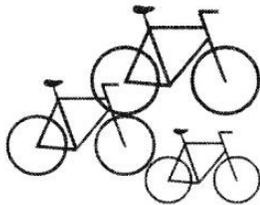
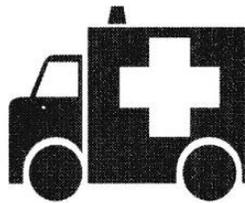
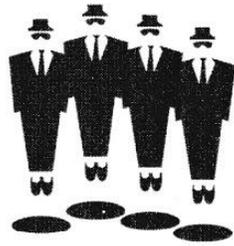


# Count your many BLESSINGS



First United Methodist Church  
Devotions for Lent 2021

## LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2021

### FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Eaton Rapids, Michigan

First United Methodist Church of Eaton Rapids is a congregation comprised of persons of diverse occupations, backgrounds, and gifts. You will find this reflected in this Lenten Devotional booklet, written by several persons in our church family.

We hope these thoughts, bits of verse, inspiration and scripture, all woven together, will be of help to you during this holy season of Lent.

It is our prayer that you allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the messages written here. The theme this year is **“Count Your Many Blessings.”** We are not theologians, only growing Christians who love the Lord. Many of the thoughts expressed here come out of deep struggles and against the backdrop of God’s marvelous gift of life to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

A very heartfelt thank you goes to all who shared their thoughts, prayers, and lives in this booklet. We thank also thank Karen Abrahamson for the art work used in the cover design. We thank Carl Florian for the formatting and printing. Also we thank all those who helped collate them.

May you experience Christ anew this Lent  
as we **“Count Your Many Blessings.”**

Carl Florian and Joyce Showerman  
Editors  
Lent 2021

## RESURRECTION POWER

They hung Him on a Cross  
And then they watched Him die,  
While friends stood all about  
And wondered, "Why! O why?"

He'd been a faithful Friend,  
So loving and so kind...  
They'd watched His miracles  
And saw His keen, sharp mind.

Wonderful potential  
Seemed wasted at that Cross;  
They stood and agonized  
And felt the greatest loss.

His death had shattered dreams;  
Lost hopes turned day to night,  
And friends who slipped away  
Felt lonely in their plight.

But resurrection morn  
Was not that far away,  
For He would conquer Death  
And rise from where He lay!

Have you a broken dream?  
Is this your darkest hour?  
Do burdens weigh you down,  
Or has your world gone sour?

My friend, please don't despair...  
Christ wants to see you through.  
His resurrection power  
Can lift and carry you.

Marie A. Florian

**Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021**

**“COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS”**

**Scripture:** Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:17

It's impossible to be thankful for our many blessings, and at the same time be grumpy, cantankerous, critical, or ill-tempered. That's a lesson Johnson Oatman, Jr. wanted to teach young people in his song, "Count Your Blessings."

Johnson was born in New Jersey just before the Civil War. His father had a powerful singing voice and Johnson always wanted to stand beside his father in church. At age 19, Johnson joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and was ordained into the ministry. He often preached, but he never entered the fulltime pastorate, for he enjoyed the business world and found it paid his bills, giving him freedom to minister without cost.

In 1892, with his father's voice undoubtedly ringing in his memory, John began writing hymns. He averaged 200 hymns and gospel songs a year- 5,000 during the course of his lifetime! One of the most well-known was "Count Your Blessings," which was published in a song book for young people in 1897. It totally reflected Johnson's optimistic faith and has been a lesson for many people ever since. We know its message is definitely needed in 2021 right here in Eaton Rapids.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for giving some persons, including Johnson Oatman, Jr., the talent and gifts to write songs that make a difference in our Christian lives. Help us to receive this life-changing message every day, so that others may know we walk with You. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

**Thought for the day:** "Count Your Many Blessings" is the theme for this year's Lenten Devotional. Let's all join together to learn and practice its message.

Joyce Showerman

**Thursday, February 18, 2021**

## **TURNING NEGATIVES TO POSITIVES**

**Scripture:** %oknow the plans I have for you, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.+ Jeremiah 29:11

The yellowed and ripped newspaper clipping is %The Pastor's Corner+from a mid-1990 issue of %The Flashes.+ It seems very fitting for this Lenten booklet focused on gratitude.

Be thankful that you don't have everything you desire. If you did, what would there be to look forward to?

Be thankful when you don't know something, for it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times. During those times, you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge because it will build your strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes, they will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary because it means you've made a difference.

It is easy to be thankful for the good things. A life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are also thankful for the setbacks.

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, difficult times and circumstances are constantly around us. Help us to not be discouraged or forlorn, but rather to reach out for Your love and comfort to guide our minds and hearts to positive and productive outcomes. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** GRATITUDE can turn a NEGATIVE to a POSITIVE. Find a way to be thankful for your troubles and they can become your blessings.

Author unknown.

First printed in 2017 Lenten Devotional

**Friday, February 19, 2021**

**COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS**

**Scripture:** Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Colossians 4:2

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings name them one by one  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?  
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?  
Count your many blessings every doubt will fly,  
And you will be singing as the days go by.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,  
Think that Christ as promised you His wealth untold.  
Count your many blessings money cannot buy  
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

So amid the conflict whether great or small,  
Do not be discouraged God is over all.  
Count your many blessings angels will attend,  
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Chorus:

Count your blessings name them one by one,  
Count your blessings see what God has done.  
Count your blessings name them one by one,  
Count your many blessings, see what God has done.

Johnson Oatman, Jr. 1897

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord for this wonderful song. We ask you to help us use it this Lent as we grow in our faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Thought for the day:** You are invited to re-read the words above and sing along. Do it every day!

Joyce Showerman

**Saturday, February 20, 2021**

**GRATITUDE: A LIFE ATTITUDE**

**Scripture:** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

An unknown author writes: "For the Christian, gratitude should be a life attitude." *Count Your Blessings*, written by Johnson Oatman, Jr., gives us very practical help with making this life attitude come alive. Yes, it is good for each of us to periodically take time to rediscover the simple but profound truths expressed by Rev. Oatman in the four stanzas of this hymn.

In the first two verses he develops the thought that counting our blessings serves as an antidote for life's discouragements and in turn makes for victorious Christian living. The third stanza of this hymn teaches us that counting our blessings can be a means of placing material possessions in proper perspective when compared to the eternal inheritance awaiting believers. Then, as we review our individual blessings, we certainly would have to agree with Rev. Oatman's fourth verse. There he describes the provision of God's help and comfort to the end of our earthly pilgrimage as one of our choicest blessings!

Each of us could spare ourselves much despair and inner tension if we would only learn to apply the practical teaching of this hymn in our daily living.

**Prayer:** Oh, God, help us to spend more time focused on the blessings You give us constantly, knowing that we don't have to carry the burdens of life by ourselves. Help us to continually recognize Your blessings and then give our thanks to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Every day, many times each day, come up with your list of blessings that show what God has done. It will change your life and bring you joy!

Bill Botti

**Sunday, February 21, 2021**

**COUNT YOUR MANY BLESSINGS,  
NAME THEM ONE BY ONE**

**Scripture:** I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.  
Ezekiel 34:26b

I don't believe any of us can even begin to name all the many blessings we have. They are hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly! There is just no end to every perfect gift we receive from the Father of Lights.

For me the most recent one was to recover from Covid-19. Not everyone in their 90's recovers. Here at Rest Haven Homes in Grand Rapids we lost 16 people in 3 1/2 months. They had pre-existing conditions so when the virus hit them, they didn't last long. We all have things wrong with us or we wouldn't be here! So no wonder I'm grateful to our Heavenly Father for His great blessing to me.

The recovery took a while, too, but He was faithful at seeing me through it all and now I'm back to my "normal" self.

**Prayer:** Lord, we give You thanks for Your healing power and pray that You will touch those who still need to be healed from this virus. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** We have a very faithful God who honors all of His great promises.

Phyllis Smith

**Monday, February 22, 2021**

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BEING THANKFUL,  
AND FOUR THINGS I'M THANKFUL FOR THIS YEAR**

**Scripture:** Psalm 9:1 . Give thanks to the Lord with your whole heart.

Psalm 92:1 . It is good to give thanks to the Lord.

