? The good news is that God will meet you in that thirst and longing. When other people/things/situations cannot or will not satisfy your longing, God can and does. It gives him joy to do so!

There have been stretches of wilderness in my life where I feel cut off. Honestly, I struggle to praise God in these times. However, I know from experience, that if I turn to God and share my desire for his strength, his comfort, his wisdom; He is waiting for me to seek him. He meets me where I am, and his comfort strengthens me. I realize how weak I am and how strong He is and then my praises start to quietly form.

Charlotte Pelz

Luke 6:43-45

The Heart of the Matter!

The Gospel of Luke is a set of teachings by Jesus in The Sermon on the Plain. Jesus had just spent the night on a mountain praying to God. On His way down the mountain a throng of people had gathered; Jesus began a sermon of notable lessons including those in Luke 6:43-45.

What is in our heart is spoken out of our mouth and reveals what is in our hearts, according to Jesus. What are we speaking about? What kind of fruit are we bearing as we speak? Jesus drives home the point to all of us, “what we speak truly reveals our true identity” and not how we act or perform before people.

Today in our country, we need to relate Jesus’ words—bearing good fruit of love for one another is needed more now than ever before. Evil and hatred sits at the forefront of the world, but God is calling Christians to be “good fruit trees,” bearing good fruit that can be identified by our character from the words we speak. If we are bearing good fruit, the results will be productivity for the kingdom of God in word and deed.

In other words, Jesus teaches that our fruit is a direct result of whatever controls our heart. The fruit of a life not surrendered to Jesus includes lying, sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, and many more evil acts. In contrast, the fruit of God’s heart are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, truth, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

With the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, God gave to the world HIS heart bearing good fruit. Have YOU had a heart checkup lately? What kind of fruit is growing on the tree of your heart??

Prayer: Speak to our hearts, dear Lord! We need to hear from You how to examine our hearts. Help us to know that our heart matters and what we speak truly reveals our true identity. In God’s holy name we pray, Amen.

JoAn Hobbs

March 19

Isaiah 55:1-9

As you read these verses there is such a yearning by Isaiah to Listen! Seek! And follow!

Listening encompasses obeying what you hear. As people, we do not always want to hear the message from God or feedback from others in our lives. That may require changing our course. That may require changing our mindset. That may require an honest appraisal of a situation or ourselves. “Listen so that you may live.” There is such

conviction here, and it speaks to us in terms of not merely existing but living fully in this life as a Christian and beyond. Everyone who thirsts, come!

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” June 2021, my mother was hospitalized due to a fall which included a broken hip and pneumonia. The course of treatment was complicated by her Alzheimer’s disease. There was surgery, IV antibiotics, and physical therapy to name a few. The treatment team kept projecting sub-acute rehab as her aftercare plan. Over the next two and a half weeks it was a rollercoaster of improvement, setbacks, agitation, and endurance. No rehab center would take her. I tried calling everywhere. After pleading with a Program Director, to no avail, I sat in the hospital parking lot crying. I begged God to please open a door. Open the door for a woman who has been a loyal servant all her life. Within two days, the door was open—to hospice. God’s aftercare plan.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” To follow where God leads you takes awareness and trust. The week I spent in hospice with my mother was a sacred time. I realized everything worked out the way it was supposed to by listening, seeking, and following.

Amy Curtis

March 20

1 Kings 19:1-18

God Encourages Discouraged Elijah

No character in the Old Testament is more vividly portrayed or has as much fascination as that of the unique character of the prophet Elijah. Elijah was not exceptionally spiritual or superior. Yet, what made Elijah extraordinary was his complete commitment to the Will of God.

God’s people had been ruled by kings for quite some time, but many had been evil. God was far from pleased by them and used Elijah to guide them out of their suffering. Even after victories over false prophets, Elijah struggled with typical human frailties. Often his burden proved to be too great to carry. His life was filled with turmoil. At times he was bold and decisive, and at other times fearful and tentative. He became lonely, weary, frightened, and depressed. He remained faithful in proclaiming God’s message, yet the only result he could see was a

threat on his life... He gave up. He prayed, "I have had enough Lord, take my life." Then he lay down and fell asleep. But an angel of the Lord came, touched him, and his spirit was restored.

God often speaks through people who are ready to give up. Could that be you—or someone you know? In my life, I have had many efforts that seemed too difficult or impossible to continue... I wanted to give up. I am thankful that even though at times the journey may seem too challenging, I know He is mindful of each of us and will give us strength to go on. Whether in victory or despair, we can trust the Lord to know exactly what we need and to meet our every need. Don't we all want to make a difference? Have you ever wondered, "if I carry on...might I make a difference?"

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all your special blessings and for this season of hope. Help us to live the life you want us to live and to be aware of your presence, reminding us you have promised to be with us always. Help us to keep our eyes on you, as we know your eyes are on us. May we hear your encouragement while you guide us along life's way. Amen.

Don McNew

March 21

1 Corinthians 12:1-13

"A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good."

A scripture passage of great meaning for me is 1 Kings 19. The prophet Elijah is enjoying a private 'pity party' just after his amazing victory over the priests of Baal. When the Lord confronts Elijah asking, "what are you doing here?" part of Elijah's response is, "I'm the only one left who has been faithful." The Lord responds to Elijah's other complaints, then—almost "by the way"—reminds Elijah there are 7,000 others who are faithful. Elijah is not alone.

Nor are we. We have been called into a body, we are part of a family, we each are essential members of this group we call the church. We have each other and have the task of caring for each other, making the whole thing work for the common good and the good of God's Creation.

Does that sound overwhelming? Remember, we have not only each

other, but the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God, to activate us. The Spirit will guide us and gift us so that we are able to do whatever God calls us to do—even rest—at the proper time.

