

*Take It to The Lord  
in Prayer*



*Devotions for Lent 2023*



**F U M E R**

FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF  METHODIST CHURCH OF EATON RAPIDS

**LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2023**

**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 “Take it to the Lord in Prayer...”, 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 Pastor Melany Chalker for the artwork used in the cover design. We thank Irene Vittoz for the formatting and printing. We also we all those who helped collate them.

May you experience Christ anew this Lent as we  
“Take it to the Lord in Prayer...”

Joyce Showerman and Irene Vittoz  
Editors  
Lent 2023

## I WANT TO SURRENDER!

Who are the ones I hold dearest, that would be so hard to release?  
What do I cling to and cherish ... what brings me the most joy and peace?  
What is the star that I reach for ... is it health, talent, money, or fame?  
What of my earthly possessions ... could I love them and still be the same?  
What would it mean to surrender ... can I trust God with all of this?  
Is He truly good and kind-hearted, or have scriptures led me amiss?

My prayer, dear God, is You will search me ...  
Search the very depths of my heart ...  
Show me the things that I cling to ... that if lost, it would tear me apart.  
Then help me willingly offer each thing that was identified  
As a loving sacrifice to You ... Oh God, help me this to decide.  
I know in my heart I can trust You, yet the clinging still clutches my soul  
I want — I so want — to surrender, yet fear dictates need for control.

Dear God, I am torn in two pieces ... I desire to give You my all,  
But then I am fearful and selfish, and each sacrifice seems too tall.  
But even were I to surrender everything I would claim as my own,  
My sacrifice never could measure Your sacrifice which stands alone.  
For You gave Your Son to redeem us, and this is my answer, I see...  
How could I not give You my all  
When You're given so much to me!

Marie A. Florian  
First published in Lenten Devotional 2004

**Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023**

**Get Away with Me**

**Scripture:** “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” *Matthew 11.28-30*

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is a Christian hymn originally written by preacher Joseph M. Scriven as a poem in 1855 to comfort his mother, who was living in Ireland while he was in Canada. One reason I believe this hymn still touches so many is the truth therein. “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”

We are ambitious, goal-setting humans who overflow our calendars daily. We like to plan ahead, make lists, and be the go-getters we think everyone else wants us to be. But what if that isn’t whom God wants us to be? What if our Creator wants us to get away with him? And not once a year for a family vacation, but throughout the year, on a regular and ongoing basis? What if we took God up on his invitation to “Come to me” today, tomorrow, and throughout not just Lent, but the entire year?

My guess is, we would truly find rest. “Real rest.” We would learn, as Jesus shared, how to live freely and lightly. Wow. Freely and lightly sound pretty good right about now. War in the world, friends and neighbors suffering health concerns, loved ones dying, violence reoccurring day after day after day... Yah. Freely and lightly sound *darn* good!

**Prayer:** Gracious and Inviting God, we take you up on your offer this Lenten Season! Let’s do it! Let’s get away together, today and tomorrow too. Let’s talk and cry and laugh together. I would love to keep company with you and learn to live freely and lightly. Thank you for asking. My heart swells in gratitude. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Are you tired? Burned out? Come to God, through Jesus. Get away together and you’ll recover your life.

Pastor Melany Chalker

**Thursday, February 23, 2023**

**What a Friend We Have in Jesus**

**Scripture:** "... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". *Philippians 4:6-7*

The theme for 2023 is "**Take it to the Lord in Prayer ...**" which is from the beloved song: "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*", written by Joseph M. Scriven in 1855. All of us have, or will have, great losses in our lives. Things happen that we don't understand; pain and grief come to all of us throughout our lives. Aren't we glad that we do not have to handle these hurts, pains, and losses alone? Indeed, we need to learn to take these needs to the Lord in prayer!

Joseph M. Scrivan faced two huge, almost unbelievable, losses in his life. As a young man, he watched in shock as the body of his fiancée was pulled from the lake. They were to be married the next day. In grief, he then emigrated from Ireland to Canada. He wrote, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" ten years later, in 1855, and sent it to his mother back in Ireland. She quickly had it published and it became a very popular hymn, but no one knew for sure who had written it. Meanwhile, Joseph fell in love again. But tragedy struck a second time when his fiancée, Eliza Roche, contracted tuberculosis and died in 1860 before their wedding could take place. However, Scrivan never lost his faith in Jesus, but continued his own Christian ministry, doing charity work and preaching the love of Jesus to others. Shortly before his own death in 1896, when asked if he had written "What a Friend", his reply was, "The Lord and I did it between us."

**Prayer:** Lord, even in troubles and losses, we are so thankful that we can always turn to You. Thank You for being our very best Friend. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Even in times of great trouble and despair, remember to "Take it to the Lord in Prayer." You will indeed find solace there.

Joyce Showerman

Friday, February 24, 2023

**What a Friend!**

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

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry, everything to God in Prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear.  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge! Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do Thy friends despise, forsake Thee? Take it the Lord in prayer.  
In His arms He'll take and shield thee: thou wilt find a solace there.

Joseph M. Scriven, 1855

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for this powerful song. We ask you to help us use it this Lent as we grow in our faith. In Jesus' precious 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 25, 2023**

**Learning to Stop Worrying**

**Scripture:** “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” *2 Peter 5:6-7*

Overwhelming. That is how life seems oftentimes. I am tired so I go to bed. But instead of drifting off, the thoughts spin about in my head. “How are my grandsons going to be okay without their mother?” “What are we going to do to help when family/friends have needs?” “How is my younger daughter going to be able to handle two disabled, pre-teen sons as they mature and she gets older?” And even...” What in the world am I going to write in this year’s devotional?” Sleep doesn’t come easily, but eventually my mind relaxes. Do my nights need to be this way?

I know about anxiety. I also know the value of living in the present and letting tomorrow take care of itself, and that God is always with me. So why is it that I don’t consistently trust in His wisdom and guidance in my daily life? This is my struggle, and the scripture above spoke to me recently. It says to “humble” myself. I must learn that I am not - nor should I be - in control!

God is listening. He is with me every step of the way. His solutions will appear “in due time.” Thanks be to God for using this devotion-writing and this verse to enlighten me.

**Prayer:** Dear God in heaven, thank You for Your presence in my life, even on the days I don’t savor Your love. You have blessed me with insight and peace, with love (even through loss), and with so many wonderful memories. I pray that I might be more aware of Your gifts and of my responsibility to share Your love. Amen

**Thought for the Day:** Just don’t waste your time worrying - it won’t change a thing! Instead, simply pray.

Sue Woodard

**Sunday, February 26, 2023**

**Not Getting the Starring Role - Humility**

**Scripture:** For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each other.... Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your estimation. *Romans 12: 3, 16*

Have you ever had that once in a lifetime opportunity come before you and you think, “Yes, this is the job I have been praying for! You know I can do this Lord, you saw me doing it for years! The timing is perfect in your life, prayers are answered!” Yes, you know there are others feeling the same way; however, you’ve been praying for this for so long this has to be it! You go through the entire process, have your references contacted. Let’s do this!! Then it doesn’t happen; it is someone else's answered prayer. Now your pride is disguised as insecurity! And what does insecurity bring? Pulling away from friends, family, and yes, even God, creating loneliness and anxiety.

Thank goodness God still is holding His hand out to you even if you do not want to reach for it. He provides everything you need to get back to Him. Here is the prayer He gave to me, to help me reach my hand out to Him again.

**Prayer:** Meet me, Oh Christ, in this stillness of morning. Move me, O Spirit, to quiet my heart. Mend me, Oh Father, from yesterday’s harms. From the discords of yesterday, resurrect my peace. From the discouragement of yesterday, resurrect my hope. From the weariness of yesterday, resurrect my strength. From the doubts of yesterday, resurrect my love. Let me enter this new day, aware of my need, and awaken to Your grace, O Lord. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Where do you need our Lord today?