Psalm 106:1 . We give thanks to God because He is good.

Psalm 116:17 . Thanksgiving is a sacrifice.

Luke 17 . Only one person out of ten gave thanks to Jesus after he was healed from leprosy and he was a Samaritan.

1 Corinthians 11:24 . Jesus gave thanks to God at the Last Supper.

Ephesians 5:4, 20 . God doesn't want foolish talk or crude joking or filthiness, but He wants thanksgiving; we're supposed to be thankful always and for/in everything.

Philippians 4:6 . By prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, talk to God about what you are feeling.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 . Give thanks in all situations, even when everything is going crazy.

1. I am thankful for having a mom, a dad, and a sister. I'm thankful for my grandma, my two grandpas, and all my family.
2. I'm thankful for my cat, my bird, and my fish. I have like 5,000 fish.
3. I'm thankful for the trampoline, 3 swings, and the slide that we have.
4. I don't normally like cauliflower, but I'm thankful for the chicken parmesan with cauliflower that my mom makes. I really like it!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help me to give thanks to You, always and forever. Thank You! Amen.

**Thought for the day:** When we start listing God's blessings to us, our focus changes from ourselves to our Lord, where it belongs. Try it!

Elijah Ellison, age 9, great-grandson of Phyllis Smith

**Tuesday, February 23, 2021**

**MY LIFE IS BLEST**

**Scripture:** I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving.  
Psalm 69:30

Recently before Christmas, as I reflected on my life, I realized my life is very full of blessings in so many areas. Bear with me.

- I'm loved by Cindy; she has my best in mind.
- I have two kids. I love them.
- I will see my kids & grandkids (in some capacity) on Christmas Day. We are all trying to be as safe as possible in the meantime.
- I will have the opportunity to tell my kids just what they meant to me, how substantial the impact their lives have had on me over these many years.
- I have my health. I'm well. I'm fortunate.
- I've a roof over my head and food. I'm fortunate.
- I've a faith that is real! I've come to truly understand that I am loved deeply by God, and it helps me stand tall in times of difficulty.
- On the other side of Covid I've a church to come home to, where I am known and where I can serve.

I'm simply saying, I've every reason for gratitude. That is truly a blessing!

**Prayer:** Lord God, I speak of what truly is, not of what I wish would be! That is indeed a miracle. Thank You from the bottom of my heart. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** As God has blessed my life, I seek to bless the lives of others.

Pastor Marty DeBow

**Wednesday, February 24, 2021**

## **LOOKING FOR GOD IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES**

**Scripture:** Keep your eyes open for God, watch for His works; be alert for signs of His presence.+ Psalm 105:3 (The Message)

These words in an advice column caught my eye: [Every night] take 10 minutes to yourself. Write down a list of some things that happened during the day that felt good. It could be something as basic as the warmth of the sun or the fact that your car is working. Start there. Resolve to notice and build on these simple things.+ This advice was for a person who was going through a period of grief and stress, but I would say it is a good practice to follow all of the time.

God reveals His presence in our lives in many ways, some of them dramatic and even profound. But I have found a certain joy and strength that comes from noticing how the Lord has touched me through simple things. When I remember these blessings, I realize how close God is to me and how He is there every day of my life. I feel especially connected to Him. This is a tremendous comfort during stressful times, of course, but it also has become a foundation that gives my ordinary days special meaning.

Scripture tells us to keep our eyes open for God, to be alert for signs of His presence. I'm convinced that devoting a few minutes a day to noting the positives in our lives is a great way to do this.

**Prayer:** Extraordinary God, You delight in showing us Your presence in the midst of the ordinary-ness of our lives. I will honor You by looking for You in the simple, everyday things. I give You thanks and praise always. In Jesusname. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** God's blessings are with me every day. all I have to do is take note of them.

Jo Ballard

Adapted from a devotion written in 2012

**Thursday, February 25, 2021**

## **CIRCLE OF LIFE**

**Scripture:** For God commanded: %honor your father and your mother.+ Matthew 5:4

My mom and dad used to say that it fell to the youngest daughter to care for the parents in their old age, possibly because that's how it went in their families and the generation before theirs. In my family, that meant me. I certainly wasn't opposed to it. They said it was the %Circle of Life.+ But for several years it didn't work out that way; I was not the one caring for my mom. Because I was in a bad car accident (mom was in the passenger seat), I couldn't help. So other family members helped take care of her for several years.

Then, last January, the kids and I went to visit mom for Christmas. We found her in very bad shape; she was very sick. Her caretaker saw no reason to seek medical help for her. I came away upset and fearing for her. I didn't know what to do, so I did the only thing I could do, I prayed. The next day, the caretaker found her urine bag filled with blood and got her taken to the emergency room. She was so very sick and close to death. But I knew that God had answered my prayers. For the first time in my life, I was in a position to put my life on hold and take care of my mom. I've now become her primary caregiver.

It hasn't been easy, not being home. I do so miss my life. But, I can't help but enjoy and value the positives. My daughter Sarah is home with a full time teaching job; she takes care of things at home so I can take care of my mom. Such a blessing! I get to see my mom nearly every day. I get to see her eyes sparkle with joy and see her be as healthy as she can be. I get to ask her questions about her life, about my dad, and hear all kinds of stories. I enjoy making her feel loved and valued. And that is a pretty great feeling! Yep, I'm enjoying this %Circle of Life.+

**Prayer:** Lord, it's sometimes hard to know what to do, but knowing You are there to answer our prayers and show us the way is such a comfort. Thank You for always helping us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Be ever ready to care for those who have cared for you.

Laurie Griffith

**Friday, February 26, 2021**

**FOUNDATIONAL WORK**

**Scripture:** Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Proverbs 3:3 TNIV

I find it is very easy to count my blessings when things are going well. It's when things are difficult, when I'm in pain, when I'm in the midst of a struggle that the real test of my gratitude comes into play. In these moments, am I able to count my blessings? Better yet, am I still willing to? When things look bleak, when it's hard to find hope, am I still willing to see all the good that God is and does? I have found that in the midst of it all is when gratitude really makes a difference.

Gratitude is a mindset. It's a learned behavior. It's a choice. Therefore, it is available to everyone. We can choose to see the good in any situation, in any person, or in any outcome. We can choose to say thank you for the opportunity to learn and grow. Gratitude is counting your blessings on a daily basis and in every moment. It is the willingness to say thank you no matter the circumstance. The more we practice gratitude, the easier it will be to access when things are difficult. Gratitude is rooted in love and graciousness. It is available to us any time of day and in any type of situation. We just have to be willing to embrace it, practice it and make it part of our daily lives.

**Prayer:** Dear God, show me how to make gratitude a daily practice in my life. Help me to build the foundation of love and graciousness in my heart and my mind that I may begin to see things differently. May I begin to see You differently, see all those around me differently, and see myself differently. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Gratitude is a practice and available to everyone.

Elizabeth Reed

**Saturday, February 27, 2021**

**FINDING LIGHT IN A DARK YEAR**

**Scripture:** And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32

For the last three years I have asked my grandkids to give me a white envelope+ Christmas. (It was an idea inspired by a story written by Nancy Gavin.) The idea is they write me a story about something good they have done for someone else sometime during the past year.

Oh, what blessings from the seven grandkids who participated! But 17 year old Andrew's story blessed me the most.

Andrew told of a classmate who was not liked much and was always in trouble. But his attitude seemed to change when he joined the swim team. That same kid dove into a pool last spring and broke his neck. The entire swim team and other participants held a flashlight vigil in the hospital parking lot so the boy could look out the window and see how many supporters he had. Andrew continued, "The event showed me a light in this dark year; that even with the struggle and hatred around me, I can still express my love and hope to others." Andrew told how he has become friends with the boy and checks in on him every couple of weeks. The boy is making progress and is now walking with a walker. He hopes to be able to return to swimming next spring.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help all of us to find hope and light in the world around us. Help this boy to heal from his injuries and be able to re-join the swim team; but most of all help him to know the peace and love You offer to all who know Your love. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Live by God's example. You never know who is watching.