Know you are equipped and empowered to be the person God created and is calling you to be.

Prayer: Faithful Father, thank you for the gift and the gifts of your Spirit. Remind us always we are never alone. Help us to be faithful members of this family into which you have called us, being and doing all you desire, and living in peace with one another. Amen.

Sally Dowland

March 22

2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:5

As our daughter was getting ready for her first AYL this year, we were gathering what we would need to take. Phone... check, journal... check, jacket... check (because who does not love a water balloon fight in thirty-degree weather!). Then I reached for her beautiful new Bible she received for Confirmation, and I paused. I thought she could leave that at home. I do not want it to get dirty. Within a couple of seconds, I said to myself, “What???!.. What a crazy thought to let God’s word sit on a shelf.” How often do we do this? We receive something finite on this Earth, and we treasure it and save it away, so it stays in pristine condition. Only to find out no matter what, it fades, it corrodes, it breaks, it wears down, and it disappears ultimately.

If you are like me, we do this with our lives too. We save ourselves so we do not get bumps and so we do not put ourselves in uncomfortable or fearful situations. Staying in our bubble with our tribe of familiar people to stay safe. That Bible sitting on my daughter’s shelf, which is our Heavenly Father’s perfect word, is meant to be seen, touched, used, and shared! By God’s will and by His design, we too are meant to be seen as an example of God’s love and used to share God’s love and the Good News of Jesus Christ who came to give us an eternal life with God!!

When Paul writes to the Corinthians he says, “For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” Through God’s good grace, each one of us is guaranteed something that will never fade and never wane in perfect splendor. I recently heard a pastor

say, "Where was the Gospel going when it hit you?" Let the Gospel hit you, let Jesus change your whole self, and then keep it moving! Let us not only see the temporary things or difficulties of today. My prayer is that we can go bravely into the world and share His word, this is our mission so that all may know of an eternal life!

Rachel Litchfield

March 23

Luke 13:18-21

The mustard seed represents something small and pervasive. Once planted, it takes over and cannot be killed, much like kudzu. Everyone knows that stories of women were not always kind. And the use of ingredients just as yeast to leaven anything suggested an evil presence. So how are these things put together to suggest a kingdom of God?

That is what makes it all wonderful. The kingdom of God will stand in opposition to the strength and dominant nature of the well-known Cedars of Lebanon. The kingdom of God will be created with everyone that is not supposed to be in the lead. And the kingdom of God will use the very things deemed bad.

To top it off, the use of three measures of flour connects us immediately to Sarah's story in Genesis. When God visits the couple, the birth of Isaac is announced while Sarah takes three measures of flour.

So, for our Lenten journey, today we are connected through these words of Luke to the stories of the many whose lives were changed because they let go of control, let go of the boundaries the world created, and let go of the preconceived notion of government and ways of culture, only to accept that God is using everything in front of us to pervade our lives so our faith may run wild.

Maybe today we pinpoint one thing or one person in our lives that we are trying to control, that is unacceptable, that we think is evil or needs to be cut out, and see that person or issues as the baker, the flour, the seed. That way, we allow God's kingdom to work instead.

Rev. Marion Brown

March 24

Joshua 4:1-10

In the scripture cited above, the stones placed in the Jordan River were to serve as a memorial to the people of Israel forever.

Today, these stones symbolize for us those people, places, and events that have shaped our spiritual lives and have helped us in trying times. I was reminded of this scripture last summer when I visited my North Carolina home church, Oakdale Methodist. Sadly, the church had been sold and was about to become a non-denominational church. This visit was indeed a blessing. I saw people I had not seen in years and thought of all the Sunday School lessons I had been taught, the hymns I had sung, and the sermons I had heard in that beautiful space. I am confident that the impact my home church had on me, and others will remain and that the ministry within those hallowed walls will continue, despite its new name and congregation. In my forty-five plus years at RUMC, I have also encountered wonderful Christian people who have had a profound impact on my life. On a wall in our choir room, there are plaques containing names of choir members who have passed away. I often stop and read the names and think of each person and his or her legacy. These are not just names. Like the stones in the Jordan River, they are symbols of God's love for us, our love and care for others, and the promise of eternal life.

My prayer is that during this Lenten season, we will be comforted by our past "stones" and our current ones and that we will contemplate the "stones" that we will be leaving our family, our friends, and our church.

Mimi Taylor

March 25

Luke 1:26-38

Luke was a close friend of Paul who referred to him as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). The reason Luke's gospel gives such a high profile to Jesus' acts of healing may be his interest in medicine. He was a physician and the only Gentile to write any part of the New Testament.

Mary proclaimed herself to be the servant of the Lord and with great courage accepted God's will in challenging times. She did this knowing that saying yes to the Lord might mean losing her own life. She showed such a perfect example of faith, love, obedience, and humility. She told God she was His, willing to do whatever He asked.

We all have an invitation to follow Jesus even with all our sins and difficulties. It does not matter what condition we find ourselves in because having Jesus in our lives means we have a steadfast hope. Through our relationship with Jesus, God's immense love will lead us to the road of redemption and salvation. He never leaves our side despite there being many temptations that can cause us to stray.

We are called to follow and trust in God every day, even when we do not know where that will take us. We all face many challenges in our lives—terminal illness, caring for aging parents, children growing up in this day and time, marital issues, etc. We are called to minister to others despite those challenges, meaning we may reach someone facing a similar circumstance and be able to share with them hope through Jesus Christ. Have you helped others in need, putting aside your everyday challenges, heeding God's word?

Give your time, gifts, and talents—it is a blessing to others as well as you!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for allowing us to live another day. Each day is a new opportunity to grow nearer to you and to fill ourselves with your immense love, your infinite kindness, and your great mercy.

