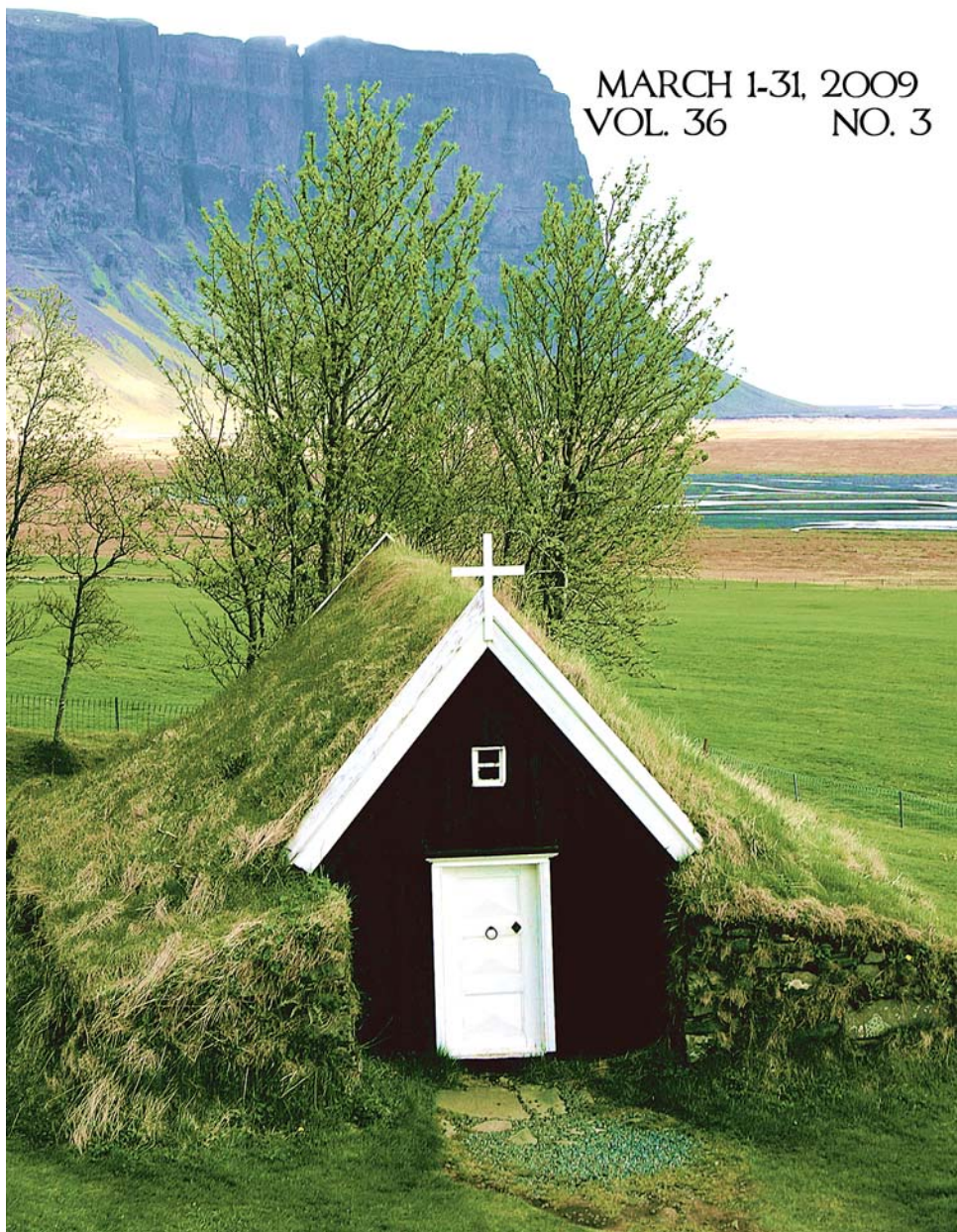


NORTHMINSTER DAILY DEVOTIONS

MARCH 1-31, 2009
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Northminster Devotionals

May these devotionals be a blessing to you as we are guided through the daily Scripture readings from *Daily Lectionary*.

This resource has come to you because people from NPC have offered their gifts, to be a blessing to the entire Northminster community, to Tucson and beyond. Don't forget... this entire resource is on our website at www.godmorning.com. So tell your friends!

If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the devotional writing team, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, March 29, 2009.

Cover image: An 18th century chapel at Nupsstaður, Iceland

The grey boxes that appear on every page direct you to pray for a particular church, organization or group each day. These come from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s 2009 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study, which are available in the Church Office.

SUNDAY, MARCH 1 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 84:1-12

Jeremiah 9:23-24

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Mark 2:18-22

Psalm 42:1-11

The Upper Room

by John McKee

When instructed to prepare
The Passover meal
In a suitable place to meet.

Peter and John asked Jesus
Where to look for a room
In which they all thirteen could eat.

He gave specific directions
As to where they should go
He even described whom they were to see.

And it was just as he'd said
The man showed them upstairs
To a large upper room where they'd be.

This was the last supper
He was to share with his friends,
And after he solemnly broke the bread,

**"Take, Eat;
"This is my body."**

To his Disciples the Lord Jesus said.

He then poured the wine
And after he'd blessed it
The Disciples all drank from the cup.

The wine was symbolic
Of his blood to be shed
On the cruel cross that lifted him up.

This was done in remembrance
Of the Lord Jesus Christ
Of the Lamb sacrificed in our place.

That all true believers
Shall have life everlasting
In Heaven through his holy grace.

Let us join in prayer for:

Self-Development of People (a ministry of One Great Hour of Sharing)

MONDAY, MARCH 2 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 119:73-80 Deuteronomy 8:1-20 Hebrews 2:11-18 John 2:1-12 Psalm 121:1-8

The Unusual, Exciting Gospel

by Dale McArthur

O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.

-Psalm 121:7

During WWII, Japan invaded China and many high-casualty battles occurred. One such battle was for the City of Nanking, China. It became so brutal that it became remembered in history as "The Rape of Nanking." The Japanese seemed to target women and children with bayonets and other forms of humiliation.

One Christian mother was determined to live through the slaughter and escaped to the countryside. Through the determination reserved for special mothers, she left China for California and succeeded in providing an education for her son. She taught him the Christian faith and after completing college, he entered Seminary to become a local pastor.

Our paths were destined to cross, as our family was living in a town in Missouri and I was traveling in parts of four states for my company. Our church district asked me to be Lay Leader for our district and I had 22 churches to oversee and assist in the lay activities. One day, I visited a very small church in a small community in the Ozarks. The new pastor was the child that was saved by his mother from the Battle of Nanking.