Kathy Whitman

**Sunday, February 28, 2021**

**BECAUSE HE LIVES**

**Scripture:** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Every day Doris and I give thanks in our prayer time for the many, many blessings we enjoy, and most especially for God's presence with us always. We are indeed blessed beyond comparison. Our marriage of 67 years – the love that we share for Jesus our Savior and each other – this country that we are privileged to be a part of – this corner of it that we are so grateful to be born into – our home that we lovingly designed and built and enjoyed for 51 years – our family who has helped get us through these last few months, especially by shopping and seeing to our needs. Our hearts are full of gratitude!

God has been part of my life for almost 91 years, even before I knew Him or acknowledged His presence with me. I thank my mother (Frances Hall) for giving us four kids a bath in the old wash tub on Saturday nights beside the heating stove, and then the next morning taking us to church and Sunday School at the Charlesworth Methodist Church on Bellevue Road. I also remember and thank Mom's parents (Lauren Erving and Laura Harshey) for their unfailing love of Jesus. As I look back on it, their influence greatly impacted my life. Blessings upon blessings!

**Prayer:** Father, help us each to be open to Your Spirit each day and to follow where You lead. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** If you have not memorized the three verses to Gaither's "Because He Lives," I encourage you to do so. You will never regret it.

Ed Hall

**Monday, March 1, 2021**

**GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS**

**Scripture:** Read Genesis 11:1-9

This past year has been so difficult. There are so many sources of information, some from recognized journalists, some from people sharing what they've read or heard about from neighbors and friends via social media. Instead of simple news, we hear opinions from every direction. Where we used to sit in front of the TV and listen to Walter Cronkite tell us what was going on, we now have fifteen or twenty news programs telling us what to think. We get to pick the program that says what we already believe, and we can avoid being challenged in our beliefs. The phrase "fake news" is used constantly, and we no longer have a single vision of reality. Confusion, doubt, and anger reign supreme.

As I pray the Lord's Prayer and ask for God's will to be done, I wonder if God is behind our lack of communication, just as God was when the tower of Babel was being constructed. What blessing is hidden in this confusion and lack of communication? Paul tells us that God uses all things for good for those who love God and are called to God's purpose. How will God use this discord? Talk about a cliff-hanger! Let's all watch as God continues to work in our lives, and cooperate with God as fully as we can so that God's will is done.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we give You thanks and praise for Your constant love and presence. Help us to remember to pray for Your will to be done, and truly mean it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** "God works in mysterious ways God's wonders to perform."  
*William Cowper*

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

## **INTERRUPTIONS**

**Scripture:** Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He shall make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

My father's short term memory was failing terrible due to dementia. I discovered a small packet of very old photos in his desk one day while frantically looking for something else. Quickly (I was very busy, after all) we started looking through them and what happened next left me in total awe. This 87 year old man, who could not remember we ate lunch an hour ago, was recalling his childhood and young adult years in immeasurable detail.

So began our time looking thru old photos and scrapbooks. I learned many things about my father's younger years- a true gift he gave me while we looked through photos and scrapbooks together in the weeks that followed. I feverously took notes while Dad spoke of shearing sheep, stringing fence lines and his mother cooking for thrashers. He talked of relatives, neighbors, buildings and animals shown in the pictures with sureness and clarity. Short, warm stories were often followed with a wide smile and a chuckle. This quiet, still, dementia-ridden elderly man came to life when remembering neighborly deeds, school class mates, jokes played on each other and reciting poems he memorized as a lad.

I had many things to accomplish the day I found those first pictures- all put on hold because of the photo interruption. God's interruption resulted in precious time together learning of Dad's younger years, his experiences, his love for others and those who loved him. Looking back now, what a blessing God's planned interruption was!

**Prayer:** Thank You God, for pressing our pause button with meaningful interruptions when we cannot press it ourselves. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** When has God put interruptions in your path that became a blessing when sharing, learning and growing can flourish unexpectedly?

Chris Larson

**Wednesday, March 3, 2021**

## **THE BLESSING OF A TOUCH**

**Scripture:** Then Jesus took the children in His arms and placed His hands on their heads and blessed them. Mark 10:16

I never would have thought before this pandemic that one of the things that I would miss the most was being touched. I often think of Christians as a fellowship of huggers.+ We seem to need to hug each other to express our pleasure in seeing another who is an important part of our life. Jesus called the little children to Him so that He could touch them. We are all little children. His children!

In 1963 Bill Gaither wrote a beautiful, greatly loved and often sung song, He Touched Me.+ The chorus goes this way:

He touched me, O He touched me,  
And O the joy that floods my soul;  
Something happened, and now I know,  
He touched me and made me whole.+

To me, this song is a reminder of times He touched my heart. that I might know He touched me and made me whole.+

I now know how important touching is and how much it can be missed, especially when it is forbidden because of a horrible virus. May the time come soon when we can again be a fellowship of huggers!+

**Prayer:** Thank You, Father, for reminding us that we are Your children, and that being touched is one way we can feel Your presence. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Reach out and touch someone. If not physically, perhaps with a note or a call. until it is safe to do it face to face again.

Jean Houghton

**Thursday, March 4, 2021**

**NUDGES FROM GOD**

**Scripture:** Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This past summer (2020), I experienced the longest vacation of my lifetime, spending 54 days at Sparrows Spa. Thankfully, I was totally unaware of the first 28 days as I was unconscious while hospital staff labored to keep me living and breathing. When I was finally aware of my situation, I thanked God that that I was still alive. Several of the doctors and nurses told me that I was, indeed, a miracle. During my time at the Spa and even after finally getting home, I have been both humbled and awed by the many acts of kindness that have come my way.

Between mail at the hospital and birthday cards that arrived for my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday a week after getting home, I have marveled at the number of people who have shown God's love through their lives and efforts. There were 44 get-well cards and 77 birthday cards! The vast majority of cards, as well as other kindnesses and gifts, were from my church family. Yes, all of you FUMERs are to be commended for your ministry, not only to me, but I know that you are all actively involved in ministry throughout the community. I've just been reminded of it personally, during and after my stay at the Spa.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for keeping us safe, even when we're not fully aware of what's happening. Help us keep our hearts and minds prepared to minister to others as they have ministered to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Always be tuned in to the gentle nudges that God gives through His Holy Spirit. Pray for others and be aware that God can work through any unique personality to help us be a blessing to others.

Doris E. Wonser

**Friday, March 5, 2021**

## **BLESSINGS**

**Scripture:** However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. Deuteronomy 23:5

**Definition of Blessings:** noun. The act or words of a person who blesses. A special favor, mercy, or benefit. The blessings of liberty. A favor or gift bestowed by God, thereby bringing happiness. The invoking of God's favor upon a person.

My life has been and continues to be very blessed. I had great parents, great friends, a great family. Still, I have had to remind myself to count my blessings from time to time. I miss my Mom, but I had her into her late 80s. My daughter has Myotonic Dystrophy, but she has been the greatest blessing of my life. I had to sell my house to care for my husband, but he lived long enough after his brain injury, 11 years, for him to accept Christ as his savior. I have been a caretaker for different family members for over two decades, but I have been blessed with their presence as well as the strength and the support from family and friends to care for them. I have always found that the more difficult the situation, the closer I feel to God- a major blessing. I feel that you must be intentional about counting your blessings as sometimes they are hard to see, but they are there.

Finally, the FUMER family has always been a blessing to me especially through this last year.

**Prayer:** Thank You, God, for Your constant presence and many blessings given freely to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** With so much going on in 2021, we all need to continue counting our blessings and relying on God as we go forward.

Loann Snell

**Saturday, March 6, 2021**

**GOD IS WITH US, ALWAYS**

**Scripture:** You go before me and follow me, You place Your hand of blessing on my head. Psalm 139:5

Blessings sometimes seem illusive. Often, people feel if things aren't going their way, they are in God's disfavor. I have found in my worst times, there are blessings to counter that thought, but you must see beyond your current circumstances. I don't want to minimize the hardship we have but often, with some effort, blessings are there to find. I've had trials, big ones, but pushing through regardless of my circumstances has been what I've done. I have found that strength and solace can be found as blessing in these situations.