Karen Griggs

March 26

Psalm 32

Psalms 32 records the experiences that David went through as he faced his sins, confessed them, and received God's forgiveness. Over the centuries, many believers, overcome by an awareness of their own sins, have found a ray of hope in the words of the "confession" psalms.

This scripture tells us that God wants to forgive sinners and that forgiveness has always been a part of his loving nature. These verses convey several aspects of God's forgiveness: He forgives

transgressions, covers sin, and does not count our sins against us. Paul quoted these verses in Romans 4:7-8 and showed that we can have this joyous experience of forgiveness through faith in Christ.

We might ask what is confession? To confess our sin is to agree with God, acknowledging that He is right to declare what we have done is sinful and that we are wrong to desire to do it. It is to affirm our intention of abandoning that sin to follow Him more faithfully.

In Psalms 8 and 9, God describes some people as being like horses or mules that must be controlled by bits and bridles. Rather than letting God guide them step by step, they stubbornly leave God the only option. But God longs to guide us with love and wisdom rather than punishment. He offers to teach us the best way to go. This scripture challenges all of us to accept the advice written in God's word and not to let our stubbornness keep us from obeying God.

During this Lenten season, we are reminded as we live on the other side of the cross that we can rejoice even more because we understand more. God has shown us that He is willing to forgive because His judgment on sin was satisfied by Christ's death on the cross.

Following Jesus does not mean freedom from pain, danger, or loss. Throughout time, God's people have never been exempt from trouble. By God's grace, however, we will be preserved in it, not overwhelmed by it.

Prayer: Forgiveness is good Lord, and I thank you for that grace. I join with David in praising you, "Who are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon your name." Amen.

Mary Karras

March 27

Luke 2:41-52

In this passage, Jesus is only twelve years old and went to the Festival of Passover with His parents. When the Festival was over, Jesus stayed behind, and everybody went home. After one day of travel, they realized that Jesus was gone. It took a long time to get back, imagine a full day of travel just to go back to your start. They looked for three days and

then found Him. Normally if you lose something, you find it in an hour or so. Jerusalem is big. It's kinda like hide and seek; Jesus hides, and his parents seek. Except Jesus wasn't hiding from them on purpose, even though His parents looked for three days. When they found Him, they were relieved and angry at the same time. He was their son, so they were happy, and they were mad because He had been gone for a long time. When they found Him, He was talking to teachers, and He said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what He was saying to them. What Jesus meant is not what we see now. He meant He was in God's house. Not His physical father, His spiritual father. We all have the same spiritual father, God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to understand what is spiritual, not just what we see. Thank you for sending Jesus to help us learn how to do that. Amen.

Daniel Fretwell

March 28

Numbers 6:22-27

Bible verses do not shy away from providing guidance and perspective during hardships, and when God speaks to Moses in the book of Numbers, it is no different. Thirteen months after being rescued from Egypt, the Israelites find themselves preparing to wander the wilderness, whether they are aware of it or not.

The Lord conveys a blessing that Moses is to ensure he gets passed on to the Israelites. I see this blessing as serving a dual purpose. First, God is reminding the Israelites that they have been set apart as a holy nation in contrast to the rest of the world. Second, this blessing serves as a reminder of God's presence with His people and His desire to provide for them. One key is that every other line begins with "The Lord." Even though the priests are reciting the blessing, the blessing itself comes from God. It is the Lord who blesses, keeps, acts graciously to His people, and gives them peace.

I am sure we can all relate to sometimes forgetting that God is with us during the tough times and that He has not left us. It is extremely easy when times are difficult to ask God why instead of trusting that He is

shining His love upon us in a way that He knows is best. I hope that by remembering this blessing passed down by God through Moses, we will be given deep, abiding, fear-dispelling, chaos-calming, circumstance-defying joy. Because He is where the joy is!

Stephen Cosgrove

March 29

Hebrews 12:1-12

In commentaries on Hebrews 12, I found references to endurance in tough and discouraging times, an exhortation to be constant and persevere, the spiritual training and discipline that God provides to strengthen us to “keep (our) eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in.”

Queue the opening scene of the movie “Chariots of Fire.” The athletes running together through the surf, splashed with spray and sand and mud. The iconic music in the background as they push forward. And their look of focus and sense of purpose, and even joy.

Personally, as I have tried to understand and follow God’s will, to persevere through difficulties, I have wished that I felt that way. It has seemed to be more stumbles than strides forward, slips and slides and more than a few detours. Reflecting on this passage, I see these hurdles are part of God’s “strength building.” And just like staying active physically for body health, there’s always spiritual work(outs) to do!

In the past, Lent has been my time for a small spiritual “exercise” or two for a six-week span. Giving up some indulgence—desserts or such. Adding a devotional reading. Little lasting effect. But this year, I want to make more of it.

In a recent devotional was a quote from Goethe: “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.” So, during this Lenten season of self-reflection, I will be looking at what needs to be stripped from my life— “throwing off everything that hinders”—and what needs to be added in place of it.

My prayers for you during this period as well, that we find that strength and joy in what matters most.

Pam Murphey Vincent

Luke 9:10-17

Feeding the 5,000. It is possibly the most recognized miracle of Jesus. It is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. So many times, I have gotten into debates with people about the actual number and the logistical improbability of it. "There's no way." "If you add the women and children..."

By focusing on those details, I think we miss a couple of key points to this story.

- The Gospel of John records the same account with a young boy giving what he had to supply the needs of many. It was not enough to feed everyone, but he did not care. He gave what he had and trusted God for the rest.
- "When the disciples returned..." We glance over these words. The disciples had just returned from a mission, obviously exhausted. But when all these people showed up, there was more work to be done. Our current culture says, "Well, my time is up." "I'm off duty now." "That's not my job." Jesus says, "There is a need." "We must respond." "Regardless."
- You do it! Reread Luke 9:12. I bet Jesus' response shocked the disciples. "You give them something to eat." Was the unplanned dinner a test? For who? The people? No. The disciples? I think so. Did Jesus know the crowds would come? Sure. John 6:6 said He was testing Phillip. Jesus already knew the plan.