Ilene Morrison

**Monday, February 27, 2023**

**Planning**

**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 2019, I was always comforted thinking, “Next year...” But things changed. I seem to have lost hope in “next year”, but I’m trying to hold on. Change is one thing, but it just keeps coming. Just when I think I’ve got life back in order, there’s a new variant. New protections. New shots. New procedures. Masks or no masks. Countries around the world are devastated. And funerals. An unending stream of funerals. I think that I’ve attended more funerals in the last three years than ever in my life. I’m tired.

**Prayer:** It’s time for me to stop trying to deal with this alone. Lord, it’s Yours. All Yours. I just don’t have the strength anymore. Help me to be conscious of Your presence today. Help me to see the plan You have for me. Help me to follow Your lead. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Hope is all there is. Hope in You, Lord. Help me to lay down the reins and simply follow Your lead. And remember Your Joyce Griffith’s 2023 Devotional words: “For I know the plans I have for you, saith the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”. *Jeremiah 29:11.*

Joyce Griffith

**Tuesday, February 28, 2023**

**A Time to Think**

**Scripture:** The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’. *Matthew 25: 40*

Over the years I’ve taken many cross-country motorcycle trips, bypassing the interstate highway in favor of two-lane state and federal highways to get across the country. Last summer I saw a sign on a grain bin in Iowa proclaiming, “What does God want you to do today?” I thought about the words on that sign many times during the trip. After we turn off the unnecessary noise in our lives, I think the answer is obvious. What God wants us to do today is pretty simple if we take time to put it in perspective. It’s the little things that will make a difference. Maybe we start by being polite and doing unto our neighbor as we would like our neighbor to do unto us. Maybe we think about being the hands, feet and voice of Jesus today as we go about our day. Maybe it’s helping those less fortunate than ourselves. Maybe it’s being a listening ear for someone in need. The list is endless. Each of us has been blessed and each of us can make a difference in the world around us. Living, loving, caring, helping and listening will all bring Glory to God. It’s up to each of us to consider what God really wants us to do today and then act accordingly.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we thank You for the new day and the opportunities that lie before us. Be with us today as we go about our business and help us to model the actions of Your Son Jesus Christ as we walk with Him today. Help us to do good through our efforts today, keeping our focus on You and Your Son. Watch over us to keep us safe as we look for ways to share Your love with those we encounter. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Every morning is a new beginning, a new blessing, a new hope. It's a perfect day because it's God's gift to us. So be sure and make the most of it.

Eric Larson

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023**

**God Walks with Us Even When We Can't See Him**

**Scripture:** The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore. *Psalm 121:8*

A few years ago, I was trying to help one of my sisters find a new place to live for her and her family after they received an eviction notice. Years before that, she had temporarily lived with us, and I found it an extremely difficult situation. With many prayers, the day of eviction was two days away but every place we looked at for one reason or another was not available to her. I was very discouraged and dreaded what might happen. We went to one last place and when the landlord asked when my sister wanted to move in, I was shocked and could hardly believe it.

That place worked very well for many more years. God was there in the search all that time and knew which was the best place. All my fears should have been replaced by faith. God seemed very pokey to me, but His time was right!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to never doubt that You are always beside us and walking with us. Help us to wait for You with faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God's timing is often not ours, but He is faithful.

Charlotte Williams

**Thursday, March 2, 2023**

**Don't Worry About Anything**

**Scripture:** Read Philippians 4:6

Can you imagine never worrying about anything?! I certainly cannot! Since Covid, worry has unfortunately been more frequent in my life. Worrying about the future, worrying about my family, worrying about what others think about me, worrying when I mess up; worry, worry, worry. It's like the list could almost be endless! The good news is that I don't have to worry about anything because God has it all figured out! God doesn't just say, "Hey! You probably shouldn't really worry about that." No, He commands us to not worry, and He even gives us a strategy for when we do worry. Prayer!

Through Paul, we are told "**Don't** worry about **anything**; instead **pray** about **everything!**" And again, Jesus said in Matthew 6:25; "So I tell you **don't worry** about everyday life..." These are not suggestions but commands!

Thankfully, Paul gives us two things that we can specifically pray for when those inevitable worries do creep into our thinking. The first thing we are to do is to tell God what we need. Say to Him, "God I need to stop worrying about..." After we tell God what we need, then thank Him for what He has done. One strategy that helps me to pray through my worry is to do a 'breath prayer' and simply breathe in while I tell God my need and then exhale when I thank Him. I then repeat this breathing rhythm several times and I am refocused on God and the anxiety has left.

**Prayer:** God, thank You for knowing that we would have worries in life and for giving us Your word to help us through those times when we do worry. Help me to always come to You in prayer instead of worrying through my anxieties. Help me to center my thoughts back on You by telling You what I need and by praising You for all You have done. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything!"

Samantha Carroll

**Friday, March 3, 2023**

**Prayer Warriors Make a Difference**

**Scripture:** Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. *Jeremiah 29:12*

I attend the Women's Bible Study led by Joyce Showerman on Thursday mornings. In early December I shared that I was feeling overwhelmed. My father, Charlie Page, lives in my house and is currently in "at home" Hospice. My daughter, Lisa, also lives with me. She has a form of Muscular Dystrophy and needs oxygen much of the time. I had recently taken Lisa to the ER with severe back pain. The Doctor felt she might be having a gall bladder attack. Due to her lung issues, she is at high risk for surgery. As I was explaining all this to the women in Bible Study, I was very emotional. These wonderful women immediately got up and came over to comfort and support me. Joyce then had them lay hands on me and pray for Dad, Lisa, and myself.

The next day Dad was more alert and cooperative in his care. Later Lisa and I met with a surgeon who said the gall bladder was not inflamed or retaining water. He recommended she not have any surgery. I was led to change my own attitude in caring for Dad. I found that as I relaxed, he improved. All of this made a huge difference for us.

I am always stunned at how quickly prayers are answered. Dad is still in bad shape but much more manageable. Lisa still has lung and other issues but is not facing life-threatening surgery. I feel much more able to cope. I cannot thank my Bible Study group enough for their prayers.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for surrounding me with so many prayer warriors. Thank You for answers to the prayers we make. What a blessing to worship with other believers. In Christ's name, Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Never hesitate to ask for prayer. FUMER's prayer chain is a fast track to prayer warriors.

Loann Snell

**Saturday, March 4, 2023**

**Serving Others**

**Scripture:** Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. *1 Peter 4:10*

Many years ago, when FUMER was having a mission trip auction, I made a cash donation because I couldn't attend the actual event. Later Joyce Showerman invited me to participate and after much thought, I accepted. That trip had a big impact on my life, and I've participated in every mission trip since. On that particular trip, I saw the devastation a family experienced when a tornado ripped through their home and what volunteers had done before us to help the family rebuild. It opened my eyes to the many blessings God had placed into my own life and for all God had provided for our family. It was a week of helping someone, getting to know both the people we served and those on our team who worked beside each other. We lived together for the week, ate together, prayed and worshiped together, laughed together and yes, even shed a tear or two together.

Mission trips aren't always about helping someone who's been through a disaster. People also need help due to employment issues, financial hardships, and illness or maybe they need assistance due to age or physical limitations. It's not up to us to judge the need or situation, but instead to be there to lend a hand and to show them God's love.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your mighty works, Your holy Son, Your awesome people and Your beautiful earth. In the wake of everything that happens, we know You are there. You have given us the best; the sun to warm and the rain to nourish, and You've given it to everyone, regardless, including the good and the bad. Let us recognize neighbors in need as opportunities to be more like Your Son and more like You created us to be. Father, let us reflect Your love by lifting our hands, lifting our prayers along with donating our time and financial resources to help others. By our actions may we show hope, kindness, and love to those we encounter. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Do not judge anyone with a burden, but instead, lend your shoulder to help them carry the load.