He was a fine young man but he had one problem when he started to preach or tell others about "the Lord will keep you from all evil." He became so excited that about every third word came out in Chinese. He was so excited to tell others about his God that it affected his ability to speak. His excitement was contagious, the congregation was on fire telling others (in English as Ozark drawl can be) that God loved them and would take care of them. I could tell that I could not improve the situation so I went home.

It causes us to reflect on whether we are excited about the Gospel message. Can others tell that we have experienced God's protective love by our excitement?

Youth: Can we show the excitement of a football game in our approach to invite friends to church?

Adults: Did you ever try playing a sport that you haven't played for a long time? It's tough. Keep up the excitement about the Gospel - others will wonder about you.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love and protection for our family and our church. Help us to tell others about you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Yukon (Alaska)

TUESDAY, MARCH 3 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 34:1-22

Deuteronomy 9:1-12

Hebrews 3:1-11

John 2:13-22

Psalm 25:1-22

Our True Home

by Anne Price

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

-Hebrews 3:4

We Christians are God's house. He lives in us. There may be helpers that are there for us, but God is in loving control of the reconstruction of our lives. In that knowledge we can find comfort, confidence and joy no matter where we live.

During my many years as a real estate broker, I took part in both the joys and the sorrows in the transfer of people's homes. Today, many people are losing their properties due to the financial situation in our country. Yet with prayer and faith, we can keep on going. Over the years there have been many downturns in the economy. We just cannot give up on what is temporary.

I think back to my first home with my young husband and little daughter in San Pedro, California. We were so happy to have our little home with a white picket fence. The price in 1958 was \$12,500. Wow, that hardly buys a car now.

As the years went on, we added to our family and had additional homes. Life continued to change with homes purchased and sold in California, Texas and now in Arizona. While reading this verse, I see how my real home is with God, the true builder that is everlasting.

Our acceptance of Jesus Christ in our whole being gives us a home that cannot be taken away.

Youth: Do you love to come home after school knowing that you are loved by God and your family?

Adults: As you live in your home do you see what God has provided for you freely?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for putting yourself in our hearts so that we may never feel homeless. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Synod of the Covenant (Michigan and Ohio)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 5:1-12 Deuteronomy 9:13-21 Hebrews 3:12-19 John 2:23-3:15 Psalm 27:1-14

Why Do We Lift Up Jesus Christ

by Jerry Smith

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that every one who believes in him may have eternal life.

-John 3:14-15

Numbers, chapter 21 tells the story about the Israelites complaining as they traveled in the desert about Moses leadership, the lack of water and the terrible bread called manna. So God sent a plague of “Fiery Serpents” and many people died as they were bitten. They told Moses of their sins and asked him to ask God to remove the snakes. Instead of removing them, God directed Moses to make a brazen serpent and lift it on a pole so that if every one bitten would look at the snake on the pole they would be spared.

It’s no different today. For those wandering in the desert of sin their only hope is if we lift up Jesus Christ so that they can see him and call upon his name to save and deliver them. The Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is still the only answer to the sin problem and we are given the responsibility of making him visible to those in need. And how about us who have been removed from the desert and placed on the mount of salvation? When we run across a black patch of sin we must also look to Jesus for forgiveness.

Youth: When in trouble do you look to Jesus?

Adults: Do you lift up Jesus to your neighbors in need?

Prayer: Father help us lift up Jesus to our families, friends and neighbors and to pray for our pastors that You may use them to lift Jesus from the pulpit. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Cincinnati (Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio)

THURSDAY, MARCH 5 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 27:1-14 Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5 Hebrews 4:1-10 John 3:16-21 Psalm 126:1-6

Why Did God Send His Son?

by Judy Williams

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

-John 3: 16,17

The third chapter of John's gospel begins with the story of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisee Nicodemus. As a member of the Jewish ruling council, he came to Jesus at night for a private meeting to have his questions answered. He was one who was perplexed by the miracles Jesus had been performing and who knew in his heart that Jesus was, indeed, sent by God. Even though Nicodemus was steeped in Jewish tradition, he was having difficulty understanding what Jesus meant about a rebirth of the Spirit.

Jesus endeavored to help Nicodemus understand that the reason he had come to earth was to give believers life in eternity with God. Jesus had come to bring the light of truth to all people who would believe in his truth.

It is in the nineteenth chapter of John where we see Nicodemus accompanying Joseph of Arimathea as they took Jesus' body to its burial place. He had come to belief in Jesus and in God's plan for his eternal life!

There comes a time within each one of us that our true self aches to be born. We must acknowledge the call to believe. Then the rebirth of the Spirit will give us more Christ-like selves, preparing for eternity with him.

Youth: Do you know that God wants you to live with him forever?

Can you live in the light of this truth today in all you do and in all you say?

Adults: Do you, like Nicodemus, have questions for Jesus? Are you ready to say "Yes" to true belief in God's promises? Can you live your life "in the light" so that others see plainly that what you do has been done through God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know you sent Jesus to earth for me. I believe that he died for my sins and that I am forgiven. I believe that I will live eternally with you because of your great gift to me. I thank you today and every day for your great love for me. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Detroit (Michigan)

The God Who is For Us

by Dick Leon

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. -Hebrews 4:15-16

Conversations change depending on who is on the other end of the line. If we are talking with a five year old son the tone and vocabulary will be different from speaking with an antagonist who is angry or judgmental.

In the same way the view we hold of God shapes how we talk with him in our prayers. If we think God is against us we may not talk with him at all. If we think God is harshly judging us (rightly or wrongly!) we will be shy and meek in our conversation.

This text gives us the good news that **God is on our side!** Better than that, God understands all of our temptations and struggles because God has gone through them to the fullest in Jesus' life and death. Jesus actually felt the full force of every temptation because he resisted them all to the end. We rarely feel the full force because we too often yield when the pressure just begins to build up!

We learn in this text we can pray to the Lord with ultimate confidence in three things:

- his understanding ... he has been through it all before
- his mercy ... God does not give what we deserve
- and his grace ... God does give what we don't deserve!

Youth: What is your image of God when you pray? Is it a mean and angry God or one of understanding, mercy and grace?

Adults: Do you see the difference in Jesus' resistance to temptation and ours?

Prayer: Thank you, dear Lord, for coming to us in the flesh, living amongst us in this troubled world, and experiencing all our temptations to the full! Help us to approach you with boldness because we know we can trust your mercy and grace. Amen!