During these pandemic times, I've felt scared and isolated, but I decided to do what I can to help others from my little space. I don't get out as much as I would like, but I use my pen and paper to write to folks, and call on the phone/zoom. And I give a little more, especially since I feel I can't give as much time. Being able to do these things are blessings to me.

I've also felt during those bad times that the church family has been my rock. I found my first UMC church while in trying times. I looked for a UMC because I had a sweet "old" lady neighbor who invited me to her church on Sunday when I was a child. They had a guitar player playing music and it felt inviting. So, if you are feeling that you can't find any blessings, trying one of our services at FUMER may be a good place to start.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for this day and all days. Be with me and help me to see where You have touched my day by thought or action. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Always look for the people God sends to do His deeds in your life.

Amy Hahn

**Sunday, March 7, 2021**

**HOME**

**Scripture:** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:6

God has been very good to me all my life. Although I may fail Him on occasion, He has always stood by me! God has blessed me with a loving family, good health, a steady income and a wonderful life.

One of the many blessings has been Eaton Rapids! Here I've enjoyed a beautiful city, with a small town friendly Christian feeling. FUMER is such a place, and I've loved worshipping here. Pastor Marty is not only a pastor, but a friend from years past. I'm also very grateful for my church family and their commitment to the Lord.

I fell in love with Eaton Rapids' quaintness the very first day I worked here. The city is structured with a thriving business community, professional services, and all we need right here in town. The city is clean and safe, with many outdoor activities. Eaton Rapids is, in my opinion, a destination stop and a home. And it is a wonderful place to raise a family.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for Your mercy and grace. I am truly blessed with family, friends and a great community. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** I will always consider FUMER and the people of Eaton Rapids my family.

Mike McGhan

**Monday, March 8, 2021**

**CHANGE NEVER ENDS**

**Scripture:** For I know the plans I have for you,+ saith the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give a future and a hope.+ Jeremiah 29:11

Before 2020, I always thought, Surely next year things will settle down.+ Funny thing about that. They never did. Change, big changes just keep coming at me. I retired. Jimmy died. I sold the farm and built a house. I moved to Florida. Built a house. Got married. Moved again to a second house. Husband died. Youd think that I love change and moving! Nothing could be further from the truth! Packing, unpacking and trying to feel comfortable in a new place. Again. And here I am, back in Eaton Rapids. And now a pandemic! Just what I needed! I thought that either God has a strange sense of humor or there is a plan I dont understand! Then this popped into my head: For I know the plans I have for you,+ saith the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give a future and a hope.+ (Jeremiah 29:11). So much has happened. So many wonderful people Ive known. What a journey! A gift from God Himself! And Hes still with me. I am safe and my family seems safe, too. Ive never spent much time thinking about that, but nowd .

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to be conscious of Your presence today. Help me to see the plan You have for me. Help me to lay down the reins and simply follow Your lead. In Jesusname I pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** I was looking for something new to say but 2020 left me speechless. Something inspiring. I guess Iam just out of inspiration! What more, O Lord?

Joyce Griffith

**Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

### **WISE WORDS**

**Scripture:** May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

A little something to ponder... I asked one of my friends who has crossed 70 and is heading to 80 what sort of changes he is feeling in himself? He sent me the following very interesting lines, which I would like to share with you.

1. After loving my parents, my siblings, my spouse, my children, my friends, now I have started loving myself.
2. I just realized that I am not Atlas. The world does not rest on my shoulders.
3. I now stopped bargaining with vegetable and fruit vendors. A few pennies more is not going to burn a hole in my pocket but it might help the poor fellow save for his daughter's school fees.
4. I pay my waitress a big tip. The extra money might bring a smile to her face. She is toiling much harder for a living than me.
5. I stopped telling the elderly that they've already narrated that story many times. The story makes them walk down the memory lane and relive the past.
6. I have learned not to correct people even when I know they are wrong. The onus of making everyone perfect is not on me. Peace is more precious than perfection.
7. I give compliments freely and generously. Compliments are a mood enhancer not only for the recipient, but also for me. And a small tip for the recipient of a compliment, never, NEVER turn it down, just say "Thank You."
8. I have learned not to bother about a crease or a spot on my shirt. Personality speaks louder than appearances.
9. I walk away from people who don't value me. They might not know my worth, but I do.
10. I remain cool when someone plays dirty to outrun me in the rat race. I am not a rat and neither am I in any race.
11. I am learning not to be embarrassed by my emotions. It's my emotions that make me human.
12. I have learned that it's better to drop the ego than to break a relationship. My ego will keep me aloof, whereas with relationships I will never be alone.
13. I have learned to live each day as if it's the last. After all, it might be the last.
14. I am doing what makes me happy. I am responsible for my happiness, and I owe it to myself. Happiness is a choice. You can be happy at any time, just choose to be!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for wise words that come to us at any time and age. May we learn to love one another a bit more every day of our lives. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Why do we have to wait to be 70 or 80, why can't we practice this at any stage and age?

Cheryl White

**Wednesday, March 10, 2021**

### **UPS AND DOWNS**

**Scripture:** And we know that all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

Arthur Ashe Jr. was the first African American man to win the men's singles title at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. In 1993, he died of AIDS-related pneumonia at age 49. His was a life of ups and downs, to say the least.

Never more than this past year, our lives are the same. We ask ourselves, "Where's the hope, the joy? Why even get out of bed on cold, cloudy winter days?" We ask God, "Why me?"

Ashe is quoted as saying, "If I were to say 'God, why me?' about the bad things, then I should have said, 'God, why me?' about the good things that happened in my life."

I found myself thinking, "God, why me?" many times in the past several months and I had to remind myself, "I am blessed," even when I can't see the blessings.

**Prayer:** God, help me to praise You in the good and the bad. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** And we know that all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

Karen Abrahamson

Thursday, March 11, 2021

## RECONCILIATION

**Scripture:** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.+ Colossians 3:13

Our Stephen was adopted, and we spoke of that quite openly with both boys as they were growing up. One afternoon, when they were maybe 5 and 6 years old, Ben asked, "Mom, when you and Dad decided to adopt a baby, you already had one boy. Why did you get another one?" Before I even had a chance to form an answer, Steve piped up, "Because you wanted a Steve, right, Mom?"

Unfortunately, Steve and I had a rather rocky relationship. He was a super-active boy and tested all the limits. Bill has commented that, "Steve could throw a 45-minute temper tantrum without repeating himself." Like most of us, he was a rather complex fellow and had many fine qualities.

One June afternoon almost 29 years ago, Steve and I sat down and had a long chat. I apologized for being so hard on him as he was growing up. "No," he said, "you were probably too easy." We both expressed regrets about the rocky relationship we had. I reminded him that his Dad and I love him and beyond that, God will always love him. What a weight that conversation lifted!

Within 24 hours of that conversation, we received the phone call that Steve had been in an accident. Though he would live for another 26 years, he was totally disabled and unable to communicate meaningfully with us.

When I read that "Count Your Many Blessings" is the theme for this Lenten season, I count that talk with Steve as one of my greatest blessings. How important it is for us to restore relationships that are impaired.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, keep us mindful of the need to restore impaired relationships before it is too late. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Is there someone to whom I need to be reconciled? Remember this advice from Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" +

Alice Botti

**Friday, March 12, 2021**

**JUST PRAY!**

**Scripture:** Apostle Paul said: ~~My~~ response is to get down on my knees before my Father.+ Ephesians 3:14

As much as we might hate to admit it, God doesn't need or want us to tell Him what to do, nor does God want to listen to us challenge Him. Yes, *absolutely*, God does want to hear from us! However, what brings the Lord happiness is our devotion to His plan. That means prayer, creating an open line of communication with God that serves as a dialogue. It means both speaking and listening. We can pray anytime, anywhere, anyplace. What a blessing to know that we can speak to God at any moment in our lives— the good moments and the bad moments. We can pray when we need God for love and support as well as when we praise Him for answered prayers. Anytime, anywhere!