Eric Larson

**Sunday, March 5, 2023**

**Pray With Shameless Audacity**

**Scripture:** Luke 11:5-10 NIV (Read Below)

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, the Gospel of Luke records that He taught them the Lord's Prayer, and then He immediately gave them the following parable to further illustrate the way to effectively pray:

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:5-10 NIV)

So, when Jesus was asked how we should pray, his advice was to do it "with shameless audacity." Sometimes this is translated as acting with "persistence" or "importunity." Because the point is, God does not give us what we ask because he is our "friend." No, God does not help us out because he likes us, or we deserve it. Rather, it is because he takes mercy on us. It is because of our persistence, our importunity, or our "shameless audacity" that he gives us as much as we need. Jesus says to just ask, seek, knock . . . and the door will be opened.

**Prayer:** Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Thank You for allowing me to bring ANY prayer request to You, no matter how audacious, no matter how shameful, no matter how small. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Jesus says it's OK to just ask, and keep asking.

Steven Peters

**Monday, March 6, 2023**

**Incubator Haven**

**Scripture:** Read Proverbs 3:5-6

In 1973, recently graduated and newly married, I left home to start a new life. My life. I was happy and excited. Hurray for me! Shortly thereafter, I went from the frying pan (safe, secure) into the fire (abused, uncertain insecure). When I returned in 1992, after two failed marriages, the second and longest being abusive and destructive, I had hit bottom. Very insecure and with little or no self-respect or self-esteem. I was done. Burnt up. My life had crumbled and me along with it.

A year or so later, in a conversation with my mother, she asked me if I believed in God. Without hesitation, I told her she didn't want my answer to that question. Over the next couple of years, she asked me to come to church with her, help with the rummage sale, and help out with some of the other things she did at the church. I eventually did start helping with the rummage sales, and even came to church once or twice a year, even though I didn't need it. I wasn't sure there was a God, and if there was, why did He hate me? This was my thought process. When I started helping at the rummage sales, I had to come to the church, and every time I was there, it felt like I had walked into another world. It was as if I was in an incubator. I got a calm, cool, quiet feeling that rushed through me.

In 1996 I met "Mr. Finally Right", and we married in 1997. We both joined the church within three years. We attended regularly and helped out wherever we could, until COVID hit. Yes, there is a God and He does love me!!! And it's a wonderful life.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for the influence and persistence of each person who draws us toward You, and who do not give up on us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God puts us in His incubator, then climbs in with us.

Judy Farnum

First printed in Lenten Devotional on March 29, 2003

**Tuesday, March 7, 2023**

**True Identity**

**Scripture:** “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” *1 John 3:1-3*

This scripture and title are from the Upper Room, August 2022. As I read it, it brought back memories of when I was in Germany. I had gone there with a group to Oberammergau, where the Passion Play is put on every 10 years. The entire town participates in producing the play.

We then went to Florence, Italy, and saw the beautiful statue of David. We could even see the veins carved in his arms and hands. We also had the privilege of seeing the painting of the Last Supper.

I left the group then and went to visit my friend who had been an exchange teacher in Eaton Rapids. After touring a castle, we were sitting outside eating ice cream. A family walked by, talking very fast, but I recognized the accent. When talking with them, I found out they were from Indiana, my home state. People often laugh when I say Washington. I always put an “R” in the word, saying “Warshington.”

It should be true that people can recognize by our words and actions that we belong to the family of God. We are His children. We are to live by Jesus’ teachings, that people will see us as His children and glorify Him.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for loving and dying for us. May our lives reflect Your love. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Can people see that you belong to the Family of God today?

Barb Kerekes

**Wednesday, March 8, 2023**

### **My Lilac Bush**

**Scripture:** A bruised reed He will not break. And a smoldering wick, He will not snuff out. *Isaiah 42:3*

My beloved small lilac bush sat at the entrance to our farm driveway. One fateful summer day, I heard a road grader coming down our road on a maintenance mission. I ran out in horror and discovered that my beloved lilac had not only been uprooted; it was many feet down the road. With tears in my eyes, I replanted it, and hoped it would survive. I had almost returned to the house when I heard the grader approach again. Once more, my lilac was uprooted and dragged down the road. At that point, I took it and planted it safely in our yard. Although I was afraid it would not survive, it grew, and much to my surprise, bloomed again!

I often feel like that little shrub as life batters me. Circumstances and events in this world are not always easy, and on occasion, I feel as if I cannot bear to continue on – trying to bloom and grow. During those times, even prayer seems impossible, and I can simply mutter, “Lord, have mercy.” Then, I am reminded of God’s faithfulness. He promises that He will not break me or extinguish my hope (Isaiah 42:3). He will never leave me (Deut. 31:8). I am not facing anything that He did not face (Hebrews 4:15). He knows that I am weak (Psalm 103:14). It is then that I can thank God for always being beside me and for carrying me during the toughest of times.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, that even when it feels as if we cannot continue on, You are our faithful friend who is always there. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Yes, we can trust God’s faithfulness, always!

Linda Jones

**Thursday, March 9, 2023**

**Trust and Prayer**

**Scripture:** So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. *Ezra 8:23*

Roger Knapp tells this story:

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

God sometimes answers prayer in unexpected ways. Disasters can lead us to salvation. We just need to trust in His goodness and mercy.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for answering our prayer, even when our faith waivers. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Keep the faith; keep praying. Trust God.

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Friday, March 10, 2023**

**Zonotrichia Leucophrys**

**Scripture:** Read Genesis 1:1

I was watching my bird feeder one fall day and noticed the White-crowned Sparrows. I hadn't seen them since spring when they were migrating through, on their way toward the breeding grounds of northern Canada, even Alaska. I first learned about them during our winter stay in southern Arizona.

It was an enlightening moment. Here was this diminutive creature that may migrate thousands of miles each year, completing a lifecycle created as the glaciers retreated and advanced. Like this little snowbird, among thousands of others, I migrate 2000 miles one way from Michigan to Arizona to spend each winter. What astonishes me is the possibility the birds at my feeder are the same ones I might observe when in Arizona. This small sparrow uses and depends upon only nature's creation over the millennium.

I cannot cease to be amazed at this creation masterminded by a supreme creator that exists beyond the realm of our time and space. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." 1 Timothy 4:4 RSV. Today humans are rejecting this wonderful creation called planet earth, an Eden in an abyss of space. Humankind was placed in this "garden to till it and keep it." Genesis 2:15. We are not doing well.

Creation is happening in a continuum of eternity. There was a beginning. ". . . so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." Hebrews 11:3. The environment and our natural resources are existential to anything else as well as the quality of life, especially for our children. Let us take it (our environment) to the lord in prayer.

**Prayer:** Our Lord of all creation, let me see and value your beauty and wonder throughout the earth and beyond, into the universe, and even into eternity. Help me to live each day as if tomorrow I might be ushered into a new realm of reality and that I might carry with me the beauty and wonder of the garden you so graciously allowed me to experience. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** May I see and bask in the beauty of this garden and understand what I must do to "till and keep it".

Ted Meijer

**Saturday, March 11, 2023**

**What a Friend We Have -- in JESUS!**

**Scripture:** Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me I and in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. *John 15:4-5*

What a friend we have indeed! John is my favorite gospel; I always come back to it because that's where I came to understand that Jesus' promise: We are one in God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. But I am human and I sometimes pull back into myself. I pout, complain, resent and fear. It's what my little self does, and then I am the branch cut off from the vine. So I can do nothing, according to Jesus.

"Remain in Me as I remain in you" is God's constant promise! The only question is -- do I choose to live in union? In the second half of my life I do choose union more than not. The only way I can achieve this is by prayer. I pray every day for the strength, courage and wisdom to surrender my will to God's. Sometimes I say this prayer more than once a day. I do know every time I choose love, respect, compassion, service and sympathy that I am in Union with Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank You for the blessing of a new day. May I choose to live it in You. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** I have never been separate from God except in my thoughts, but my thoughts don't make it true. We are all in this together! Peace and Love. "Love must always precede knowledge!" Richard Rohr

Randy Taylor

**Sunday, March 12, 2023**

**Mom Comes into Our House**

**Scripture:** “Don’t be afraid for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with My victorious right hand.” *Isaiah 41:10*

When I got the word that my mom’s rehab facility had seven cases of COVID, my heart dropped! Mom had just moved into her independent apartment the day after we had celebrated her 104th birthday. She was excited about her new adventure and was looking forward to having friends to be with during the long winter months ahead. Little did she know that just 2½ months later she would fall and break her pelvis, ending up in this rehab facility. Because of COVID we couldn’t even go in to see her and she was lonely, afraid and in pain.