Let us join in prayer for:

World Day of Prayer

SATURDAY, MARCH 7 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 43:1-5

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

Hebrews 5:1-10

John 4:1-26

Psalm 31:1-24

Living Water

by Jennifer Monroe

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." -John 4:13-14

We had been hiking for almost eighteen miles, and a big portion of our day had been spent trudging downhill in the intense heat of a Tucson August afternoon. We had come to the last drops in our camelbacks and canteens, and the water in them tasted warm and sour in our parched mouths. Then, in the distance, we spied them: bright orange Igloo coolers! This could only mean that the long hike down from the top of Mt. Lemmon was almost over, and cool, clean water awaited us (along with some icy Eegees and fat slices of watermelon). Almost nothing has ever tasted so good! We drank until we thought we would never need to drink again.

The gospel of John tells the story of another man who, after a long time of travel, stops for a water break at noon, the thirstiest time of day. Jesus purposefully chose to travel through Samaria, an area that most Jews generally tried to avoid, and, just as purposefully, he engages a Samaritan woman, an obvious outcast living in a town of outcasts, in conversation. What follows is a discussion in which we learn that, while Jesus may have needed a drink of water, the woman is much, much thirstier. We've probably all felt really parched at some point in our lives, but we know that, no matter how much cold water we drink, we'll still be thirsty again in the future. What Jesus offered the Samaritan woman, and what he offers us today, is "living water", his refreshing and reviving presence that won't ever run out or go away. In fact, Jesus says that this water will not just quench our thirsts, but it will "well up", be abundant and overflowing. After we've invited him into our lives, we don't have to go back to Jesus, day after day, begging him for his presence - he's already within us, gallons and gallons and gallons worth! Once we learn to tap this bubbling spring, we can use the abundance we have to offer the water of life to other thirsty people that we meet.

Youth: When was the last time you were really thirsty? What did that feel like?

Adults: Have you asked Jesus for the water of life? If so, how can you use it to start reaching out to others?

Prayer: Jesus, you are our living water, the presence that sustains our lives. Give us the courage to offer that presence to others, in your name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Eastminster Presbytery (Ohio)

SUNDAY, MARCH 8 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 84:1-12

Jeremiah 1:1-10

1 Corinthians 3:11-23

Mark 3:31-4:9

Psalm 42:1-11

The Promise of Salvation

by John McKee

Salvation is promised
By Jesus to all
Who believe he is God's only Son.

John 3:16 states
That if you but believe
Life eternal in heaven you've won.

You don't have to memorize
Scripture or verse
Nor be pure as the wind-driven snow

To reserve one of the many
Mansions in Heaven
With family and friends you love so.

The New Testament Gospels
Tell us succinctly
The criteria for man's salvation

Is to confess before men
That Jesus is Savior
And Lord of all God's creation.

That God would allow
His Son to die in our place
Giving sinners an unearned reprieve

Is a huge stumbling block
To many intellectual skeptics,
Who find it quite hard to believe.

Yet, the foolishness of God
Is wiser than men
(See First Corinthians 1:25).

We're redeemed through his grace.
All our sins he's forgiven
Forever more we will be alive

With the angels in Heaven
To sing God's holy praise
Acknowledging his sovereign reign.

A life of joyful peace
In the presence of Jesus
That's devoid of tears or of pain.

Let us join in prayer for:

International Women's Day

Have You Heard Your Calling Today?

by Marie Ruiz

Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you ... They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. -Jeremiah 1:17a,19

Whenever God called his people in the Bible to do great things, he assured them he would be with them and protect them. This is the scene in the Jeremiah passage today. Jeremiah was called to be God's servant and prophet while still in the womb. As Jeremiah grew he was being primed for the many instances that God would instruct him: to uproot kingdoms, appointing him over the nations, to tear down, to destroy, and overthrow, to build up and to plant. Wow, this is a mouthful of commands that probably made Jeremiah shiver in his sandals. But God always was faithful to reassure Jeremiah at the same time he gave him these sometimes very grim instructions, that he would be with him and rescue him. This verbal assurance is what Jeremiah had to go on and he did obey God's commands every step of the way.

Few of us will ever be asked to do the kinds of things Jeremiah was instructed to do, and yet we find ourselves often paralyzed to proceed even with the smallest of tasks knowing full well that God is all powerful and will lead us every step of the way that he commands.

As we begin this new year let us be attentive to what God is calling us to do and be reassured that he is standing guard seeing us accomplish all that He asks. *Get yourself ready!*

Youth: When your parents ask you to do something, they are confident that you can accomplish what they have asked because they know you and have prepared you to complete the job. God also has many things that he will ask you to do throughout your life. And God will always go before you and help you to complete it. Ask God today for something you can do for him.

Adults: When was the last time you asked God what he would like you to accomplish for him?

Prayer: Help us Lord to ask boldly what you would have for us to do. Let us rest in the assurance that you will prepare the way for us to accomplish all that you ask. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Lake Huron (Michigan)

What is Your Wealth

by Karen Foss

Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

-Proverbs 11:4

God gives many lessons about money and a lot of them are in Proverbs:

- Give generously 11:24-25; 22:9
- Help the poor 19:17; 21:13
- Save for the future 21:20
- Be careful about borrowing 22:7

In today's economy, these lessons are especially relevant. It is especially important now to have some money in our savings accounts and to be extra careful about using those credit cards and taking out loans without thinking twice about it. This doesn't mean that we can forget about those that have less than we do. With times as hard as they are, people are giving less to charities and that affects those that need help the most.

So we need to make sure our families are taken care of but also be obedient to God's teachings and take care of those around us that are having a hard time. When we stand before God on that judgment day he's not going to ask us how much money we have in the bank.

Youth: Are some of your friends' parents going through a hard time? Has it had an impact on some of the activities you're used to doing?

Adults: In these hard times, how can you help those less fortunate? A bag of groceries or a small donation is always helpful.

Prayer: Dear Lord, All we have to do is look around us to see people that are struggling. Help us be ever mindful of them and do what we can to help. It's in the name of your Son we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Lake Michigan (Michigan)

Do You Want to be Right or Well?

by Dick Leon

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" -John 5:6

There is a half-way house for boys coming out of juvenile detention and on the mantel this saying is carved:

"Do you want to be right ... or well?"