Prayer knows no rules, so just pray! Unplugged! Heart tuned in! Let it all out! Communicate with God! He is both our Creator and our best Friend! He is what we need every day in our lives. Follow God's lead and make prayer, God's form of communication, not a sometime thing but an all-time thing! It will change your life.

**Prayer:** Thank You so much, dear Lord, for loving us as no one else ever can. Each day may we trust You enough to share everything with You. And may we allow ourselves to grow closer to You every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Do you want true joy? Spend time with our Lord every single day.

Mark Adam

**Saturday, March 13, 2021**

## **MOUNTAIN BIKING**

**Scripture:** I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.  
Psalm 34:4

Mountain biking can be very fun, but there are plenty of opportunities for big wrecks and big injuries. It can be downright scary sometimes. If a mountain biker looks at an obstacle in the trail, he or she will most certainly hit the object instead of avoiding it. This is also true when navigating a narrow path on the edge of a mountain with a 1,000 foot cliff. It's just a natural human instinct to look at the obstacles, especially when the path is especially dangerous or scary. Isn't the same true for life?

One of the most valuable skills in mountain biking is to look where you want to go. By fixing one's eyes on clearest path instead of the obstacles, the mountain biking is safer and smoother. However, this is much less instinctual. When I'm riding fast through a technical section or turning sharply on a downhill switchback, I must constantly chant to myself, look where you want to go! Isn't the same true for life as well?

It is such a blessing to know that if I fix my eyes on the Lord, He will deliver me from all my fears. No matter what obstacles lie in my path, I know when I seek the Lord, He ensures my path is safer and smoother.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for taking my fears away and blessing me with Your peace. Help me to seek Your path in all things. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Fix your eyes upon the Lord today; let Him be your guide in all things.

Rachel Gibson

**Sunday, March 14, 2021**

**CHANGING MY FOCUS**

**Scripture:** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: %Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all!+ Luke 2:13-14

As was true for all of us, 2020 was a very difficult and life changing year, and thus far, it has continued into the first part of 2021. While we all have experienced many good things, somehow we have allowed distressing events to turn into ugliness. Our society seems full of hatred, anger, negative attitudes, actions and words. Such things seem to have taken over the world. Unfortunately, these words and attitudes contribute to our feelings of depression, sadness, fear and loneliness. This is not the way we as Christians should be living during these difficult days.

What is the Christian response to all of this? Well, I have discovered that when I change my focus and turn it on Jesus and His gift of pure love, focusing, even for a few minutes, on my many blessings, everything looks different! Joy returns and I feel God's love in my heart again. And that's because I know these blessings are all gifts from the Lord I love. And when that happens, I seem to be able to live as Jesus wants me to live. And this includes loving and helping all of my neighbors.

Below is a prayer that was printed in our Michigan Conference newsletter several weeks ago; I don't know who wrote it, but it spoke to me and I would like to share it with you. It has blessed me over and over. May it bless you as well.

**A Prayer for Civility in a Divisive World**

**Everywhere we turn these days, we see and hear the reminders  
of a world divided on so many issues.**

**Social media is full of heated debates on so many issues.**

**God, help us remember we are made in Your image.**

**Guide our words toward civility and wisdom in discourse  
and discussion.**

**Teach us as people of faith to model love for our neighbors  
in all conversations, whether public or private.**

**You have called us to be salt and light in our nation  
and to the world.**

**Empower us to be peacemakers with our words.**

**Amen.**

**Thought for the day:** Let us always turn our eyes upon Jesus. He is the giver of love, peace and joy. He can change our lives.

Joyce Showerman

**Monday, March 15, 2021**

**BLESSINGS COME IN SMALL DOSES**

**Scripture:** Shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.  
Philippians 2:15-16

One of my husband's nieces has a houseful of worries. Two children have been dealing with substance abuse, her husband is greatly obese and confined to a wheelchair, and this past month she, Carolyn, fell off a ladder and broke her leg. With all of that, one would think she would be in deep despair. But not Carolyn. This sweet family lives in Pennsylvania, but when we visit, I bring some piano music and Carolyn and I sit at the piano and play together. She is much more talented in her music than I am, but we have such fun together.

Carolyn faithfully plays the piano for her little country church. She never gives up her smile or happiness. At one point in her life she nearly sold her piano but I told her not to, that she would regret it. That was a number of years ago. Little did she know how much music would sustain her in years to come.

Happiness comes in small doses, like playing the piano for ourselves, or like Carolyn, for others. We don't realize how much things like that can matter in our lives. I can't play like Carolyn does, but when I do sit down at my own piano I find great solace and peace. And when I play I often think of Carolyn. If she can smile through all her problems, why should I be sad or lonely? I call Carolyn from time to time to see how she is doing. It may be a small thing to do, but a phone call can be more important than we realize.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to never be too busy to call someone to give encouragement, support and friendship. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** A phone call, a note, or a smile can go a long way in sustaining others as well as ourselves.

Inge Logenburg Kyler

**Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

**FAITH**

**Scripture:** Have Faith in God,+ Jesus answered. Mark 11:22

I belong to a quilt group here in Florida. We make simple quilts for a wounded Warrior Retreat Center here in Ruskin as well as for the Hospice Center. We also make baby quilts for the Pregnancy Center along with diaper bags and shawls for nursing mothers. The other projects include quilts for the dialysis center.

I love working with about 25 women, and we have time to talk to each other and learn about each other's lives, family, and faith. One Monday I was working on a quilt with a lady from southern Ohio. I asked her if she had been to the Ark Experience, since I was really interested in going. She is of a different faith and she responded that her church taught her it was nothing but a Jewish fable and she knew it couldn't have happened. She said in the first place, it's a desert and there wouldn't have been wood to build it. I asked her if she had been to the Middle East and she said no. I told her of my time in Israel, Jordan, Greece and Turkey. There is lots of wood and if we believed God's word, He would have provided it.

What is faith? It's believing in something we can't see. I believe in Daniel in the lion's den. I believe in the ark. I believe in a risen Saviour! And I believe in God!! Some day we will meet Him face to face. But until that time comes, I believe in Him.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for being with us every day in everything we do. As we play and work together with friends, Lord, let our love for You shine through to others. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** We need to study, share and share our faith with those we meet.

Barb Kerekes

**Wednesday, March 17, 2021**

**BLESSINGS VS. LOSS**

**Scripture:** Weeping may spend the night, but there is joy in the morning.  
Psalms 30:5

What a year was 2020. So much loss- illness, relationship challenges, struggles for school-aged grandchildren, no church or choir, friends at a distance, PANDEMIC, POLITICS, DEATH. So easy to get bogged down with overwhelming sadness and despair. Our personal loss of our daughter still consumes our thoughts in waves.

I have learned in my life it's my choice to wallow in self-pity or to look for joy. (Please understand I am not saying that clinically depressed people can make this choice without some help.) With all the stress-causing stuff going on in the world and at home, I am blessed beyond measure: I have a wonderful home, warm clothing, plenty of food to enjoy, the love of my spouse/partner in life, the daily company of my furry kids, vehicles to drive, health to walk and enjoy nature, Facebook and telephone and video to connect with friends and family near and far, and the BEST BLESSING OF ALL- my Lord, who has walked with me, cried with me and held me up through all of this!

I know we as humans are not promised life will be easy. Pain and sadness come and go. But I feel His love. It's going to be alright. All is well. God is good.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, Your presence is so dear to me. Your comforting arms wrap my sad heart in love. Thank You for helping me to rise above grief and pain and look for the good in life. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** List your sorrows and then list your blessings- the blessings win!

Sue Woodard

**Thursday, March 18, 2021**

**BLESSED BY A CREATIVE GOD**

**Scripture:** Read all of Psalm 104. %Bless the Lord, O my soul!+ David is acknowledging there would be no blessings without a creative God.

I cannot count all my blessings; they are too numerous. Many of those I forget or may not even know about, but there are those I can never forget.

Of course, a loving God and what Jesus did to define that love.