My husband looked at me as we got the news, saying, “Let’s go get Mom and bring her here!” Without hesitation, my sister and I drove to the rehab facility and picked her up. She was delighted to be with family because her biggest fear was if she were to die, she did not want to be alone! Little did I know the impact of Mom moving into our home. Soon Hospice became involved. With their help, and other caregivers too, Mom thrived and was able to live her life where she wanted to be, among family.

Mom died on April 12, 2022 after almost two years with us. Looking back, I remember how afraid I was of caring for her properly. How could I do it? I got my strength from Isaiah 41:10 (See scripture above.) It was one of the hardest jobs I’ve ever had, but I’m so glad we had the opportunity to give Mom two happy years with us!

**Prayer:** Thank You, God, for being with us and supporting and strengthening us in our journey with Mom. You were always there! Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** We are never alone, God is present! When a challenge comes your way, know that God will give you the strength to deal with it.

Anne Comer

**Monday, March 13, 2023**

**Divine Providence**

**Scripture:** “And whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”. *John 14:13*

In early July 1952 I landed at Pusan, Korea, got on a train and the next morning I was 30-40 miles in N. Korea at the Main Line of Resistance. We were well fortified with artillery. I was assigned to E. Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Division. I was given a Browning Automatic Recoilless Machine Gun (B.A.R.) to fight the war with. It weighed 18 pounds and I had never fired one. I know without a doubt that my mother, Frances Hall, and her parents, Erving and Laura Harshey, prayed for me every day while I was in Korea. After two weeks of carrying that B.A.R., my company was all given the chance to volunteer to join Battalion S2 (infantry intelligence), but no one did. Later I joined it as a front line F.O. (Forward Observer). For the next ten months I fought the war with a 30-power telescope.

In church several years ago, Dan Tink, who had lost a brother in that war, asked if I would like to read a book on the Korean War. I got to April 16, 1953 and read “At 10:00 p.m. Chinese forces attacked Pork Chop Hill, E. Company, 31<sup>st</sup> Regiment.” My former company! I was in a bunker on the M.L.R. overlooking Pork Chop Hill with that telescope and using a tank gun to help our boys out!

**Prayer:** Lord, even before I knew You as my Savior, Your Divine Presence was with me. Thank You. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** “He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His Own.”

Ed Hall

**Tuesday, March 14, 2023**

**When the Quiet Is Loud**

**Scripture:** Read I Kings 19: 11-12

Have you ever experienced complete silence? A place with absolutely no sound: no distant birds chirping, no faraway sounds of people, no traffic, no waves lapping on shore, no leaves rustling in a faint breeze, no faint mechanical humming? Complete and total silence?

Many years ago, I was in such a place. Our small group had stopped at a pull-out on an off-road trail high in the Rocky Mountains. There had been no other traffic; above was a bright blue sky and majestic mountain tops surrounded us. God's beauty at its best! Yet the air was completely still. No grass waving, no animals scurrying, no distant sounds. It felt very eerie. My ears were straining to hear something, anything really. Our small group sat totally silent for a several minutes when someone quietly whispered "The quiet is so loud". Indeed, the quiet was loud, but so was that very soft and low whisper. Would you hear God calling if it was a whisper, perhaps in an unsuspected quiet place?

The hymn "God Is Calling through the Whisper" reminds us God calls us in many different ways including through relationships with others, nature, beauty, music and unsuspecting situations. God is calling, can you hear? Do you strain to hear God's voice while carrying out routines, in comfortable spaces with noises around you that are so common you mentally tune them out? God is calling, can you hear the whisper? Can you hear God's soft and low whisper in the silence?

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for the silence. Help us turn down the noise and allow our hearts to hear You wherever, whenever and however You call to us. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Listen to this hymn and/or read the lyrics (Google is your friend). How can you experience silence today and listen for God's whisper?

Chris Larson

**Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

**Loneliness**

**Scripture:** Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. *Psalm 25:16-17*

When Joyce Showerman asked me to write a devotion, I had no idea where to begin. Why? Because this year was so full of God talk. God talk! What? Exactly what I said. Recently I had a virus that lasted over 30 days. I was so out of it. I knew I needed to stay home, alone.

Alone is not my style. I love being with people. Lots of people. Different people. I'm active in quilting groups here in Eaton Rapids, online and in my Florida Guild, too. I am also in the Women's Bible Study and our choir here. Did I mention the Coffee Hour after church? If you come to the early service, the Coffee Hour catches people from both services. Lots of people! I often follow the church service and Coffee Hour with lunch at Robin's Nest! People!

God gave us relationships because He couldn't be with us in person all the time. There are so many of us! Others with great problems need Him, too. He responds to our prayers. There are just so many of us just being lonely.... Well, you understand. God listens. He hears us. He knows about illnesses and loneliness. Reading the scriptures helped me through it. And friends who called or sent a card, what a blessing they were! If you've never thought of yourself as 'God sent', think again. When you call or send a card, you are touching someone for Him. You are God sent!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, make me an instrument of Your love. Help me to see the loneliness in others. Help me to have the ears to hear their pain. Help me to show Your love to those who are lonely. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Lord, make me an instrument of Your love and peace.

Joyce Griffith

**Thursday, March 16, 2023**

**Loaves and Fishes**

**Scripture:** Read Matthew 15:29-38

When I was assigned my first church, I met with the former pastor. I was given the keys to the church and a little book titled *Ending with Hope*. I was told that there were only ten in attendance on an average Sunday, and there was no money. I had not even started my seminary education, but I couldn't bear the thought of my first church closing. There was only one thing I could do. I got down on my knees and prayed, "Oh, God, please – not on my watch. Don't let the church close."

What does one do when there is no money and few people to ask for more? Ask God for help. The only mention of money to the congregation was that God expects us to tithe, to give our first fruits to Him. Once the collection plates were returned to the front, they were placed on the altar. We prayed, "God, we have done our part. Now we ask that you do yours. Please multiply our tithes and offerings so that there will be enough for Your ministries here in this church."

We did this each Sunday, and God was faithful. We had enough to meet expenses. We had enough to buy an audio system and video projector. We had enough to give to hospice and other local charities as well as individuals in crisis. Then we even had enough to redecorate the entire church. It all snowballed. More people came to church, and we had enough to hire a superb Sunday School teacher. Children started showing up, and bringing their parents or grandparents. It was wonderful. We saw that prayer was the answer. It is always the answer.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for Your faithful answers to heart-felt prayer. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God's resources are limitless. Ask and you will receive some.

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Friday, March 17, 2023**

**Love of God**

**Scripture:** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”  
***John 13:34-35***

When I was assigned to my first church, lack of money was one problem. The other was few in attendance. How do you get people to come to church? Once again, I fell down on my knees and started praying for God to send people to our little church in the country. I prayed that God would send an angel up and down the nearby roads to sing a siren song, drawing them to church. I prayed that the light of Christ would pour out of the bell tower like a lighthouse, warning of danger and guiding folks to the love of God.

As our evangelism instructor had encouraged, I walked the boundaries of the church lot, praying that all who set foot on the land would feel God’s love and acceptance. I prayed that any discord within the church would be driven out, and only love would remain.

Our congregation was encouraged to love on people who came to church for the first time, welcoming them with glad hearts and inviting them to sit with them. Every person in the congregation welcomed the newcomers, not just the person handing out bulletins. There was no embarrassing mention of newcomers from the pulpit, just quiet approaches by the folks in church. We wore name tags, so that people could quickly learn the names of those in church and feel more a part of the congregation. In a few years, our little church grew from ten in worship to forty. God answered all our prayers.

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for Your faithful answers to heart-felt prayer and Your infinite love. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God’s love is limitless. If you share it, folks will come.