Jesus' question to this crippled man raises the same issue. Sickness can be useful to us! I remember, when I was seven or eight years old, telling my parents that I didn't feel well so that I didn't have to go to school and face a test or a quiz or just school itself! Sickness can be useful! We can avoid a lot of responsibilities in life by staying sick. This in no way is intended to discount genuine illness and infirmity ... but is rather intended to deal with those times when we have a choice in wellness!

Jesus may have been thinking this crippled man lacked a will to be healed. Maybe the man had something good going with his infirmity. The boys in the half-way house had all asserted themselves in a way that got them in trouble with the law and probably with a lot of other people also. The mantel-question was an attempt to get them to think over whether they preferred to be stubborn about their own ways or wanted to do the hard work of getting well!

This is a good question for all of us. We all make choices that impact the health of our bodies, minds and spirits! When we choose to stubbornly stick to our own devices and desires we will most likely remain impaired and we will miss out on the wholeness and health that God wants for us all!

Youth: Are you more concerned with being "right" or being "well?"

Adults: How many times in your life can you recall when you made the sad choice to continue to "appear right" instead of fessing up and finding wellness?

Prayer: Lord we thank you so much that you want only what is best for us and only what will make us whole and wholesome. Forgive us for sticking with our own ways when your way lies close at hand! Heal us from the deep inside out by helping us to want to be well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Mackinac (Michigan and Wisconsin)

THURSDAY, MARCH 12 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 27:1-14

Jeremiah 4:9-10,19-28

Romans 2:12-24

John 5:19-29

Psalm 126:1-6

Is Praying Worth It?

by Frank Shallenberger

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.

-Psalm 126:7

This call of David to God is a call that you and I make every time we pray. Everyone of us wants God to answer our prayers. Prayer is a mighty thing. Even though we are continents apart we can be close to those we love and care for through prayer. But is prayer worth it? Does God hear us when we pray? And more importantly, does he ever answer us?

Every Christian has a 24 hour hot line to God. All it takes is turning one's mind and heart to him and speak of all the things that are on our heart. Sometimes this is praise, sometimes this is intercession for ourselves or others, sometimes this is just keeping quiet and letting our spirit communicate with the Holy Spirit of God.

Each morning when I awaken I thank God for this new day he has given me. Everything about the morning reminds me of God. The warmth of the sun, the beauty of the flowers, the smile on my wife's face. I cannot lay my head down upon the pillow at night until I first thank the Lord for all he has done for me this day. I lift up to him my children, our troops, our president, pray for peace in the Middle East, pray for our pastors and Sunday school teachers and devotion writers and also pray for those who are not well in body or spirit.

Many members of this church have prayed for me in a recent illness and I know that the reason God brought me back to a condition where I can return to some of my prior activities is directly due to his answer to prayers of the faithful. Does prayer work? You can bet it does.

Youth: How do you start your day? Do you take time to speak to God about the coming day?

Adults: Remember you can pray anywhere, in the car, at the office, in the privacy of the bathroom. It doesn't make a difference where you are, God is always there to listen.

Prayer: Father, we your children come to you seeking solace, comfort, safety, security, peace and so many more things. Hear our prayers and answer them in the proper time. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Maumee Valley Presbytery (Michigan and Ohio)

FRIDAY, MARCH 13 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 22:1-31

Jeremiah 5:1-9

Romans 2:25-3:18

John 5:30-47

Psalm 105:1-45

Praise the Name of the Lord

by Judy Williams

...Praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.

-Psalm 148: 5,6

The psalm writer was fully in awe of all creation when this song was written. From heaven, to angels, to the heavenly hosts, to the sun, moon, stars and skies, and then to the earth, the oceans, the weather, the mountains, the trees, the animals, the birds, the small creatures, all kings and rulers, young and old, men and women - all things were included!

Today more than ever we are reminded of the fragility of God's creation. We rejoice in the beauty of our earth, but are aware that we are its stewards and that God has given us the responsibility of caring for our home. Most of us try to recycle and live our lives with an understanding of our environment.

With the psalmist I, too, revere the beauty of this earth as the wondrous work of God. But I believe the writer intended that we not stop at praising the creation itself, but that we are meant to praise the Creator! In the thirteenth verse of this psalm, it says: "Let (all creation) praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens."

Praise the Lord!

Youth: When you look around you at all the beauty in nature, do you realize that God made everything? How can you do your part to take care of the planet on which you live?

Adults: When you are watching a glorious sunset or enjoying a cooling rainstorm are you remembering the creator or just thinking about the creation? Do you praise God for creating you?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, your works are awesome! We marvel at all you have made and praise you above all. Help us to be mindful of our part in keeping your creation beautiful and safe for all generations to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of the Miami Valley (Ohio)

SATURDAY, MARCH 14 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 43:1-5

Jeremiah 5:20-31

Romans 3:19-31

John 7:1-13

Psalm 31:1-24

She Knew!

by Karen Foss

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. -Luke 1:31-33

When I read this passage, all I could think of was one of my favorite songs that we usually hear only around Christmas time ... *Mary Did You Know?*

In this Scripture passage, Gabriel is telling Mary of the child she will soon have. What must it have been like to be told that you were having the son of God? She had nine months to think of this. Israel was waiting for a Savior. She was told of the great things in store for her son. There is so little written in the scriptures about the years that Jesus was growing up. Did Mary try to prepare him in any special way for the role he was to play? Mention is made in Luke 2:40, "... and the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." We know that he was consecrated at the temple. Luke 2:41-52 tells us of Jesus at the age of twelve discussing theology with the teachers of the law at the temple. Mary was also told by Simeon that Jesus would have a paradoxical effect on Israel. Because of him, some would fall and others would rise. As Jesus mother, Mary would grieve at the rejection he faced.

Youth: Have you read about Jesus birth and life? Has it changed you in any way?

Adults: Do you ever wonder what Mary's life might have been like?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, this child that Mary delivered so long ago is still delivering us from our sins if we only ask him. Help me spread the good news to all who need to know about him. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Muskingum Valley (Ohio)

The Difference Between Can and Should

by Dick Leon

"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor. 6. 12

Becoming a Christian is a lot like going off to college. First year college students are suddenly out of the house and out from under the rules and regulations and guidance of Mom and Dad! It is a risky time in life. Will the training of the past help form good boundaries and habits ... or will we go berserk in that first year of college?

One of the great themes of the New Testament is our freedom from the Law as the way to be right with God! Jesus is the giver of grace ... the unmerited favor of the Lord that makes us right with God because of what God has done for us not what we can do for ourselves!