Whether you believe there were 5,000 people or there were 5,000 men (then add the women and children) or that it is all allegorical and there was just a really big crowd, it really does not matter. Either way, the Gospel writers were so compelled by this story (and I believe so led by the Holy Spirit) that they HAD to include it in their writings because it teaches us so much about faith, work ethic, commitment, following Jesus and the cost of discipleship. And that is ultimately the main point.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season, may we have the opportunity to give what we have for the cause of Christ. May we have the opportunity to serve when we are tired and feel like we cannot. And may we have the opportunity to be shocked by Jesus in His response to our requests. Amen.

Psalm 126

Psalm 126 tells the story of the Jewish peoples' relationship with God: their release from exile; the immense joy of freedom; living in the experiential mountains and valleys of their daily lives; and the expectation and belief that through relationship, God would turn tears into laughter and joy into sorrow. The memory of rejoicing when released from captivity is the foundation of a strong hope for even greater joy with God.

This is our story, too. So many things can hold us captive, especially in the last two years of pandemic: uncertainty, anxiety, loneliness, death of a loved one, loss of a job, fear...

The psalmist tells us that in the arid, hopeless time of captivity and distance from God, God will send living water to set us free—just as He sent abundant streams of water in the Negeb desert.

God walks with us through adversity to bring us to joy once again.

God does restore us. This is the promise of his abundant love in the past, the present and the future. We need to look expectantly to God's restoration for us. Excerpts from a prayer by Ted Loder help define our response to this restoring love:

“Lord of laughter, as of tears, shake me awake....
To the love in me unused,
To the strength unspent,
To the courage untapped,
To the dream unrisked,
To the beauty unexpressed,
To the awareness that I must get on
with being who I am as fully as I can...
As gracefully, as powerfully, as faithfully
as you created me to be.”

This is restoration. This is an immense joy. This is EASTER! Allelujah!

Kathy Newman

Exodus 32:7-14

Be at Peace

In the morning darkness when sleep eludes, thoughts are heavy and focused on the past tumultuous year. It was a seemingly never-ending pandemic; discord amongst families, country, and world was ever present; and a new awareness was created through a focused study of history—that our church, our country, and we ourselves have acted in ways that are thoughtless, hurtful, and hateful to people different from us. We might ask why this is happening to us.

Should we be surprised by these realizations and that we are experiencing tough times?

We recognize that God has provided, through Jesus, the way to redemption. God could choose not to forgive us, His sinful people, but rather provide everlasting punishment. Our focus on the wrong things and our inability to recognize our part in the angst we feel means that perhaps our awareness is best developed when we deal with tough times.

Scripture shows that God can change His mind and has not given up on us. He recognizes that we can change, redeem ourselves, and be part of the promise of faith and hope that Jesus provides through His death and resurrection.

God has shown His compassion, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness when speaking to Moses and most importantly through His Son.

Why now must we endure difficulties, other than to be shown that we are imperfect? Through repentance we will experience the higher level that God plans for us. So, we will be prepared for the next situation where we will have to be more patient, more loving, and kinder. Who knows what He intends to make of us? Certainly, something better than we are today.

As the sun breaks through the darkness and morning clouds, we acknowledge the promise of a new day. We visualize a new and higher, braver way of being. We experience joy as we become a better example of the compassionate servant who is at peace with self and others.

John 11:45-57

This passage follows the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave after four days. That left no question that Lazarus was dead. Because Lazarus and his two sisters were friends of Jesus, many wondered why Jesus had not come to heal him. The question was so big that by the time Jesus did arrive, there were a lot of people gathered around to observe Him... Everyone wanted to know why? It would have been so easy for Him. When Jesus had them roll back the stone, much to everyone's dismay, they were even more stunned to see Lazarus walk out of the grave.

Some in the crowd ran off to share with those in power of the Sanhedrin what they had witnessed. They told them, "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him."

Even His enemies believed! They believed in the miracle but rejected the Lord.

John's words in 51-53 are profound. Caiaphas spoke. "Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Caiaphas, set out to kill Jesus for fear of losing his own fragile control with no understanding of God's plan to save us all.

When it was time for the Passover, the people were looking for Jesus, wondering when He would come.

It is this longing, this looking, that I understand. It is also the knowing, that yes, Jesus comes. He came for us. He comes for you and for me. The reassurance is in the many signs, like this one, that Jesus is who He says He is. He is the risen from death Christ, the Son of God who came to give us life.

Prayer: Father, we praise you for the amazing gift of your Son. Help us to follow in your truth and light.

Judy Mardis

John 12:1-8

The Voice of Love

Today's devotion focuses upon the beautiful story of Mary worshiping Jesus in an extravagant way that poured her heart out to Him as she sat at His feet and anointed Him with perfume from the essence of nard, further wiping His feet with her hair. An act of worship that can come into our mind's eye and give us a sense of peace and worship ourselves—but then, we have Judas Iscariot who sounds off about her act as being a waste. In fact, his words were, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor," (verse 5). Red flag here—Judas Iscariot was a thief, and it is assumed that he would have stolen some of the money for himself had he been given the chance. But enough about him. What I want us to consider today is what happened next. Jesus stood up for Mary in responding to Judas' outburst by saying three little, yet profound words: "Leave her alone," (verse 7). I think these words were not only significant to Mary in that moment, but they are also significant to us today; especially as we consider our Lenten Theme, "Voices of RUMC: Many Stories, One Body."