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Saturday, March 18, 2023**

**Comfort My People**

**Scripture:** For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on them in their suffering. *Isaiah 40:13*

Quite a few years ago Jan Boardman and I discovered we shared a common concern for people who had suffered the loss of a loved one. We knew we lacked the time it would take to provide adequate and long-term one-on-one support, so we sought permission to start a Grief Support group, and it was granted.

Quite a few years later, the average attendance at our sessions was 12. Recognizing that grief does not take vacations, we decided to meet year-round and during November and December we meet weekly to address issues that are specific to coping with the holidays.

Emotions run the whole gamut. Many times, the tears flow, but just as often, laughter fills the room. People in all different “stages” of the grieving process attend, and each provides a different perspective on the work of grieving, and it IS work! Hard work!

Unfortunately, Jan’s health forced her to move to Charlotte to live with her daughter; however, I and this ministry were blessed when Kathy Whitman agreed to join me in this ministry. She definitely has a heart for helping others.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, how grateful we are for the many ways You have blessed this ministry. We pray for wisdom for all involved to deal gently and lovingly with each other. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God can create beauty from ashes, turn mourning into dancing, and change weeping into joy.

Alice Botti

**Sunday, March 19, 2023**

**Love Wins**

**Scripture:** Read Mark 12: 29-31

It was Christmas in 1949 and my Sunday School teacher, Ethel Wood, gave me the book, "Spiritual Help for Everyday Problems". I was 16 and I still have this gift. It was my first Bible. This was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

In the past few weeks, I have experienced deep pain, sorrow and loss in the death of my wife, Hope. Every day is a struggle to overcome the darkness. But I want you to know that I feel so blessed by the people of this church. My neighbors, who are members here, make sure that I have plenty of good food to eat. On Sunday mornings so many in the congregation ask how I am doing. After church I enjoy sitting at the table having coffee and cookies with my new friends. Also I have been asked to go out for coffee, which is lots of fun. One morning at church I was given a little book called "Healing After Loss." For me this book is a huge blessing. I have read it twice. Also every Wednesday morning two of our church ladies stop at the Methodist doors on the street for a chat. I can hardly wait until they get to my door. This is so fun and a real blessing to me.

I am so happy being in the midst of a congregation that believes in loving and caring for each other. It is such a blessing for me! Thank you all so much.

**Prayer:** Thank You, God, for always being present in our pain and for giving us Your love and hope for tomorrow. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** We can trust God. He will never forsake us.

Rev. Ron Thompson, Retired

**Monday, March 20, 2023**

**Prayer: Our God Connection**

**Scripture:** “The Lord has listened to my request. The Lord accepts my prayer.” *Psalm 6:9 (CEB)*

I remember a story about prayer that I heard in a sermon many years ago. The pastor spoke about an experience he had as a youth. One summer day, he and a friend took a boat out onto the river that ran through their small Midwestern community. When they had gotten all the way through town, the boys imagined they were explorers and decided to continue downriver to see what discoveries they would find. Things went well at first, but eventually they realized that the current had gotten faster. About that time, they rounded a bend and “discovered” a stretch of white water a short way ahead! The pastor said that he realized they were in trouble and started to pray, but since time was short, all he was able to say was “Oh God!” But, he said, evidently those two words were enough. Both boys got through the rough waters safely.

Whenever I recall this story, I am reminded that God is always near us and always hears our prayers. And that there is no such thing as a prayer that’s too short. In fact, if we really are at a loss for words, the Holy Spirit will wordlessly convey our prayer to God for us (see Romans 8:26-27). I believe that whenever we pray, we don’t need to feel self-conscious about our words, or even lack of words – it’s the reaching out to God that matters most.

**Prayer:** Loving God, Thank You for hearing our prayers. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** No matter how we deliver them, our prayers connect us to God.

Jo Ballard

**Tuesday, March 21, 2023**

**We Are Never Alone!**

**Scripture:** “Oh Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down. You are acquainted with all my ways.” *Psalm 139: 1-3*

In late 2016 I lost my job, started another one and lost that one nine months later. Both companies had been sold and brought in their own people. In the next year and a half, we lost my brother, my mother-in-law, and my sister. We moved four times and bought or sold three houses. One event like these can really amp up the stress level, let alone nine of them. It's not what you expect your sixties to look like.

When the world came to a screeching halt in 2020 and I realized I had permission not to do anything, I took it as a respite from the sorrow and chaos of the previous few years - a time to sit and breathe and think. But then, sorrow and chaos became the norm as the Pandemic continued. I acutely felt the loneliness of being the last one left in my family. I threw myself a Pity Party and dove into a Pity Pot and still do that occasionally, which is a dangerous place to go, especially when you are in recovery. It's a very strange feeling to no longer have anyone in your life who you've always known or someone who has always known you.

Wait. What?

God the Father, Jesus my Savior and the Holy Spirit have been with me before I ever thought to be with Them! Who knows me better than my Creator, my Savior, my Wonderful Counselor and my Comforter? I am never alone!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, please help me to keep talking to You. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** We are never alone.

Cathy Taylor

**Wednesday, March 22, 2023**

**Sam's Song**

**Scripture:** “An Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up” he said, “take the Child and His Mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you...” *Matthew 2:13*

When I was thirteen years old, I had a pocket-sized New Testament. I was the bugler at a Boy Scout Camp in Northern New Jersey. One evening, my tent mate saw that I was reading that little blue book and he asked me what it was. I told him it was a Bible. I don't remember his reaction, but I'm sure it wasn't enthusiastic.

The bugler is a hated person. I had been told that before camp, but I didn't realize then that it was true! The bugler is responsible to keep things running on time; the staff hated to get up, and the campers didn't want to go to bed! Kids threw rocks at me in the dark, while I was playing Taps (which meant it was time to be quiet).

And I was homesick. The Bible said to take it to the Lord in prayer, so one night I decided to try it. I prayed while I walked in the dark to my bugling spots. Suddenly, in my head, I heard Bing and Gary Crosby singing “Sam's Song”. Where did that come from? The words in my head were clear:

*“So forget your troubles and wear a smile,  
You'll find you'll never go wrong.  
If you look to croon this happy tune  
They call it “Sam's Song.”*

I needed that. Did God remind me of that song? Sometimes He works in strange ways – I think He did put those words in my head, just when I needed them.

I learned a lot that summer; perhaps the most significant thing was that God really does care about us and doesn't want us to suffer.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for caring for us, Your children. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** “Just forget your troubles and wear a smile, you'll find you'll never go wrong ...”

Bill Botti

**Thursday, March 23, 2023**

**Welcome! Sign in, Please**

**Scripture:** “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” *Matthew 25: 31-35*

Bellevue (Michigan) was a hustling and bustling place in the mid-1800s! The Eagle Hotel and Tavern was the social hub in town. Overnight guests included out-of-town travelers who had taken the stagecoach from Marshall. My great-great-grandfather, Zachariah Cook, owned and operated it in the 1860’s. Our family has the Eagle Hotel guest registry from Fall 1892 to Spring 1893. Each page is filled with guest names written by them in the sweeping curved writing style of the day, their hometown, and the date of their stay.

Zachariah welcomed guests from large cities (Detroit, Chicago) and small towns too. Yes, Eaton Rapids residents stayed there as well! Occasionally, guests were from out-of-state, just like in the westerns. Zachariah welcomed travelers off the stagecoach, calling them by name as they sign the big ledger book, and directing them to rooms, the tavern or other local places where they could find rest, relaxation and replenishment.

I have yet to find a signature from a famous person to get me on *Antiques Roadshow*, although a four-person orchestra stayed there once. But I have something richer. I have pages of autographs from people who received a warm smile and hospitality from a stranger.

We all can always offer a warm smile, a kind word and a welcoming hand to anyone, if we know them well or not. God gives us opportunities to offer hospitality to others all the time. So smile, welcome them, call them by name and be sure to get their hometown.

**Prayer:** God, encourage me to practice the spiritual gift of hospitality to all - my friends, my family and, yes, to those who are strangers as well. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Sometimes we are travelers, moving towards a new place, a new time, a new goal. When did you experience hospitality from someone you had never met? When did you offer a smile, a kind word or a welcome to a person you did not know very well?