But as soon as we learn that we are free from the Law we run the risk of going berserk! The Law has served as a 'teacher' for knowing right from wrong and now we will be tested to see if we live by the Law because we want to rather than because we have to!

So, here is Paul's new rule of behavior. It is a great one. Yes, he says, everything is permissible ... but that does not mean everything is beneficial! Just because we can do something does not mean we should do it! Paul goes on in this passage to illustrate his point by naming food and sex as two obvious appetites that could easily end up mastering us rather than being mastered by us!

Paul gives us a great question to ask ourselves: Is this act/decision beneficial ... this is really good for us, and for others, or is it harmful, dangerous, addictive or just plain dumb?

Youth: Does Paul's question (Is it beneficial?) help you choose good habits?

Adults: How sharp is your conscience? Does this question (is it beneficial?) help shape it?

Prayer: Lord, remind us all that your Lordship in our lives and the Law are both meant to restrain us from trouble and to make us into the most joy-filled people on earth! We pray in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Columbia Theological Seminary (Georgia)

MONDAY, MARCH 16 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 119:73-80

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Romans 4:1-12

John 7:14-36

Psalm 121:1-8

Always Protected

by Anne Price

The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life: the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. -Psalm 121:7-8

“Oh my God, what do I do now? I can’t move, there are lights all around me.” I prayed silently. Doctors and nurses were speaking over me and I could not understand what they were saying.

The last thing I remembered was a shiny chrome grill heading towards us then a crash. All I had left as to my own power was my faith that God was with me and would not let me go.

Over the years as a believer it wasn't until that time that I felt God's presence so strongly. I did not ask God “Why me?” Accidents happen to innocent people every day. He did not stop that drunk driver from hitting us, but he provided policemen, firemen, an ambulance, and the care of trauma professionals at The University Medical Center Hospital.

As I was being treated I faded in and out. The whole time I felt God's presence. I knew that I was helpless on my own. I learned from that experience that no matter how strong I thought I was, I was not bullet proof. God taught me again that I could count on him to never leave me.

God's word gives hope when we feel utterly alone and helpless. He does not allow a trial in our lives that is too great for us to bear.

Youth: When you feel frightened do you know that God is with you even in the dark?

Adults: Have you known that when you are weak God is your strength that is beyond our understanding?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for watching over my life. No matter where I am, there you are. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Scioto Valley (Ohio)

The Gift of Living Waters

by Dale McArthur

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. -John 7:38

One reward of writing devotions is it allows us to think about times when the Scripture affected our lives. Let me share one of those times.

We were ending our leave of absence year when the church leadership asked us to move to another state to minister to a small church congregation that was in trouble. With our worldly possessions loaded in a U-haul we headed to a new adventure with Christ. Our new home was a small frame house in need of repair and the small congregation meeting in a funeral home.

The first Sunday arrived and the congregation filled the small space allotted for worship. It was a very discouraging time for us. We had expended a large amount of resources, both monetary and physical to be there, and were feeling a bit down after the service.

Evidently God wanted us there because after the service an older couple stayed behind and said he was a retired executive of a major oil company. He and his wife asked if they could help us build a new church.

Joining them was another family. He was a prominent ophthalmologist with wife and two young boys. They, too, asked if they could be part of building a new church.

We accepted them gratefully but at the time did not recognize them as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Two years later we moved the congregation of 300 people into a large, new church that is one of the largest in that community.

Isn't it true that many time God sends us Living Water but we fail to recognize the gift of his love.

It's a blessing to look back at adventures with Christ to see the gifts we were not aware of at the time.

Youth: Can you see God's gifts to you? Are you one of God's gifts to others?

Adults: Is God using you as a gift to someone? Is he sending gifts to you and all you need to do is accept?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the Living Water you send us in this sometimes dry world. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve (Ohio)

What Did you Expect?

by Jennifer Monroe

Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

-Psalm 5:1-3

A son asks his father, "Dad? I was wondering if I could have some money. I know that you're a good and loving father, and that you know that \$10 would really help me go see a movie and have some pizza with my friends. I would really like to have the money, if it's all right with you. Thanks." Then, without waiting for a reply, the son turns around and walks away, not even noticing the smile on his father's face and his hand reaching for his wallet.

This seems like a pretty absurd situation, doesn't it? And yet, a lot of the time, this is the way that I pray. If you're anything like me, you know that often we ask God for things without *really* expecting him to give us what we ask for, or even to reply at all. Maybe we've been disappointed too often and don't want to get our hopes up that this time we'll get what we want. Maybe we think that the Master of the Universe must be too busy to consider our requests worth his precious time. Or maybe, deep down inside, we think that our problems or desires are too big, even for God to figure out. We ask for solutions out of habit, but we don't really think we'll get an answer. And yet, over and over and over again in the Bible we are reminded that not only does God listen to our prayers, and not only does he care about the things we care about, but he has promised to answer our prayers. The Psalmist paints for us the somewhat audacious portrait of a man who, first of all, believes that God will listen to his cry for help, and then after laying his requests before the Creator of the World, "wait[s] in expectation" for a reply! Sometimes I wonder what God might do if I expected a little more from him. So often I make half-hearted and perfunctory requests and then fail to wait, watch, and really listen for God's reply. What if we in the Church had the courage and boldness to pray big prayers, ask for big things, and then stand expectantly, waiting for an answer? Who knows what amazing things God might have in store for us?

Youth: When you ask your parents for something, what do you expect will happen? Does their response often meet your expectations?

Adults: When you make a request of God, do you expect a response? How might you make your prayers bigger, bolder and more expectant?

Prayer: Master, Lord and Creator of the universe, please give us the courage to pray big prayers and the patience and humility to wait expectantly for your answer. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies

(Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin)

THURSDAY, MARCH 19 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 27:1-14

Jeremiah 10:11-24

Romans 5:12-21

John 8:21-32

Psalm 126:1-6

Are You a Cafeteria Christian?

by Frank Shallenberger

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." -John 8:31-32

In this passage Jesus is speaking directly to Christians, men and women who believe in him. He is telling us that if we are to be disciples of his we must be faithful to all that he has taught. If we do that, he assures us that we will know the truth and the truth will free us from all the tangles and difficulties of this life.

We can't call ourselves Christians if we pick and choose the things that we want to believe and reject those teachings of Christ that we don't like. The world is full of people who think the Bible is like a cafeteria where you can pick and choose what you want. One cannot do that and be a Christian. A Christian by definition must be faithful to every thing that Jesus taught us. When we do that, we can be assured that we know the absolute truth. That truth will enable us to live in this world but not become a part of this world.