In today's story, we have several voices: Mary's unspoken voice through her acts of worship; Judas' outspoken voice of untruth; and Jesus' voice of protection, shield, and love. And what love! What love He had for Mary—and what love He has for us today. Yet, our world is full of so many voices that consume us and get us headed in the wrong direction—the Evil One takes every chance possible to be a persuading voice that interrupts our walk with Christ. But God, in His love for us, gave us Jesus. It is His voice that we must read and learn and meditate upon so that when another voice gets louder and louder and louder, we can remember the voice of our Savior who knows His sheep and calls us all by name. Let us rest in His voice today and let His love that comes to us through the cross of Calvary speak into us and through us this Lenten Season.

Susan Gunter

April 4

Isaiah 43:1-8

In the previous chapter of Isaiah, the Lord addresses Israel and tells them that the punishment they endured was justified by their own sin and disobedience. Yet here we see the Lord redeeming them. Not rebuking them. Not abandoning them. But calling them precious and honored. But they just made all these mistakes! And God is still here naming them, claiming them, and calling them to His purpose. The Lord is here making promises to His people. He is showing up. Are we?

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah contain the injustices and ways that these people have turned their backs on the Lord. Yet, what we read is vastly different. We must read about the depths of their disobedience to understand the fullness of Lord's faithfulness and the beauty of His mercy that is revealed to us in this passage. What a great reminder that no matter how far we run or how badly we think of ourselves, we are never separated from the love of God. He is there waiting and ready to redeem us, His grace covering all our failures and shame.

Do you feel like the waters are overwhelming you today? Do the flames feel like they are about to burn you? The Lord is protecting you. He loves you. He knows you. He has called you by name and created you for His glory. He is never going to leave you. I pray that during this Lenten season you will lean into and rest in His promises.

Elena Mitchell

April 5

1 John 4:7-21

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from one another, for love comes from God...We love because He first loved us...Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:7, 19, 21).

Love . . .love . . . love. I think that is what Lent is all about. God loved us so much that He could not let us just go and do what we thought was right. He gave us the perfect example in His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us what was right. Jesus walked this earth and lived the perfect life. He fed the hungry. He clothed the naked. He healed the sick, the lame. He didn't care whether the people He fed, clothed, and healed were good

people. Each person was a child of God. Each person was beloved by Jesus because God put them on this earth. They did not have to do anything extraordinary or say the right words. Some of them hardly even thanked Jesus. I think they were stunned that He not only paid attention to them, but He healed them—completely! And maybe that's what we need to do for Lent. Most of us are not going to be able to physically heal anybody, but we can notice that they are hurting. We can pay attention to the homeless, the hungry, the sick, the poorly clothed. Each person in need is a child of God just the same as each of us. That makes us all brothers and sisters. Let us show our neighbors that we see them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us act just a little like Jesus would and show that His sacrifice on the cross was not in vain...that we are paying attention.

Prayer: God, thank you for giving us another chance to be more like Jesus.

Pam Page

April 6

Mark 1:15

In Mark 1:15, Jesus is announcing that the time has come for Him to begin His earthly ministry. “Repent and believe the Good News!” This proclamation from Jesus is often the phrase spoken when the officiant at the Ash Wednesday service makes the sign on the cross on your forehead in ashes.

The word that Jesus uses here, “repent,” actually means to turn. Not just a little turn or veer in one direction or another; it means to turn completely around and go the opposite way. I like that. One of my favorite images of Jesus is from this verse. I imagine Jesus looking out at a large group of people who are walking away from Him. Because of His great love for them, Jesus is sad, since He knows they are going in the wrong direction. They are following the wrong voices, the wrong information, the wrong leaders. The hope, joy, and gladness they are looking for will not be found in that direction. So, Jesus calls out, “Repent!” Jesus is not scolding the crowd, but He is simply trying to help them see that if they continue on the path they are on, they will remain lost.

Jesus’ “repent” is an offer of love and grace. “Repent,” He says, “come

and follow me. Don't go that way, turn and come this way. I can lead you! You can trust me!"

Lent for me, is a time to take stock of the voices I am listening to, a time to pay better attention to the path I am on and see if I am following God or if I am trying to get God to bless the path that I have stubbornly chosen for myself.

Dr. Jeff Ross

April 7

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Unlike some of the other biblical letters attributed to Paul, the letter to the Ephesians does not appear to address any specific issues in a specific church but is regarded to be a "circular" letter originally sent to be shared with multiple churches in and around Ephesus. It contains general instruction from Paul on how the new Christian communities should behave and treat fellow Christians, and ultimately everyone they met. This specific set of verses addresses how we should conduct ourselves in order to build up and encourage the body of believers. It talks about striving for truthfulness, generosity, controlling one's temper, encouragement, compassion, forgiveness, and love. It urges us to reject anger, bitterness, rage, slander, fighting, and every form of malice. It sounds like being exactly like Jesus to me. It sounds like a recipe for bringing the Kingdom of God to the here and now. It sounds eternal.

During this season of Lent, while we ponder and anticipate the impending death and resurrection of our savior Jesus, let us spend some time envisioning a world where we all embrace these virtues. Let us dream about how we can build each other up, not for our own sake, but to be faithful witnesses of Jesus for all to see. Let us all pray for compassion, sharing with those in need, welcoming those who are hurting, and those who feel left out or marginalized. Let us focus on how we can be a blessing rather than a stumbling block. Let us take a prayerful moment to envision what the Kingdom of God might look like in the here and now and commit to help making that happen by being "Jesus-like" to someone every day.

As Paul wrote, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God,

therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 4:32 -5:2).

Chris Leiner

April 8

Luke 14:1-13

In Luke 4:1-13 Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where, for 40 days, He was tempted by the Devil. Jesus left the Jordan river behind and found Himself hungry and alone. Life got hard, and He was tempted.