My mother.

My wife, Ina, has been my greatest blessing for over 61 years.

We are blessed with two wonderful children, Julie and Craig.

Julie has blessed us with a great son-in-law, Alan.

Craig and Kristin have blessed us with three great grandchildren, Gabriel, Sydney, and Taylor.

I am privileged to have been born in America.

Many blessings have come my way through the Christian Church, particularly FUMER.

Several men in my life stand out as turning points, my father, my brother, Carl Fenner, David Burch, Franklin Mack, Harold Hicks.

So many friends and family over the years have given Ina and me wonderful memories.

I feel blessed to have developed such love and appreciation for the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

We are all blessed for having health care workers and other front-line people willing to sacrifice for us.

I feel blessed for good food and health.

**Prayer:** Creative God, Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, help me to see the blessings that come my way this day from You as well as from others. Help me to count my blessings not my bane. Keeping me open to possibilities, show me the way to be a blessing to others. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** As I wake may I decide that this day will be a blessing for me and through me a blessing for others.

Ted Myers

**Friday, March 19, 2021**

**BEST BLESSINGS**

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

I have pondered my blessings a great deal this holiday season. I counted the fact that Social Security and retirement income keep being deposited in our bank account, without our having to go to the bank. No worries there. I had to laugh as I paid our estimated tax payment today. I saw that the government stimulus check had come, and so the government had in effect paid our tax payment. Go figure.

My feet still hold me up; my fingers still let me type. My mind has not forsaken me, and my body is bearing up. Our roof is sound- no leaks there. The furnace works- we are warm and toasty. My husband Gary has healed, which is an enormous blessing. Our son found a job after four months of unemployment, and he found a job in Seattle while spending time here in Eaton Rapids after Gary's accident. His new boss came from Charlotte, and knew exactly where Chris was as he interviewed with him via the internet. Perhaps that helped him land his job- God at work. Even better, our family is healthy when so many others are very sick.

I could go on and on, but none of these are the best blessing of all. We know Jesus. We know that God will never leave us or forsake us. We are never alone, even when we have lost a loved one. Jesus is always there to hold us tight. He will never let us go, not even when we too leave this world. We have a date with God in Paradise, where we can gather with the angels without a face mask. Now THOSE are blessings to treasure.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so deeply. Thank You for holding on, and for preparing a place for us in Paradise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Thanks to Jesus, we are never alone.

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Saturday, March 20, 2021**

**62 YEARS AS A U.M.W. MEMBER**

**Scripture:** Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I Thessalonians 5:18

Here are some of the highlights of 62 years in United Methodist Women. I joined UMW at a circle at Michigan Avenue United Methodist Church in 1959, then a circle at Faith United Methodist Church on Pleasant Grove in Lansing, and later a unit at Faith United Methodist Church on Waverly Road in Lansing. I was serving as treasurer and Deb was in the second grade when we moved to Petrieville Road in Eaton Rapids. I belonged to the Miriam Circle at First United Methodist Church in ER and presently belong to the Priscilla Circle there. I was president of the local UMW for 6 years. I traveled too, as Connie Hicks, Martha Ledergerber, Dianne Clone and I went to New York City. I received a Second Century Woman award and Mission Recognition Award from our local church (FUMER).

I served beyond the local church as well. I was on the District UMW for 14 years and went to many Schools of Mission, district and conference annual meetings. I had training at Wesley Woods and Lake Louise Camps. I also went to Washington D.C. twice and to the Assembly in Philadelphia where women from all around the world attended. I am writing a more detailed account of my years for the historian.

**Prayer:** Thank You, dear Lord, for these many opportunities to serve You through the United Methodist Women's ministries. It has been a blessing for me, and the memories are precious. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** We can find solace in change because You, oh God, are steadfast.+

Alys Hoover

**Sunday, March 21, 2021**

**THROUGH IT ALL**

**Scripture:** Read Philippians 4:11-13. Verse 13 says: I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

One of my favorite songs is written by Andre Crouch:

I've had many tears and sorrows, I've had questions for tomorrow  
There've been times I didn't know right from wrong.

But in every situation God gave blessed consolation  
That my trials come to only make me strong.

Chorus:

Through it all, through it all,  
I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God  
Through it all, through it all,  
I've learned to depend upon His word.

I've been to lots of places, And I've seen a lot of faces  
There've been times I felt so all alone;  
But in my lonely hours, yes, those precious lonely hours  
Jesus lets me know that I was His own.  
(Repeat chorus)

Even though the world is in a dark place, and a scary place right now, all I want to do at times is to curl up into a ball and find a dark corner. Then I remember: ~~in~~ every situation God gives me blessed consolation.+ Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me my unbelief. Thank You, Lord, for walking with me, hand in hand, and for Your tender mercies. Through the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** The sun comes up every day. We can meet it every morning and ask God to take our hand because we know He is willing to give us strength. He will bless us to be a blessing to someone who needs it.

Nora Wellman

**Monday, March 22, 2021**

**IT'S ALL A GIFT**

**Scripture:** And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. John 1:16

As I grow in my spiritual journey I have come to understand that God's plan for me is to wake up in the morning and that is the greatest blessing that I can have. I give thanks and ask for strength, courage and wisdom to understand God's will, word and way. I accept God's fullness in that I didn't have to do anything to receive grace upon grace. It is freely given! It has liberated me from my egotistical self and allowed me to open my heart and head up to love, forgiveness and contemplative prayer.

All this helps me look at every day as a new beginning and I can get through one day at a time. What a blessing it is being able to stay in the present and if I am having trouble with my mind racing, I can just ask God to take those feelings and God does!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, have mercy on me for I am a sinner. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** First we must fall, and then we recover from that fall. and both are the mercy of God.+ (Julian of Norwich)

Randy Taylor

**Tuesday, March 23, 2021**

**SHINE, PEOPLE, SHINE!**

**Scripture:** Read Matthew 5:14-16

A violent storm destroyed a beautiful church. The church was rebuilt, and a service of dedication was scheduled for midnight. Every person was asked to bring a small lantern to worship. At the beginning of the service, the pastor said to the people: "See how the light of your lanterns makes this sanctuary glow. Without your light, this sanctuary would be in darkness." This reminds us how important is the light of our faith to our congregation and to the community we live in.

In Matthew, Jesus is sitting on the side of the mountain talking to His disciples and says, "You are to be a light in the darkness." Let people see your good works of love and grace. Don't hide this under a bushel. Shine!

Many years ago I was visiting Ruby, a member of our church. Ruby was 83, living alone with very little income and no family close by. Somehow we started talking about food, and Ruby said, "I love whole wheat bread, but it is too expensive for me to buy." I couldn't forget this, so next time I visited, I brought a loaf of whole wheat bread; Ruby was so happy, she tried to jump up and down!

We never know what a show of kindness, a phone call, sharing a bowl of soup, a cookie or even a loaf of bread can do for someone today.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for Your love and grace. Help us to share Your love and be a light in the darkness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Today, lift someone's spirit. Shine, people, shine!

Rev. Ron Thompson, Retired

**Wednesday, March 24, 2021**

**STANDING IN A RAINBOW**

**Scripture:** All these blessings shall come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 28:2

Have you ever dreamed about standing in a rainbow? Imagine warm, vibrant colors shining on, and around you. What an amazing experience this would be! Close your eyes and stand in the rainbow of blessings God gives us every day.

**Red** hues come from parents, teachers, health care workers and others who help grow our minds, care for our bodies and urge us to reach toward new opportunities and experiences. *Encouraging, compassionate and nurturing care is a blessing.*

**Yellow** iridescent colors represent the sunshine of our days - kindness. Small gifts, cheerful cards, phone calls and encouraging messages are reminders of support and great inspiration. Hearing ~~let~~ me know if you need anything+ never grows old. *Unexpected and thoughtful random acts of kindness are a blessing.*

**Blue** sparkling lights are reminders a bright, blue sky makes any day brighter. A simple smile, a dose of humor or sharing a laugh shines brightly in the hearts of others. So does a simply smile with a warm ~~hello~~.+ *Sprinkles of warm smiles and sparks of humor are a blessing.*

**Purple** reminds us of God's love and the power of prayer. Prayer brings comfort and peace. God's love is constant and always with us, even when we are not looking. *God's everlasting love and prayers during times of celebration and difficulties are a blessing.*

The rainbow colors twirling and spinning around are the wonderful blessings God places around us. They go with us always when we are spreading and living in the love of Christ. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:** Thank You God, for putting us in the right spaces at the right times where we can feel the sparkles and warmth of Your blessings in our hearts. Help us to share our blessings with others so they, too, can know the feeling of standing in Your rainbow. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** What blessings can you share with others as a bright and sparkling reminder of God's love?