Youth: Have you learned all that Jesus taught? Do you believe everything?

Adults: Are you a cafeteria type Christian or do you hold dear all that Jesus taught?

Prayer: Father God, help us to be faithful to all that Jesus taught us so that we might enjoy eternal life in heaven with you. This we ask in the name of our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Central Nebraska

FRIDAY, MARCH 20 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 22:1-31

Jeremiah 11:1-8,14-17

Romans 6:1-11

John 8:33-47

Psalm 105:1-45

Sleepless Nights

by Karen Foss

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. -Psalm 63:1,6-8

This psalm of David was written when he was hiding from his enemies in the desert of Judah. He was lonely and longed for a friend he could trust.

I have a very hard time falling asleep. My mind seems to race with all kinds of thoughts when I go to bed. I always envied my husband, LeRoy, because within five minutes of lying down, he would be sound asleep while I watched the digital readout on the clock flip endlessly. David was awake because he was keeping watch, but he turned that time into singing praises to his God. My study bible says that a cure for sleepless nights is to turn our thoughts to God. That there are many reasons we can't sleep - illness, stress, worry - but sleepless nights can be turned into quiet times of reflection and worship. This is a good time to review how God has guided and helped you. What a good lesson this is! From now on, I will use this time to have some good conversation with my God.

Youth: Where do you find time to talk to God?

Adults: Do any of you have trouble sleeping? Do you turn to God at these times?

Prayer: Dear God, as a father longs to hear from their children, you long to hear from us, to be a vital part of our lives. Help us remember to turn to you because only you can satisfy our deepest longings. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Dakota (non-geographic)

SATURDAY, MARCH 21 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 43:1-5

Jeremiah 13:1-11

Romans 6:12-23

John 8:47-59

Psalm 31:1-24

The Gift That Keeps On Giving

by Marie Ruiz

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
-Romans 6:22-23

I celebrated a birthday this month; what I like the most about birthdays is the thought that people put into their gifts. When I want to give a relative or friend a birthday gift, I try to think of something that would be special to them and make them happy. After all it is their special day and year to come!

Gifts that we receive remind us of the one who gave the gift. The most precious gift of all that anyone would desire is the gift of eternal life, given by God. *It is truly the gift that keeps on giving ... there is no end!* What an awesome thought that when we commit our lives to God, he says "I love you so much that I want you to live with me forever." Eternally in Heaven. We cannot comprehend fully what it would mean to have a heavenly body, but we can trust that God's Word is holy and true. And that's good enough for me ... What a gift!

Youth: Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? When you ask Jesus to be your savior, he gives you eternal life.

Adults: Do birthdays or aging cause you to fear the future? Not so if you are a Christian. Birthdays literally bring us one year closer to our eternal home with our heavenly Father.

Prayer: Dear Lord help us to celebrate each passing year knowing that you have prepared a place for us to live forever. And help us to live our lives here on earth for your honor and glory so that others will commit their lives to you and receive your precious gift. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Des Moines (Iowa)

SUNDAY, MARCH 22 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 84:1-12

Jeremiah 14:1-16

Galatians 4:21-5:1

John 8:47-59

Psalm 42:1-11

How Lovely

by John Charles Cheek

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.*

-Psalm 84:1-2

Read the first verse of this passage out loud. Don't you just naturally slow down and draw out those words? "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!" It is such a beautiful sound on our lips.

It has been said that the book of Psalms was the hymnbook of Temple worship. I sometimes try to imagine what it must have been like to hear a choir singing this in the Temple. In fact, the Northminster Choir has frequently sung an anthem based on this text, and I can't read the words without the melody running through my head.

Do we have this same overpowering desire to be in the presence of the Lord? Do our souls yearn, and even faint, for the courts of the Lord? And yet we are the ones in whom the Holy spirit of God resides.

We have aching hungers for some things in our lives. For some it is security, for some it is belonging, for some it is material wealth, for some it is healing and protection. May each one of us, day by day, come to ache simply to know more, and experience more, of what it means to be a blessed and forgiven child of Almighty God.

Youth: What are some of the things you want the most of all? Loving God is even better than those things.

Adults: What are your hungers and your aches? How does your life testify that your deepest desire is to be closer to God?

Prayer: Lord, let us ache for you, and let us be filled with you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico

MONDAY, MARCH 23 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 119:73-80

Jeremiah 16:1-21

Romans 7:1-12

John 6:1-15

Psalm 121:1-8

The Angels Nest

by Dale McArthur

I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. -Psalm 121:1-2

We were serving a large downtown church in a city surrounded by high mountains. There were several large medical hospitals that served the surrounding states. Patients would arrive in need of the specialists in these hospitals but patients had no home church communities for support. I'm certain that each department had an angel assigned to them, also known as Registered Nurse. They knew when to call a pastor to stop by for a visit.

Early one morning the angel from a maternity ward called requiring a baptism for a newborn that was very weak. The mother was very concerned.

I assembled the church secretary, treasurer, and membership secretary, my white robe and portable baptismal font. We arrived at the hospital and the maternity was the size of a basketball court full of babies. Our newborn was in the center of the room. Our group was joined by the head nurse of maternity, parents and grandparents. It must have made an impressive group as we processed to the center of the room for the baptism.

Maybe it was my imagination but this room full of babies became unusually quiet. We baptized our newborn and as we left the room it seemed to me that I could hear the sound of wings flapping.

If you feel alone and discouraged - remember that God is present and will keep your going out and coming in.

Youth: Look around you. Can you identify the many ways God cares for you? You might even be aware of an angel.

Adults: Do we worry too much about our teenagers? They are in good hands and God can surely help them face their problems.

Prayer: Thank you God, for the assurance that you are with us and will keep us. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of East Iowa

TUESDAY, MARCH 24 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 34:1-22

Jeremiah 17:19-27

Romans 7:13-25

John 6:16-27

Psalm 25:1-22

I Do Not Understand What I Do

by Judy Williams

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. -Romans 7:15-16,19-20

Just try to read this tongue-twisting passage aloud! Poor Paul! He was writing a letter to the Romans, but I believe he was writing a letter to himself as well, trying to untie the knot of sin that controls each of us.

Paul has realized that like all of us, when he wants to do the right thing, evil is right beside him, tempting him to do the wrong thing. His inner being wants to obey God's law, while outside influences are drawing him toward sin. He asks, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" And immediately he answers: Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Because Jesus died for me, I know my sins are forgiven. Even trusting in his saving grace, I find evil standing beside me much too often. I do not understand what I do! I want to do the right thing, but so often I fall once again into sin.