Chris Larson

**Friday, March 24, 2023**

**The Gifts of Prayer**

**Scripture:** Cast your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. *1 Peter 5:7*

I have a Schefflera plant which was given in honor of my husband 5 years ago. Because it holds a significance for me beyond the average plant, I take good care of it by watering, fertilizing, trimming, repotting it as it grows, and positioning it in a sunny area. But beyond what I can do for it, the plant has to absorb the water and nutrients that I make available for it. If it hadn't done that then it would have withered and died a long time ago. Just like the plant, we can thrive and grow in relationship to God through our prayer life. God offers us His love, care, peace, strength, comfort, courage, protection and whatever it is that we need to sustain our soul during times of anxiety and great need. But we have to be willing to cast our burdens on Him in our prayers in order to receive all that He has for us.

There are many assurances in scripture of God promising to be with us and never leaving us. For example, Deuteronomy 31:6 says: Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; He will not fail you or forsake you. Another scripture is found in Psalm 56:2: Oh, most High, when I am afraid. I put my trust in you. Also Psalm 118:7: The Lord is on my side to help me. Isaiah 41:10: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you; Joshua 1:9: Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. There are many other promises in the Bible which assure us of the blessing we have of God's love and care.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of a relationship with You through prayer that can sustain us and those we pray for. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** The gifts of God's love and care are available to us through prayer.

Carol Buwalda

**Saturday, March 25, 2023**

**A Little Piece of Them**

**Scripture:** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.  
*Colossians 3:14*

A few people in my life have passed this past year. It was a rough year to say the least. One of my grandmothers passed in February and a good family friend passed in December. Both of these people loved to hear about my classroom and would talk to me about it all the time. As such when they died, some of the things they owned got transferred to my classroom. One of the things was from my mom's friend who had a very well-maintained fish tank. When I told one person that I was preparing a space for the tank, she looked around my classroom and said, "Don't you have enough animals in here?" However, this was different because it came from someone who loved me and loved hearing about my classroom.

On those really hard days it's nice to look at or interact with the things from them. It's kind of like a little part of them is sitting in my classroom with me, watching me, and cheering me on. It helps me to remember that the ones I lost are still with me and are supporting me even if they can't be here on earth with me.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help me to be at peace with those that I have lost. Help me to still feel their presence and the comfort that comes with it in the little things. Amen.

**Thought for the day:** Find the little things that others have given you that are special. You may find peace in hard times.

Sarah Griffith

**Sunday, March 26, 2023**

**Scripture:** Read Luke 6:12

Peering through the tiny crack of the bedroom door in my Eaton Rapids home left me with a visual image that sticks in my mind even until this day: a small Japanese man on his knees in prayer with his Bible open. Feeling much like a sneaky intruder, I quietly returned to bed after visiting the bathroom. Later that morning, I cautiously approached him, asking him what he was doing in the middle of the night. With a bit of a grin and a twinkle in his eye, he asked me if I truly wanted to know. I said, "Yes I do". It was then he told me he was talking with God, and God was talking to him, about me!

The day I took him and my mother-in-law back to the airport to return to Japan was the same day I visited that small bedroom after smoking a joint of marijuana. I thought maybe I could somehow encounter God and know Him to be real just like my father-in-law said He was. What I didn't know was that tiny bedroom had been sanctified with prayer and the Holy Spirit was still lingering there! I was totally apprehended by God's Spirit and couldn't move. Something like invisible fingers wrapped around me and began to squeeze. I tried to break its grip and escape, but couldn't. In desperation I screamed, thinking I might die, but suddenly was moved backwards outside the door. I ran screaming all the way downstairs and my wife came running. After calming down, I got on my knees by our sofa and prayed. I told the Lord I was sorry for ruining my life and cried out with tears of repentance asking Him to forgive me and ... could He make me like my father-in-law? I was powerfully born again! The troubling drug problem was instantly gone.

Knowing Jesus had changed me, I thought it would be a good idea to go to church; so, I did. Conveniently, there happened to be a big church just a couple blocks from the front door of my house where my wife had been attending. It was FUMER! Much to my surprise a number of people I didn't know approached me and told me by name, they were so glad to see me. Then Rev. Ron Houk, the pastor, came to me and said, "Neal, we are so glad to see you have come! We've been praying for you!"

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for the power of prayer which changes lives! We are forever grateful! Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Even now God is interceding for you and me, for everyone who is open to His power and love.

Neal Hicks (Missionary to Crossroads of the Nations" in Nashville, TN)

**Monday, March 27, 2023**

**Solutions Under Pressure**

**Scripture:** In my distress, I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry to Him reached His ears. *Psalm 18:6*

In December I was checking the readiness of our motorhome to make the trip to Florida in a couple of weeks. There was a snowstorm coming, to be followed by temperatures in the teens. The routine check of the tire pressures turned urgent when I discovered one of the dual tires on the back had no air pressure. This had never happened on those relatively new tires. After I aired up that tire, it lost most of its air pressure again the next day. I was faced with deciding on going to a large shop that could handle a motorhome or to try to replace the short air hose that extended the valve stem on that tire.

Meanwhile the snow arrived. I asked God what to do. I was led to give the existing hose a tightening turn by hand, and it has held air pressure ever since! I am thankful God gave me a solution when time was short, and weather closed in.

Although God does not rescue us from every dilemma, He will guide us through them and offer a calming insight.

**Prayer:** Our Lord, help us see through the worst outcome and help us try solutions that come through Your inspiration. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Think of one recent time when God answered a dilemma for you ... and share it with someone today.

Tom Hanna

**Tuesday, March 28, 2023**

**Blessings Flow**

**Scripture:** ... because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb. *Genesis 49:25*

As I woke up this morning and looked out the window, I saw that this would be a glorious day, full of sunshine in this drab winter season. The fog of the night had deposited a glistening frost on the trees and grasses. Then I looked out the bathroom window and saw two deer right behind the house, nibbling on the grass. After I prepared myself for the day, I looked out again. When I looked harder, I saw two additional deer in the wild area behind the lawn. There were two more deer, browsing on the shrubs. It was enjoyable to simply watch them eating, looking around, pricking up their ears, swishing their white tails back and forth, and finally moving off. We'd seen lots of hoof prints on our little nature trail. It's fun to see the beautiful animals themselves.

Blessings are like that. If we take time to really look, we will notice more and more. It takes living mindfully, taking note of what is around us and within us. Looking at the news, we can be miserable. Looking at God and the world God provides, we can see such beauty. We just have to take time to notice and thank God for all we see and sense. All else fades away, and we can bask in the joy of God's love, beauty, and presence.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the beauty of each day. Help us to recognize and focus on You and Your blessings, revealed to us in this glorious world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Be mindful of the beauty God provides for us and take joy in it.

Pastor Irene Vittoz, Retired

**Wednesday, March 29, 2023**

**God's Other Plans**

**Scripture:** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. *Hebrews 11:1*

It seems that this new year started out with a heavy foot. My husband lost his youngest sister, Shirley, in January 2023. I lost my one and only sister, Betty, in January 2022. When Shirley passed, our hearts were sad as there was no way we wanted to tackle Route 80 or the Pennsylvania mountains in January. My sister had been anxious to get back to her apartment so she could finish her Christmas cards. Shirley was anxious to get back to her beautiful apartment. But neither one saw those wishes.

God often has other plans for us. When our camper blew a tire on our last camping trip last October, we were fortunate we had not been killed! For one thing, the blowout occurred just as we were conveniently at the Mt. Pleasant exit on the highway! For another thing, we were able to get home safely, after Art laboriously—due to all the ruined metal, etc., installed the spare. When the insurance company said “irreparable damage,” that was sad, but the camper, after all, was old and had given us many good years.