First, Jesus is tempted to trust in His own power to satisfy his needs, rather than trusting in God’s provision. Second, He is tempted to switch His allegiance to someone (Satan) who flatters him with shortcuts to power and glory. Third, He is tempted to question whether God really is with Him, and therefore to try forcing God’s hand in desperation.

In today’s vernacular, The Tempter offered three things—you’ll get your material needs met, you’ll have power over others, and you’ll be assured of your personal security. To live in this world means that you will encounter temptation.

You never know what trials and temptations you will face today. When you do face them, will you know what God’s Word says about the trial you are facing? Do you know Scripture well enough to make it your protection and guide through the pitfalls you will face?

Jesus resists these temptations by relying on God’s word. Jesus didn’t fight the temptations, He didn’t even fight with the Tempter, He met each temptation with faith. He stayed true to His center. He wasn’t looking for an easy way out. He didn’t seek to dominate others. He didn’t seek personal glory. His trust in God was His pillars of fire and cloud.

In this holy season of Lent, may we examine our temptations, hold fast to the Word of God as Jesus did and face our responsibilities with courage, faith, and perseverance.

Lori Walsh

Zechariah 9:9-13

The word Zechariah means “God remembers.” This short book (it is only 14 pages in my Bible) was written as an encouragement to the people of Israel in 520 B.C. God, indeed, remembers His people, as these verses of prophecy and encouragement explain.

Let’s break it down:

Zechariah 9:9 – “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Just imagine, 550 years before Palm Sunday, Zechariah prophesied that King Jesus would arrive on a donkey!

Zechariah 9:10b – “His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.”

This verse is still future as evidenced by current events of warring nations, nations that have yet to hear the name of Jesus, and those who have heard the good news of salvation yet deny its truth. We can be encouraged—just as the prophecy of Jesus coming on a donkey proved to be true—one day, Jesus’ dominion will be from sea to sea!

Zechariah 9:11-12 brings more encouragement as we see that, because of Jesus’ death, the prisoners are set free, have hope, and are restored.

What a joy it is to read the Bible and know that it is true, even though we might not understand it at the time. Zechariah’s words to the Israelites as he told them of their King arriving on a donkey were surely difficult to understand. In fact, John 12:16 tells us that even the disciples did not understand that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy as He rode the donkey.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to believe and trust in your word, even when we do not understand it. Amen!

Nancy Erwin

Luke 19:28-40

Lent is best known as a time for sacrifice and denial, a time for Christians to focus on what Jesus went through in preparation for His torture and death on the cross. Lent is also a time for preparation, contemplation, and...celebration. I believe this story is focused on celebration. This is the story of the first Palm Sunday.

Jesus' followers, who have witnessed His miracles and teaching, believe He is the Messiah, the Son of God. They believe He has come to free Jerusalem from Roman tyranny and reclaim the promised land for the Jews. When He approaches the city on a donkey colt, He fulfills a Jewish prophesy foretold by the prophet Zechariah. Imagine the excitement as Jesus made His way toward the city gates. The cheering crowd, filled with unbridled joy, laid their garments on the road in His path, and waved palm branches, proclaiming Jesus King!

Within the crowd were several Jewish leaders who feared that this man would upset the status quo. They scolded Jesus, telling Him to silence the blasphemous crowd. This is where we discover something remarkable: The celebration is much more than what is visible. All creation is celebrating! Jesus tells them that even if He were to quiet the crowd, the very stones in the road would cry out!

Today we understand that Jesus was indeed on the verge of liberating us, but from sin and death, not the Romans. Even more reason to celebrate! Our savior has come! He sacrificed himself on the cross to bring eternal life to all who believe. What could be more celebration-worthy? On Palm Sunday, wave those palm branches with JOY, because we know He is risen. Halleluiah!!

Lee Dodson

John 12:1-11

In this passage, Jesus is having supper at the home of Martha and Mary. Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the grave, is also there along with others. Jesus is preparing for His entry into Jerusalem where we witness His betrayal, trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Mary shows her humble devotion and love for Jesus by pouring expensive perfume, usually used to prepare a body for burial, on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. She and the others are unaware of the coming events that lead to Jesus' death. Judas complains that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus reminds everyone that the poor will always be with them, and He will be with them for only a short time. Judas is not truly concerned for the poor but would like to have the money in the treasury of the apostles so that he could pilfer for his own desires.

For me, this interaction between Mary and Jesus shows us how to treat the people we care about. Like Jesus, we are all here for a short time. We do not know how much time we have. We should spend more time showing others how much we love them by simply treating them the way we should want to be treated. Our acts may not be as extravagant as the gift Mary gave Jesus, but simple things can express our love and devotion for a person. We can suggest going for a walk or just sitting and talking. We can offer to do simple repairs at their home. Bake them a cake or prepare a meal. There are many ways we can follow Mary's example to show our love and appreciation for others. We should make this a good habit to keep.

Bobby Dickens

John 12:20-36

Jesus was in Jerusalem following raising Lazarus and His jubilant entry into Jerusalem at Passover. The Pharisees were in a panic about all the miracles Jesus was performing and the fact that the "world has gone after him." Consequently, the Pharisees conspired to eliminate Jesus... and Lazarus since his life was compelling proof of Jesus' power (John 11:47-53; 12:10, 19).

In addition to the Jews following Jesus, some Greek admirers were there asking to meet with Him. The heart of this passage is Jesus' unusual response to their request. Many had come to celebrate His predicted kingship, but Jesus highlighted His impending death.