But because I believe that God loves me and wants me to spend my eternity with him, I can say with Paul, "Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Youth: Can you think of a time when you knew the right thing to do, yet you did the wrong thing? Were you able to ask for God's forgiveness?

Adults: Do you always understand what you do? Or, like Paul, do you fail to do what you want to do, and do what you do not want to do?

Prayer: Father, we pray for your constant help in guiding our thoughts and actions. Keep us from doing the things that displease you, and help us to do the good we want to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Homestead Presbytery (Nebraska)

My God Shall Supply All Your Needs

by Jerry Smith

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. -Romans 8:11

When given a devotional assignment, I will read each of the Scriptures and then wait for the Spirit to give me a message on one of them. The assignment for today seemed like a shoo-in for either the Gospel of John or the letter to the Romans. In John, Christ was declaring himself to be the Bread of Life. And Romans chapter eight is breath-taking. But it wasn't that easy to choose because each of the Psalms is also great like, "The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?" Psalm 27. Jeremiah speaks of the potter and the clay in chapter 18. So you can see my dilemma.

After considerable prayer and meditation it came to me that if we are truly Christians and have the Spirit of God living in us, (the author of all the Scriptures 2 Peter 1:21), then it really doesn't matter where we open the Bible. If we ask and trust him, he will reveal the message God has for us today, as we meditate upon the "active and living Word" Hebrews 4:12.

A few more thoughts. Jesus said, "These Scriptures are all about me" John 5:39, and that the Holy Spirit, "Will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" John 16:14. If we want to know Jesus we must read the Scriptures and ask God's Spirit to reveal Jesus to us. The closing thought is this, "And my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" Philippians 4:19. No need is greater than God's riches in Christ Jesus.

Youth: Do you have needs? Ask God. Do you have wants? Ask your parents.

Adults: Do you need to know Jesus or know him better? God has the answer in the Holy Scriptures as revealed by his Spirit.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, our prayer is that Jesus our Lord will be revealed to us as we read the Word each and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of John Knox (Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin)

Pain with a Purpose

by Jennifer Monroe

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. -Romans 8:22-23

I gave birth to our third child last August, and while each of my children's births was different, there was one thing they all shared in common: pain. Bill Cosby once quoted Carol Burnett as saying that the sensation of giving birth was not unlike the feeling you'd get if you pulled your bottom lip up over your head. I don't think it matters how a baby is born, through a "natural childbirth" or with lots of medication, he is going to cause his mommy a significant amount of pain somewhere in the process. The pain of childbirth is pain that is productive and purposeful. All of those contractions work together to deliver a new life into the world, and it's remarkable how quickly the memory of the pain seems to fade away with the joy of seeing the face of a new-born baby.

Paul says that creation itself is experiencing something not unlike the pains of labor. The entire universe has been affected by sin, and it is in the long and often painful process of being redeemed. We are used to thinking about human beings as depraved and sinful, but we don't as often think about the implications of the fact that all of creation is in bondage to sin. However, the really good news is that "God so loved the world that he gave His one and Only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). I've been told that the word "world" in this verse could also be translated as "cosmos" or "universe." Jesus' life, death and resurrection have "*already*" secured salvation for the entire universe, human beings included. However, we must live in the tension of knowing that redemption is also "*not yet*" - we, along with the creation, are all still "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons". Perhaps one way to think about our task as Christians is to envision ourselves as obstetricians or midwives, people whose job it is to help bring new life to birth, wherever we are. When we hear creation's groans, we need to do what we can to make sure that pain has a joyful purpose.

Youth: What was the time in your life you experienced a lot of pain? Did anything good come out of the pain?

Adults: Where is one place you can hear "creation groaning"? What is one thing you can do about it?

Prayer: God, Creator of the universe, we thank you for the victory over death that Jesus accomplished on the cross and we pray that we might be your agents to bring to birth your new creation, wherever we are. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Milwaukee (Wisconsin)

Only One Word is Final

by Dick Leon

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 8:37-39

What happens after an army conquers another land? The next steps are occupation and reconstruction. Historically you could also make a case that some conquests ended with occupation and exploitation! But if the conquering nation is honorable and wise they will seek to build up the country and set it free to thrive on its own, as America did with Germany and Japan after the Second World War!

Because of Jesus Christ we are more than *conquerors* over all the forces that we might fear: life and death, angels and demons, things present or future, any powers that would threaten to undo us from on high or down low. And in case Paul missed something, "anything else in all creation!" None of these forces have any power now to separate us from life ... because we are now *occupied* by the love of God that has come to us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Paul is describing the consequences of Easter for us! The dark forces are still real until the end of time ... but they are not final!

- Death is still real; but death does not have the final word.
- Demons are still real; but demons do not have the final word
- Troubles are still real; but troubles do not have the final word..
- Jesus Christ is the Final Word to death and demons and trouble!

Because of Jesus Christ we live with resurrection power over any and all dark forces of this world! Hallelujah and Amen!

Youth: This world talks a lot about the dark powers of the universe that can harm you. Do you know you are safe from them all in Jesus Christ?

Adults: Do you fear death or demons or the troubles of the future even after knowing Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Mighty God, we thank you so much for your conquest over the dark forces of this world! Keep us safe in your son, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys (Minnesota)

To Whom Shall We Go?

by Jennifer Monroe

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." -John 6:66-69

At first, following Jesus must have been completely exhilarating. Here, at last, was the Messiah, the One for whom the people of Israel had been hoping and praying for years. He made the sick well, fed the hungry, walked on the water, preached with an authority that none had ever seen before. And then, following started to get harder. Jesus' teaching started to be more and more confusing and shocking: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (John 6:56). What in the world is this man talking about? Has he gone crazy? How can we eat his flesh and drink his blood? And then, rather than toning his message down or explaining what he meant, Jesus said "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (6:65b). It's as though Jesus has drawn a line in the sand that many of his disciples simply cannot cross. The newness and excitement worn off, they decide to turn back and go home.

Sometimes, we would all prefer a Messiah whose words are nothing more than pretty platitudes and whose message is nothing more than a gospel of niceness and tolerance. We walk in danger of allowing our own conception of what we would like the Messiah to be to overcome the truth about who he really is. We allow ourselves to see nothing in Jesus but the kind of savior that we would like, smoothing over the rough spots and adding or subtracting as we see fit. When the truth gets hard to accept, we pack our bags and head off somewhere else, looking for a different religion that will make us feel better about ourselves. The Gospel message of John is clear, however: beware of following a Messiah who never demands anything of you, who never says things that are at times difficult to understand. We can all thank God for the courage and grace of Simon Peter who understood that even though being Jesus' disciple wasn't always easy, it was Jesus who had the "words of life." For Peter the choice was no choice at all. Where else could he possibly go?