Neither Betty or Shirley had an inkling their lives would be over so quickly. Neither did we know our camper was ready to be put to pasture. We never know when things are going to happen, good or bad. We just need to make the best of situations and be ready for new experiences, whatever that may be. We are saddened for all of those loses but God is good. We know He is watching out for us and we give thanks. We are especially thankful for wonderful memories.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to remember to always keep our lamps lit for unexpected happenings in life. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** We need to be thankful for the things we've got, and not begrudge what we have not.

Inge Logenburg Kyler

**Thursday, March 30, 2023**

**The Armor of God** (or My Little Cross Necklace)

**Scripture:** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. *Ephesians 6:13*

When I started working at high-need schools in the inner city, I knew, without a doubt, that I was in the right place at the right time. I wanted to serve. I was called to do the hard work with students living in the most difficult circumstances. I loved my job. I loved the children. However, the environment was not safe. There were weeks where my school was locked down 4 out of 5 days due to weapons, fights, trash can fires, violent parents, you name it! The eminent danger embedded in my career choice was very real, every single day.

I purchased a small cross necklace during my first weeks in that school. Each day, I put it on like an armor of protection. I prayed for my safety and the safety of the students and staff at the school. I knew that if I went to work, fearful of the dangers ahead or the safety of the children, I would never be able to truly engage in the hard work necessary to improve student learning. My cross necklace was a touchstone, reminding me that I released my fears to God in prayer. With that necklace as my armor, I felt protected and I was able to serve the school and the students to the best of my ability.

**Prayer:** Father, You know my fears and my concerns. Thank You for taking them from me today so I can be my best for myself and others. I am so grateful for the armor and protection You provide to me each and every day! Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** What do you need to release to God today so you may be your best for yourself and others?

Rachel Gibson

**Friday, March 31, 2023**

**Do Not Be Scared!**

**Scripture:** Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. *Isaiah 41:10*

“What are you scared of?” I could hear the whisper from God in my ear. “I’m scared I’ll be overwhelmed and too busy and I’ll be in more pain”. “Trust Me,” He countered. I knew I should, but I had been pulling back for years, fearful of the pain my body endures when I overdo things, causing tight muscles that lead to joint pain, extreme exhaustion and sleepless nights.

But I had been drawn to the youth for years and I’ve been helping with Youth Group on and off as well. The youth were on my heart. My church was on my heart. I missed being more involved. Where was the woman who ran the MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group for seven years, hosting huge fundraising events and running biweekly meetings? She’s afraid and no longer has the energy.

But when the first person asked, “Would you consider being youth leader?”, my immediate instinct was NO, but my heart. Oh, my heart. It leapt up and said YES. I realized I was filled with elation that grew with every person I spoke with about it. Each step took me closer to being that leader. I’ve been in church more the past month since I accepted the position than I probably have been the past 3 years combined. I feel so at peace. More patient. Living with intent. Yes, I’m busier, but I’m also using my time more wisely. And there is a fire in my belly that has been absent too long and it has ignited an undeniable passion.

**Prayer:** God, remind us that You are always there and will guide us in the right direction. We do not need to be scared. You will help us through anything. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** What passion do you have lingering underneath that you are too fearful to explore?

Melissa Hampton

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023**

**God Walks with Us Even When We Can't See Him**

**Scripture:** The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore. *Psalm 121:8*

A few years ago, I was trying to help one of my sisters find a new place to live for her and her family after they received an eviction notice. Years before that, she had temporarily lived with us, and I found it an extremely difficult situation. With many prayers, the day of eviction was two days away but every place we looked at for one reason or another was not available to her. I was very discouraged and dreaded what might happen. We went to one last place and when the landlord asked when my sister wanted to move in, I was shocked and could hardly believe it.

That place worked very well for many more years. God was there in the search all that time and knew which was the best place. All my fears should have been replaced by faith. God seemed very pokey to me, but His time was right!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to never doubt that You are always beside us and walking with us. Help us to wait for You with faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** God's timing is often not ours, but He is faithful.

Charlotte Williams

## **Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023**

### **Will You Show Up?**

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

I can't imagine what it would have been like to watch Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey: to be among the crowd waving palm branches, throwing cloaks and blankets on the road to pave His way; to have my voice join with others as one, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

What would it have been like that day? Would I have made my way to the front? Would I have hung back to take it all in? Would I have lifted my voice in praise? Would I have stayed silent? Would I have even gone at all?

These are all questions I hypothetically ask myself, but they also apply to situations and scenarios today. How often do I choose to "stay home and avoid the crowds", rather than showing up to be a part of God's purpose and story?

I'd like to say that I would have gone to see Jesus riding into Jerusalem. I'd like to say that I would have been passing out palm branches and bringing friends. I'd like to say that I would have lifted my voice in praise with those around me. But I can't say I would have done any of those things for sure. So instead, I ask myself in current situations and scenarios, "am I willing to show up for Jesus now?" Will I help prepare His way, bring friends, join others in shouting praise and sharing in the joy and love that comes with knowing Jesus and anticipating His arrival? We can't travel back in time and be there on that glorious Palm Sunday, but we can choose to show up for Jesus now in the opportunities we're given today.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for offering us opportunities to "show up" for You. Help us connect inward with You to work outward for You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** In what areas of your life will you "show up" for Jesus?

Elizabeth Reed

**Monday, April 3, 2023**

**”Grand Means” of Drawing Near to God**

**Scripture:** Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. *Mark 1:25(NIV)*

John Wesley wrote in a letter, dated March 29, 1760, “Prayer is certainly the ‘grand means’ of drawing near to God; and all other [means of grace] are helpful to us only so far as they are mixed with or prepare us for this.”

Our Wesleyan tradition tells us that we participate in our salvation. The primary way we participate in our salvation is through the means of grace, The means of grace, our activities, bring us into the presence of God and/or helps us to know God. Some of the primary means of grace are regular Communion, worship, acts of mercy, fasting, to name a few. For Wesley, prayer was the “grand means“ of drawing near to God.” Through the practice of prayer, the follower of Christ experiences both the presence of God and gains insight/understanding into Who God is and What God is doing.

Prayer is more than offering our requests to the One who created the universe. Prayer is listening. Prayer is being still and just being in the presence of the Holy One. Prayer is communicating with the One who loves unconditionally and completely. In prayer we share our deepest longings, our hopes and fears with the One who knows us deeply and intimately. Through Prayer God desires us to know Him as deeply and intimately as we are known by Him.

Prayer is not a mere religious exercise. Prayer is the very life breath of the Christian. For through the practice of prayer the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ guides us, inspires us, speaks to us, listens to us, and instructs us.

**Prayer:** Loving Father, move in our hearts, through the very power of the Holy Spirit, that we may seek to draw ever nearer to You. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Are you making it a daily practice to pray?

Rev. Eric Beck, Retired

**Tuesday, April 4, 2023**

**The Beauty of the Living Water**

**Scripture:** ...but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. *John 4:14*

As I write this, my cousin's husband is in Hospice Care. Like so many, Jim's illness seemed to come out of nowhere and hit him like a ton of bricks. Jim is fit, an outdoorsman, a fisherman, a lover of nature, and a very kind soul. My husband and I are on vacation while Jim says goodbye to his family and friends. But, of course, he is never far out of our minds or prayers.

On our travels, we searched out waterfalls – lots of them! We marveled at one of God's greatest gifts: His refreshing, living, ever-moving water. I was drawn to the parallel of our lives to those falls. We meander through life with gentle twists and turns. Then life seems to speed up, churning our waters briskly and often can leave us afraid and alone. That's where Jim and his family are right now.

But then the Lord turned my gaze downstream where the rushing waters calmed, and the way was smooth once again. I know Jim will ride the waves and then, in God's time, he will go around that last turn, out of sight, and right into the presence of our Lord. No longer in turbulent waters. No longer alone. No longer afraid.

We prayed long and hard for my cousin's family. We prayed for peace and understanding. We prayed with great appreciation for everlasting life!

**Prayer:** Thank You, Creator God, for the living waters that flow throughout our lives. Help us to see Your power and love through the turbulence, and grant us the peace that comes from knowing Your promise of eternal life. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Ride the waves and know that you are not alone.