Jesus announced, "The hour has come... for this purpose I came to this hour." Indeed, Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8b). His own death (and subsequent resurrection) was the main purpose of His incarnation! The moment of His death was the judicial enactment of humanity's salvation from sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), but the Righteous One paid that debt for unrighteous humanity. We accept his payment by dying to ourselves (exchanging our own ways for God's ways), submitting to Christ, and following Him (Mark 8:34). Jesus then clothes us in his own righteousness enabling us to have a personal relationship with our holy God.

Jesus' message was one of life or death, light or darkness. Do we desire to walk in darkness according to our sinful nature or walk in the Light according to God's best plan for us? Having made that decision for life/light many years ago, I can promise that it is a choice that supersedes ALL choices in life. It is supernaturally transformational. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). No wonder the "ruler of this world (Satan)" as seen in this passage was and remains determined to eliminate Jesus and His message. Choose Life!

Sally Gresham

April 13

Luke 22:54-62

The beginning of this week was one that Jesus and His disciples had never experienced. They came into Jerusalem, and the whole of the city treated Jesus like He was a conquering hero. People were pulling off clothes and laying them in the street. People were pulling branches off trees and waving them shouting, "Hosanna" which means save us. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

The problem was that they did not know what He was the conquering hero of: they were hoping Caesar and the Romans. Thinking this to be true, the disciples asked Jesus, "Which one is going to be the most

important after you?” But Jesus had His eyes on something a little bigger—on the cross, He would conquer sin and death.

Jesus confused them when He didn't give them the nod of approval. They were even more confused when He drew His disciples together later that week and told them He was going to be killed. That He was going to die. That one of His disciples would betray Him. In the confusion, John finally asked, “Well, who is it?”

Jesus implicated the one for whom he dipped the bread—Judas. He gave communion. He gave his body and his blood to Judas. He offered Judas forgiveness before Judas betrayed him.

We hold Judas up as the worst that ever could be, but Jesus offered forgiveness to him. Judas is the example we so often hold up before ourselves and say, “At least there is someone worse than us.” Next to Judas—or our neighbor—we look pretty good. Maybe we're not good enough for heaven, but we're way too good for hell. We are caught in this in-between, this competitiveness, and there's always someone worse.

So often, it is in the competitiveness and the self-justification that we refuse the forgiveness Jesus offers. We're not that bad, after all, certainly not as bad as Judas. If Jesus offered Judas forgiveness, know that there is nothing you have done that you can't receive forgiveness for as well. What He did on the cross was enough. It was enough to conquer sin and death once and for all...and for all, that means you and me. Know that when He rose from the grave, He gave us power over the troubles in our lives. Power over whatever holds us captive. Power over whatever keeps us competitive or self-justifying. Jesus is the conquering hero, and He offered His life for ours. For this, we can be grateful.

Dr. Tom Davis

April 14

John 13:1-7, 31-35

In John 13, we read about Jesus just before the Feast of Passover. He knew his life on this earth was soon to be ended. He knew He would be leaving His disciples and others that He loved dearly. He knew that Judas was to betray Him. He had a lot on his mind! Yet, the scripture tells

us that Jesus rose from supper and began to wash His disciples' feet—a task that was usually performed by servants. What an example Jesus was for his disciples and for us! Later in this same chapter, Jesus tells us, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

It's important that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, not only for ourselves but for others also. RUMC provided a path for us in 2020, as we were dealing with the Covid pandemic. Floyd and I were asked (as were many others) to “check-on” six members occasionally by calling or delivering needed items to their doorsteps (yes, we even delivered toilet tissue once). Then later, when restrictions were not as severe, I was asked to greet and take temperatures of masked church members and visitors before entering the Sanctuary. God put those people in our paths to get to know and love. When Sunday School started up again, we were asked by Nancy Spence to teach three-year-old Sunday School. There were not enough teachers, so being 74 did not disqualify us. Cheryl Funsten and Katharina Watts agreed to team with us. What fun we are having in Sunday School! God has provided many opportunities for us to love and be loved by others. What joy these folks (aged 3-100) have added to our lives! Dr. Davis asks us each Sunday to think of one person to call to let them know they matter to God and to us also—this is a good place to start to share God's love and when you want more, call the church to volunteer. I promise you will receive more.

Jane Connell

April 15—Good Friday

Luke 23:44-49

When we read this passage today, it can feel slippery. We are accustomed to hearing this reading at Good Friday services, but anyone even passingly familiar with Christianity knows that is just two short days away from Easter, so it can be hard (and frankly quite uncomfortable) to imagine ourselves in the disciples' position. Try to picture it: having given up everything—friends, comfort, livelihoods—trusting that this Jesus who they were following was indeed the Messiah, the disciples were now faced with His death, from which no one had ever returned. What would it have felt like to have staked all their hopes on Jesus, only to watch those expectations be crucified? However strong their faith had been,

is it any surprise that folks “returned home, beating their breasts”? After all, if the very sun itself and the curtain of the temple seemed to be in mourning, how could onlookers have imagined what God had in store?

Thus, it is tempting to avoid looking at Good Friday in the fullness of its despair, not unlike how the priest and the Levite avoid the pitiable traveler in the story of the Good Samaritan earlier in Luke (10:25-37). We would much rather just slide ahead to Jesus’ resurrection without reckoning with His death. Yet this is often exactly what we need to do. All around us there are irreversible, intractable problems; it is much easier to skip ahead to a feel-good part than to be in that place of loss, of anguish, of grief. The good news that awaits us, though, is that these never are the last words. Though it seemed impossible, God was there on Good Friday, and through God’s grace, there is nothing that cannot be redeemed.

Matt Hall

April 16—Holy Saturday

Matthew 27:57-66

Secure as you know how. From the lids on water bottles to the laundry detergent, we secure things, so nothing spills or leaks out. Lug nuts on cars, patio furniture in a hurricane, and umbrellas on the beach. We know the assurance that comes with securing something the best we know how.