Youth: Is there something about Jesus that is confusing or hard for you to understand?

Adults: How do you deal with the aspects of following Jesus that you find difficult?

Prayer: Jesus, give us the grace to follow you, even when the way seems hard. We believe that you are the Holy One of God. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Missouri River Valley (Iowa and Nebraska)

SUNDAY, MARCH 29 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 84:1-12 Jeremiah 23:16-32 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Mark 8:31-9:1 Psalm 25:1-22

A Mint on the Pillow

by Andy Ross

My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. -Psalm 84:2

Have you ever thought about those little amenities which say, "Welcome. Make yourself at home, like little mints on the pillow in a hotel; courtesy newspapers to read; helpful gestures that say "You can relax; you're supposed to be here"?

Psalm 84 is a well-loved picture of the peace we find when we enter God's temple, when we come into the presence of the Lord - for worship, but really for refuge and shelter.

Jesus came, and carried his cross, so that we could be fully at home with God every day. The cross is a picture of abandonment and pain, outside of the city, far away from the temple. Jesus took upon himself all of the punishment and pain of our wrongdoing, so that we can be restored and welcomed into the most glorious presence of our heavenly Father.

Then, in our reading from Mark and 1 Corinthians we are encouraged to think of those ways we can serve others - by carrying our own cross of sacrifice, by all the ways we live as servants for those around us - caring, listening, helping, and sometimes just being there. It's a way Jesus helps us live each day "at home"; it's a key way we experience the shelter of the Savior with and for each other through him, on this journey homeward.

Youth: What are the ways you welcome guests into your home? What does that teach you about God welcoming us into his presence?

Adults: This week, what are those servant, "mint on the pillow" opportunities to show someone else that you care, and that Jesus cares for them?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you, for leaving all your glory and home behind, and serving us on the cross, so that we could be welcomed into your presence this day! Help us to live as your servants for someone else today. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship

MONDAY, MARCH 30 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 119:73-80

Jeremiah 24:1-10

Romans 9:19-33

John 9:1-17

Psalm 121:1-8

Lessons From Cruising

by Anne Price

As it is written in the Scripture: See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. -Romans 9:33

As I started to read this verse I noticed the opening statement and saw that it was referring to Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16, the Old and New Testament all tied together.

The reminder of the breaking of laws and the mercy of parents took me back to my teen years. I was a strong willed girl who just wanted to have fun. When I was 15, I decided to go cruising downtown in our family's big Packard. It was certainly against the law for me to drive without a license, but I did it anyway. The police pulled me over right in the center of town. They took me in the squad car to find my parents who were at a church festival. I was certainly disciplined but I still knew that I was loved. They did show me mercy that I did not deserve. The laws given to us by God are meant for our own good. Yet, we follow our own will and break them. If it wasn't for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross dying for our sins we could not have been saved on our own merit as sinners. I trust God's mercy because it brings the joy of a true relationship with him.

Youth: Have you ever gone against your parent's rules and received their loving forgiveness though may have been punished?

Adults: How have you received mercy when you know that you broke one of God's laws?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for standing up for me in my many weaknesses. I may let you down at times, but you never leave me unloved. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of North Central Iowa

TUESDAY, MARCH 31 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 34:1-22

Jeremiah 25:8-17

Romans 10:1-13

John 9:18-41

Psalm 25:1-22

Frightened or Scared?

by Marshall Worden

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. 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. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

—Psalm 1-2a, 4-5, 16-17, 21

Situation 1: Seventeen. On the way from California to college. First night in New York City. Alone in a hotel room. Never completely on my own before. Lonely. Afraid. Crying.

Situation 2: Twenty-one. With best friend. In prop plane over Bay of Bengal somewhere between Calcutta and Rangoon. Plane falling several thousand feet. Screaming all around. Surprisingly calm.

Situation 3: Fifty-something. With best friends. Hiking in Chiricahua Mountains. Maybe lost; on wrong trail. Hot, over heated, desperately in need of cold water. Great fun, being ridiculed, laughed at and with.

These life snippets remind me how dependent I am on friends and, particularly, how much I value friends when they are right with me in times of challenge and fun. I am grateful for the faithfulness of friends and family from childhood and youth into adulthood. It is really amazing to consider all the comfort, advice, encouragement, correction and discipline, protection and guidance dear friends provide even when we are way off track.

Psalm 25 is precious to me because it reminds me that my most important friend - Jesus - is always very close and I have immediate access to him. I've leaned on this psalm often, in times of serious illness, death of parents and friends, my own bad behavior, and great work stress. Where are you and your friends today? Are you frightened by economic, job and financial conditions? Do you feel lonely or hopeless? Do you need guidance? Remember that Jesus is here for you.

Youth: When have you been really scared by events in your life? Who helped you get through those situations? How did Jesus get through tough times?

Adults: Do you fully depend on Jesus and how's your relationship with God today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for always being available in my life no matter what the situation. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Northern Plains
(Minnesota, Montana and North Dakota)

Faith

by John McKee

One day in Capernaum
As Jesus was teaching
In someone's home to a crowd...

Hearing a raucous commotion
Commence overhead
They looked up as it became loud.

All were startled to see
A hole being made
Through the ceiling above the Lord's head

On the roof men were working
At enlarging the hole
Through the tiles to lower a bed.

As the crowd gazed in awe,
A paralyzed man
Was let down to the floor via rope

By four compassionate friends
Who had brought him to Jesus
To be healed... was their fervent hope.

Seeing their faith Jesus said
"... *Your sins are forgiven.*"
To the paralyzed man on his mat.

The scribes grew very angry
And called it blasphemous
When they heard the Savior say that.

"*Which is easier,*" Christ asked
"*To say, 'Your sins are forgiven.'*"
"*Or, 'Take up your pallet and walk?'"*

The crowd glorified God
At what they were to witness
The room buzzed with excited talk

For they were anticipating
A miraculous healing
By Jesus in the room they were in.

He demonstrated the authority
Given him by the Father
To forgive men of their repented sin.

Christ said to the paralytic,
***“I say to you, rise...
“Take up your pallet and go home.”***

The man immediately arose
And took up his pallet
Praising God to now walk on his own.



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