Chris Larson

Thursday, March 25, 2021

## THE LORD OF MILLIONS OF BLESSINGS

**Scripture:** The simple truth is that if you had a mere kernel of faith, a poppy seed, say, you would tell this mountain ~~Move!~~ and it would move. There is nothing you wouldn't be able to tackle.+ Matthew 17:20 (The Message)

I have chuckled at many of the Covid-related jokes going around on social media over the past year. One of them showed a cartoon of a face mask with facial features, hanging on a hook and saying, ~~ugh!~~ I can't take smelling their breath all day!+

Haven't we all felt like that poor face mask at some time in our lives? The current pandemic has changed our lives tremendously- our priorities, our choices, our schedules, our expectations, and many other things. At times, the problems and uncertainties seem to keep piling up, looming like mountains in front of us.

For such times, I would like to share with you these words from devotional writer Sharon Hinck: ~~Whatever~~ needs we have, Jesus can provide answers. When we remember how much bigger He is than those mountains, they begin to shrink before our eyes. There are a thousand things that are hard about these mountains. But Jesus is the Lord of millions of blessings. He will outnumber the problems with His overwhelming grace and mercy.+

So count your blessings with joy and thanksgiving, and as you do, may your faith grow and sustain you!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I am so grateful that You are bigger than any situation I may face. May I never lose sight of Your overwhelming grace and mercy. In Your name I pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Jesus is the Lord of millions of blessings.

Jo Ballard

**Friday, March 26, 2021**

**PRAY CONTINUALLY**

**Scripture:** Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.  
I Thessalonians 5:16-18

In the late 1990s FUMER chose a slogan for the campaign to build the big addition that was completed in 2000: *"Building with 2020 Vision!"* It was, of course, a play on words intended to convey the clarity of the plans and a 20-year long-range view into the future. I can assure you no one had in mind how blurry being the church actually ended up looking in 2020!

In I Thessalonians, Paul gives us three directives: ~~%~~Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.+ (I Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV). But it can be a challenge to be joyful and give thanks in the midst of the pandemic. The contrast between our dreams and reality can turn out to be stark. It can seem like there are more things we are restricted from doing than we are allowed to do. The stream of bad news seems to drown out the good things we hear. The isolation and misinformation can make us paranoid and frustrated.

But I have found that if I simply follow Paul's third directive, to ~~%~~pray continually,+ the other two, ~~%~~give thanks+and ~~%~~be joyful,+fall into line. The more I count my blessings in prayer, the more reassured I become that God's love and mercy will continue to see us through. This ignites a joy that sustains me despite the circumstances. So, I continue to pray and give thanks no matter what, for Paul tells us, ~~%~~this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.+

**Prayer:** Father God, I want to always be joyful and to give thanks in all circumstances, even in a pandemic. I do have a lot to be thankful for. So, I come to You with prayers of thanksgiving and praise. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** What will church be like in 2040?

Steven Peters

**Saturday, March 27, 2021**

## **LIGHT IN THE DARK**

**Scripture:** You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.  
II Samuel 22:29

Can blessings still occur in the dark? We often think of blessings when we are in the light. When things are good, when we are happy, when there is something to celebrate. But what about when we are in the dark, when things are bad, when we are filled with sadness, when there feels like there is nothing to celebrate? Are we still able to think of our blessings then?

What is the moon? What are the stars? If not hope and light in a dark sky? It may not be as bright as day, but there still is light.

I am always impressed by the light of the moon at night. This winter I have noticed the brightness of the moon as it reflects on the snow. Even though it is night, and darkness casts over the sky, there is still light. I pray that we may always remember that when we feel like we are living in a season of darkness or night, no matter what, there is still and always will be light. It shines above us and reflects below us. It's the moon and the stars, and it's the reflection of the moon and the stars on the water or snow shining back up on us. For even when we feel we cannot find the light ourselves, God offers a way to light up our darkness to help us find it again.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me see the light in the dark. Reflect Your light on me, in me, and through me. May Your light fill up the darkness with hope and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Sometimes the dark offers contrast to the light that we have trouble seeing in the light of day.

Elizabeth Reed

## Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021

### GREAT EXPECTATIONS

**Scripture:** Read Matthew 21:1-11

Briefly said, Palm Sunday is the holy event zeroing in on the last week of Jesus' earthly life. Mel Gibson's well-known movie "The Passion of the Christ" paints unforgettable images into our minds and hearts. Since Zechariah prophesied this event nearly 500 years earlier, all Israel was anxiously awaiting the time the Messiah would come. "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." (Zechariah 9:9)

This is the hope of fulfillment the Jews held in their hearts, that the Messiah when He came, would be their earthly king. He would be strong and invincible and destroy the Roman government. And then one day it actually happened. And to rightly honor this earthly king's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, His path was covered with palm branches, a Jewish symbol of triumph and victory (Leviticus 23:40; Revelation 7:9) and also covered with regal cloaks, the customary announcement of a king's arrival. (2 Kings 9:13) And then there were the deafening cries, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8) There were such great expectations!

But it didn't take very long and the hope and expectations of so many were dashed to pieces. Their king was arrested, beaten and flogged, and nailed to a cross in utter shame and humiliation. Then he was buried in a tomb. Jesus hadn't come as a mighty conquering king to liberate them from the tyranny of Rome, but much to their shock and dismay, He came to surrender up His life and die on a cross in order to save mankind from sin and eternal death. The Bible also tells us that one day; Jesus will return gloriously as a mighty warrior in battle and will reign forever with us beside Him. (Revelation 19:11-16) So, for us then, Palm - Passion Sunday is a time to deeply reflect on the agony and suffering of Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, knowing that the glory of the Father would Resurrect Him in just three days" and "that ALL who place their faith in Him will follow!"

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so much that You "didn't even spare Your own Son, but gave Him up for us all." You totally judged ALL our sin, past, present and future, by "making Jesus to be sin for us, thereby justly declaring us not guilty and imputing to us the very righteousness of Christ Jesus Himself. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Hosanna to our King Jesus!

Neal Hicks

Neal is our Missionary to "Crossroads of the Nations" in Nashville, TN

**Monday, March 29, 2021**

**WHEN GOD SPOKE TO ME**

**Scripture:** My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. James 1:19

About thirty years ago I was a single mother trying to raise three boys. I had always been taught that I should tithe one tenth of my income to God. But as each paycheck came in there were never enough dollars to cover all the expenses. It was easy to reason that God would understand if I did not tithe until things improved at my house.

Then one day I was driving down the road and a deer ran across the road right in front of my car. It was so close it took my breath away. Then I heard this voice as if he were sitting in the car beside me. God said, %just saved you the \$200 deductible that you would have had to spend to fix your car if you had hit that deer. I want you to give that \$200 to me.+

From that day forward I started tithing again. God hasn't saved me from every car/deer accident. (I think I have had 3 or 4 since that time.) But every time I come close to hitting a deer I remember how God spoke to me that day. Sometimes when I start a trip I pray God will keep the deer out of my path. When I arrive home safely, I give thanks to God for giving me safe travels.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us all to hear Your voice when You speak to us. Help us to take action as You guide us. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Don't ignore God's little nudges. You might miss out on some tremendous blessings.