Sue Leach

**Wednesday, April 5, 2023**

**Keep on Praying**

**Scripture:** “Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.” *Romans 12:12*

Life is crazy isn't it!? Circumstances and situations get thrown at us left and right, making us feel like we are losing our minds and maybe even running out of breath! We can go from seasons of life where things are wonderful and carefree and then... Boom! A curve ball is thrown. We all have them, those curve balls that don't fit into the particular plan or idea of how we thought our life would go. Job loss, health concerns, relationships, struggles and the list can go on and on. What do we do as Christians when these moments hit our life, as they inevitably will?

Paul gives us a three-step plan of action, if you will, in Romans 12:12. Step one, rejoice! Why can we rejoice when life seems overwhelming? Because we have a hope in Jesus that is eternal. This can never be taken away from us so we can be confident in hope. Step two, be patient. It's hard, I know! But step one, be confident in hope, will help us to have patience no matter what the trouble is that comes. We can follow in the footsteps of Jesus as we have patience through the trials. And finally step three, keep on praying! Live with God in your heart and on your mind and give thanks for all things as you rely on Him for strength. Take these steps as more of a circle that never ends. As you rejoice in hope, you will be more patient in trouble, and prayer will naturally be a part of all your circumstances in life. I love how the Message version of this verse goes: “Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder.”

**Prayer:** God, life has a way of throwing us curve balls. We think we know what tomorrow will bring but then something changes and we may not know which way is up. Thank You, God, for when those times happen that I can keep on praying! Help me to rejoice in hope, be patient through the troubles and turn my heart and mind to You through it all. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** “Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder.”

Samantha Carroll

**Maundy Thursday, April 6, 2023**

**Keep Trusting and Following His Lead**

**Scripture Reference:** Read John 13:1-17

At what we now know as “The Last Supper”, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. Ever been to a dinner party where you transition into the feet washing portion of the night? Probably not, and neither had the disciples. They were confused. They didn’t know what was going on. They didn’t understand why Jesus was washing their feet or even half of the things Jesus was saying throughout His whole ministry! Yet, they were still there with Him, listening, asking questions, and following His lead. And although Jesus knew His disciples were confused, He didn’t give up on them or make them feel lesser than. Instead, He kept teaching, demonstrating, and reminding them that everything He did and said would make sense later. Another way of saying, “Hang in there and keep going!”

This tells me that following Jesus is about the journey. It’s not about getting answers, having the answers, or understanding it all. It’s about trusting Jesus, and trusting the process of living a life with Him. It’s about accepting that He knows what He is doing. It’s about being willing to keep listening, keep asking questions, and to keep going in the direction Jesus is leading, even when, *especially when*, nothing seems to make sense.

It can be very easy for us to get tripped up in wanting to understand it all. We want to have answers and explanations for things, but Jesus never promised that. Instead, He said things like, “Come, follow *Me*” and “Love one another”, invitations to a new way of life with Him. So when we feel like the disciples, confused and not sure what is going on, it’s okay. Just keep spending time with Jesus, keep listening, keep asking questions, and keep following His lead.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for Jesus and all that He taught us and continues to teach us. Thank You for being patient with us when we become impatient and want to understand things now. Remind us that a life with You is about a life of love, learning and trusting You. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Even in times of confusion and uncertainty, do you trust Jesus with your next step?

Elizabeth Reed

## Good Friday, April 7, 2023

### Love is the Answer

**Scripture:** Read Luke 23:32-43

Jesus offered us many examples of prayer throughout scripture. He taught us “The Lord’s Prayer”. He goes away for periods of time to pray, and at other times He prays out loud for others to hear.

One of His prayers that has caught my attention is when He is on the cross and prays for forgiveness for those who are dividing His clothes. “Jesus said, *‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’*” Here He is, being crucified, mocked, betrayed, and He asks God to forgive them. He doesn’t curse them out. He doesn’t declare revenge. He doesn’t tell them how awful they are. No, He prays for them. That’s right, *for* them, not against them. This prayer is an ultimate example of love. How often do we pray for forgiveness for those who hurt us? How often do we choose to pray as a response when someone has hurt us?

Jesus taught us so much in this moment and in this prayer. He showed us how to go to God with everything and how to love everyone as God sees them. It doesn’t matter how much pain we are in. It doesn’t matter how much hurt someone has caused. We must go to God in prayer and pray for their forgiveness. We don’t fight back. We don’t lash out. We find our strength in Jesus’ love and go to God in prayer.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for Jesus and all of His teachings. Even as He was being crucified, He prayed for forgiveness for others. Help us to be more like Jesus and pray for forgiveness for others no matter what kind of pain or situation we are in. Help us remember that the answer, the solution, is always love. Thank You for Jesus’ sacrifice that we may have an even deeper relationship with You through Him. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Love is the only answer.

Elizabeth Reed

**Saturday, April 8, 2023**

**Having the Mind of Christ**

**Scripture:** Read Philippians 2:5-11

Early in my pastoral career I attended a seminar on “Healing Prayer.” I thought I knew about prayer. This workshop was not what I expected. I anticipated spending significant time in very traditional prayer modes. I secretly hoped there would be some special, translate that a “secret”, information that would make my prayers more effective. We did spend a lot of time in prayer but it was anything but that I would have considered traditional. We used visual imagery and a lot of movement. I also admit that I had longed for some actual healing to take place, i.e., tumors disappearing, pain eliminated, even perhaps the blind made to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to walk.

Even though I didn’t experience miracles, I did grow in my understanding and practice of prayer. I came away from that seminar with two very definite learnings. The first is that prayer does affect reality. I’m not saying that somehow our prayers can manipulate God. I had a professor in seminary who said, “Prayer is not the cosmic crowbar to tip the Rock of Ages.” Prayer doesn’t put God under my control. In prayer, I am brought into the presence of God and made aware of the mind of Christ. God is already at work long before my prayers. Prayer brings me alongside of God and God’s plans for healing and restoration of our world.

The second learning is that because prayer affects reality, I have a vocation of prayer. Prayer is not something that is an extra benefit of following Christ. Prayer is a calling. In prayer I join God in His great work of shalom/healing/salvation.

**Prayer:** Father, You have called me to a life of prayer. Grant that I may be given the mind of Christ so I join You in Your great work in this world. Amen.

**Thought for the Day:** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,... (Phil 2:5, NRSV)

Rev. Eric Beck, Retired

## Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023

### Prayer as Praise

**Scripture:** “Those who live at the ends of the earth stand in awe of your wonders. From where the sun rises to where it sets, you inspire shouts of joy.” *Psalm 65:8*

Prayer is often thought to be intercessory. We need, or another has needs, so we lift them to God. But prayer can also be praise. And we can be freed from our burdens just as much with praise, as with requests. In fact, I think more so, because our focus changes from the void (what we need, but don't have) to abundance (having so much more than we could ever need, with God).

On this special day of Resurrection and New Life, may we carry everything to God in prayer, even our praise. Thank you, God for our families and loved ones, for our friends and neighbors, for our community and culture. Thank you for hope and new life, freedom from addiction and death, a new tomorrow and joy for today. Thank you for wanting a relationship with each of us, special and unique. Thank you for pouring your love onto and within us, teaching us how life can be so different with love at its core. Thank you for hearing all our cares and woes throughout the year, and compassionately working on each of them.

Spend your day lifting praises, one after another, until there are no more in you to pour out. And then simply marvel at the wonders of his hands, the love in his heart, and the hope he offers each of us. Life doesn't have to be perfect to be blessed. But when we have a God who adores each of us and resurrects our lives again, each day, who needs perfection anyway?

**Prayer:** Resurrection and Life, we praise your name this splendid Easter Day! We shout for joy at the empty tomb, reminded once more of your wonders as we stand in awe. Happy Easter, Lord Jesus! Happy Easter Creator God! Happy Easter Guiding Spirit!

**Thought for the Day:** How many of your prayers are filled with praise? If your answer is “not many”, then maybe your Empty Tomb Day can be made new, as well.

Pastor Melany Chalker

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