With that idea in mind, today we remember that Jesus really died; He was crucified and laid in a tomb. Yet somehow, the Pharisees were all astir; so much so that they went to Pilate. We can only imagine what the chief priests and Pharisees were thinking. To what extent would His disciples go, to be able to say that He had been raised from the dead? Something had to be done...

“Give the order,” they said, and with that, Pilate didn’t hesitate. In fact, Matthew tells us he said, “Take a guard. Go make the tomb as secure as you know how.”

Here’s the plot twist: going to that great extent to secure the tomb and to watch over it with a guard only underscores Jesus’ power. He did rise on the third day. In their diligence to prove Jesus wrong, they gave witness to Him. To His power. To God’s Word. They gave witness to

Truth. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6.

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Nancy Lane

April 17—Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12

"He is not here, He has risen!" Luke 24:6a

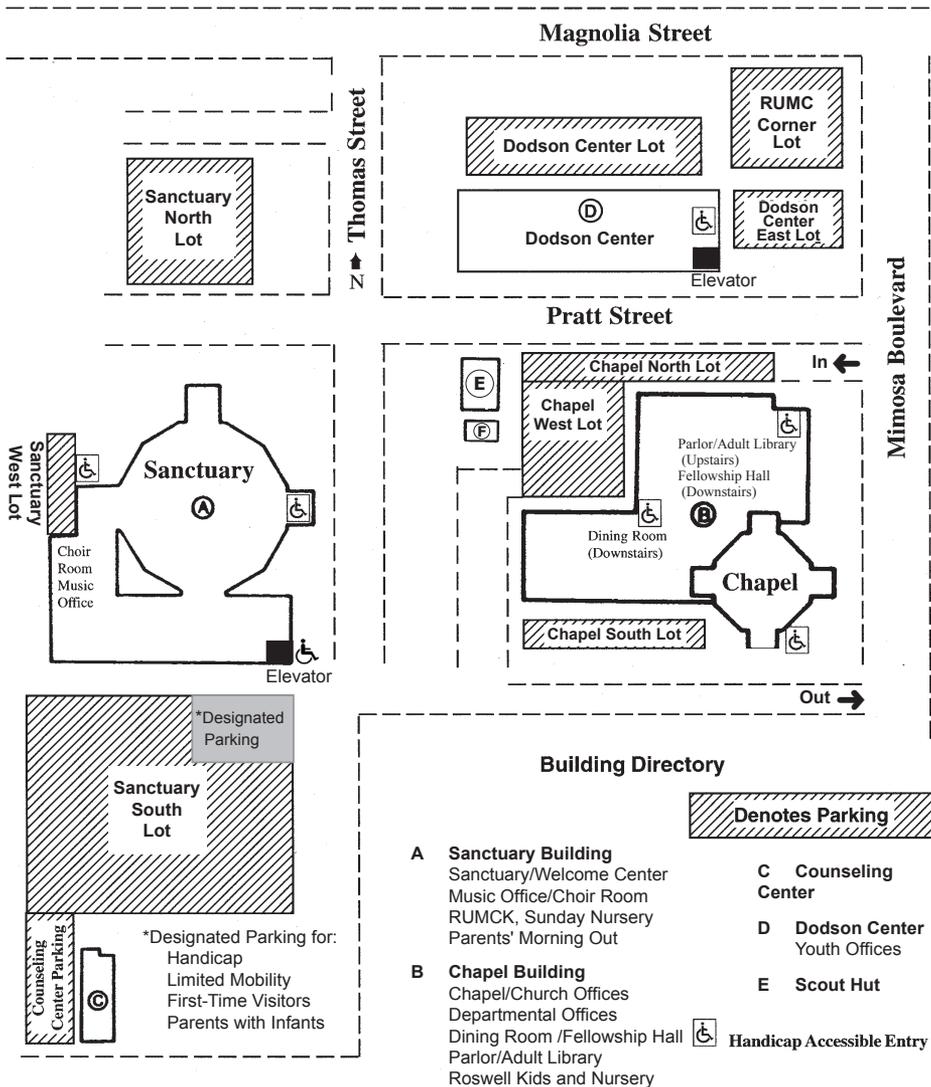
Seven words, spoken by an angel, that have changed the world. The women early on that Sunday morning were at the tomb to finish preparing Jesus' body. What they expected and what they experienced were astonishingly opposite. They expected a body in the tomb; they experienced an empty tomb. That was hard for them to wrap their heads around; so, it is for us today.

We believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and He did. But if He was not raised from the dead, then He was just another martyr. He defeated sin on the cross on Friday and death on Sunday. God ushered in His kingdom on earth the second Jesus busted out of that tomb and that changed the world. Sin and death no longer have any control over believers.

That is good news, but how does a risen Jesus change your life? We are called to participate as a member of the family of God in this kingdom in this world. That means that what we do here and now has a lasting effect in God's new world. Resurrection people are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring justice, show mercy, and love each other here and now.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, God of power and might, show me today where I can make a difference in this world. Help me to see the opportunities, however small, to live like a Kingdom person. Give me the courage to follow your will and the power to overcome my fear and anxiety. Thy will be done, thy kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Bob Fletcher



Building Directory



- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>A Sanctuary Building
Sanctuary/Welcome Center
Music Office/Choir Room
RUMCK, Sunday Nursery
Parents' Morning Out</p> <p>B Chapel Building
Chapel/Church Offices
Departmental Offices
Dining Room /Fellowship Hall Handicap Accessible Entry
Parlor/Adult Library
Roswell Kids and Nursery</p> | <p>C Counseling Center</p> <p>D Dodson Center
Youth Offices</p> <p>E Scout Hut</p> |
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