Kathy Whitman

**Tuesday, March 30, 2021**

## **JOY FROM A BURST BUBBLE**

**Scripture:** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior, my God. Psalm 43:5

I was so excited! In these times of COVID and limited contact, I wasn't at all sure when or if I would get to see my soon-to-be-born grandson. The thought made me sad. I have four grandchildren that I rarely get to see because they live in Edmonton, Canada. The idea of having my new grandson born here in Michigan and not being able to enjoy him right away was a hard thought to take indeed! Then I found out that the hospital where the kids were having the baby would allow ~~one~~ allotted visitor+ to be at the hospital. They then asked me if I wanted to be that one visitor or if I wanted to take care of my awesome 2 year old granddaughter. How could I say ~~Yes!~~+to both options?

Then, as the COVID counts became higher and higher, the hospital changed to zero visitors. I was devastated at the news! So disappointing!!! BUT, that made me the babysitter. I was still very disappointed but knew I would enjoy my time with my granddaughter. Still, it felt a bit like a second rate consolation prize. Then the time came. The baby was coming. I drove to the kids' house and saw them off to the hospital. I was no longer disappointed or feeling cheated in anyway. I was still so excited to meet the new baby. For I knew that I cannot be sad for long when my granddaughter is around! I loved the time we spent together! I was so blessed to be able to spend this one-on-one time with her. AND I was in regular contact with the kids and got pictures within minutes after my grandson arrived! My granddaughter and I even got to video chat with the new baby brother and the new parents! How could anyone be disappointed! It was pure JOY as that burst bubble became the best of both worlds!

**Prayer:** Lord, help us remember that You are always with us and that You will help us bear whatever burdens or disappointments come our way. What a joy it is to know that You have wonderful plans for us and small disappointment will be turned to joy! Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Be happy and supportive of others, no matter what is going on in your own life. It certainly won't hurt and it might help!

Laurie Griffith

**Wednesday, March 31, 2021**

## **PARENTS**

**Scripture:** Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children. Proverbs 17:6

I am so thankful for God in my life, church, family, friends and my free country. We live with all the privileges we enjoy. Especially I thank God for my loving parents.

I want to share with you about them. They were not regular churchgoers, but they were obviously Christians by their beliefs and dedication to their family and for the way they treated and cared for everyone.

When my dad's father died in 1922, he was only two years old. He supported his mom from the time he was old enough to work until she passed. Even in the Army, he sent all his pay home to her so that she could remain in her own home. We lived in a small farming community where he was the only mailman. He was well known, loved and respected. As a father, he always worked two jobs to support his family, while he went often without. He wanted us to play sports while we were growing up, something he couldn't do. He was a wonderful role model with a great big smile and a mischievous sense of humor, and he always had a twinkle in his eye.

My mom came from a broken home, missing out on parts of life because of circumstances. She was a wonderful mother who worked as a nurse to support our family. Even though she worked hard, we always had a clean house and a balanced meal every day. She was a wonderful listener and kept three boys in line as well!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I am so thankful for the parents who loved us and made sure we had all we needed. Both were wonderful role models as long as they lived and in memory as well. Thank You. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** There are many children who do not have such a loving, supportive home life. Do what you can to help at least one of them — even today.

Mike McGhan

**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021**

**THE SERVANT KING**

**Scripture:** Read John 13:1-20

At a recent Senior High retreat, we had a worship service where a part of it was to wash another's feet. As expected, there was some complaining beforehand about this. There were feelings of embarrassment over having someone know that their feet might have an odor. There were feelings of indignation about even doing such a thing. I was aware of all these feelings as well as my own concern that this could flop. I prepared a short meditation on how the disciples must have felt. They, too, were embarrassed and indignant because Jesus was washing their feet. After all, He was their Master, their Leader. How could He be doing such a thing? This was a job to be performed by servants.

Jesus replied was, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are correct. But if I, as your Lord, have washed your feet, you also should wash others' feet. You should follow My example."

Now I do not think Jesus meant we ought to go around with a tub of water and towel and wash people's feet. What Jesus was saying was that true greatness is not measured in how many people serve you, but in how you are willing to serve others, regardless of how menial the task may seem. When we are willing to get down on our knees and clean the dirt and grime from another of God's children, then we reflect the touch of the Master.

**Prayer:** Lord, mold me into Your image. In the name of the Servant King. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** "And the King will answer them. "Truly I say to you, as you do it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." Matthew 25:40

Pastor Eric Beck

Written in 1983 when Eric was Associate Pastor at FUMER. He is now retired and attending FUMER again.

**Good Friday, April 2, 2021**

**THANKFULNESS IN DEATH**

**Scripture:** Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! II Corinthians 9:15

When I tried to think of what I am grateful for- especially this year- I couldn't stop naming things.

But first of all I am thankful for a death! What, you say? How can you ever be thankful for a death? Well, it was the death of my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the most meaningful death to ever happen on the face of this earth. It means that He died to take away all of our sin, each individual person. What better gift is there than this?

Along with that He came to give us life- more abundantly. He provides for our every need, protects us from all danger, disease and viruses. Oh, yes, we do get them but even if we should die, He will carry us safely to our home in heaven. He gives us guidance and direction and even imparts wisdom whenever we ask for any of this. He loves us more than life itself. What better love is there than that?

As we face every new day, He will always be with us, never to leave us nor forsake us. His presence is a comfort to us on any occasion. We are even given the promise of eternal life in a place far better than we have here on earth and with new bodies and minds where we will never see any heartaches, health issues, sorrow or death again. So, now, what are you grateful for this year?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord and Savior, we can't even find enough words to tell You "thank you" for all You have done for us throughout our lives and in the fact You came to this earth to die for us and give us the promise of a new life with You. May we ever be grateful for every day and in every way that You are our living Savior. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Where does your thankfulness begin?

Phyllis Smith

**Saturday, April 3, 2021**

**SERVING OUR LORD**

**Scripture:** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.+ Matthew 28:19

How often are we really grateful? It is so easy to take acts of kindness for granted. Paul died five years ago and I haven't really adjusted to being alone. I finally learned there are many things I can't handle. I moved into an apartment in Eaton Rapids, having sold my house on the campgrounds this past year to a young family. Our lives change over the years. I lived there 22 years with my first husband, Jim, and after his death, with Paul. I'm very thankful for my friends. They are so willing to help me and often include me in their activities.

At my Bible study here in Florida, we are studying the book of Acts. One of the first things the teacher said was, "How can God be Father, Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit, all in One?" She said, "I don't understand it but I know it's true. Yes, and someday we'll understand." I am most grateful that Jesus was willing to go to the cross for me! I'm not worthy of His sacrifice. We talked about the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on those gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The Apostles were filled so they could speak other languages and preach to others in their own tongue. God was with them wherever they went. Why are Christians filled with the Holy Spirit? I don't speak another language, but I am filled with gratitude and concern for others.

When I visited Israel, I walked the route Jesus took to His death. I remember tears coming down my face knowing that I am not worthy, but that He loved me! There are a lot of things I cannot do, but I can do what He asks me to do, especially sharing concern for others, and telling them of His love for them.

**Prayer:** God, we love You. Be with us in these troubled times. Give us the strength and courage to serve You. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Always listen to the Lord and serve Him every day.

Barb Kerekes

**Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021**

**ALWAYS CHOOSE JOY**

**Scripture:** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell His disciples. Matthew 28:8

The last few years have been a series of changes for me. Some harder than others and some where I wanted to quit. But then I heard a song from the Sidewalk Prophets, Smile. The line that says "A little change in your point of view could be just what you need. There's always a reason to always choose joy."

What a life changer. It was my affirmation. I CHOOSE JOY. When I was overwhelmed. When I wanted to quit. When I wanted to hide in my room and cry, I would look up to heaven and tell God, "I choose Joy." Some days were harder than others, but just reminding myself that, "I choose Joy" would get me through. People would ask me why I was always happy and I would say, "I choose Joy." And maybe, just maybe my Joy can be contagious.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, in the times when we cannot cheer someone up with the smile hidden under a mask, let us spread the Joy that You gave us and sacrificed for us. That is a love, a Joy, that no one can destroy. I choose Joy, Lord. I choose Joy. In the name of our risen Lord, Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Just remember that the storm only lasts for a while, so choose Joy .. and smile. God can see it.

Jean Burk

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