

# Northminster Daily Devotions

May 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](http://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 ?? DAY, ?? 26, 2009.*

Cover image: Monastery area of Clonmacnoise, Ireland

***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.***

## ***A Special Cactus***

by Dale McArthur

*Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them. -Luke 5:14*

It was one of those Missouri winter days, cold wind from the north that put a chill in everyone. A small, old, frail, German widow from our parish was in a hospital 100 miles from home scheduled for cancer surgery. Part of my ministry was to be present when any member went to surgery - this was no exception. We spent some time together in the surgery prep room, with prayer, and I waited until she returned from recovery. She had no friends or relatives to be with her.

She returned home a couple of weeks later where the ladies of the parish could look in on her.

A couple of months later she called and asked if I could stop by, she had something for me. I responded and she had a gift for me: a Christmas Cactus planted in a rusty, one pound Maxwell coffee can. Probably her only possession she could give me. I thanked her graciously and took it home.

A descendant of this special cactus grows proudly in our living room, blooms at Christmas, to remind us of a little, old German lady and her faith. She was responding to Jesus' instruction to the cured man with leprosy. I was the nearest one to the church she could give a gift.

I wonder if we are not missing a blessing by not observing this gift giving after something special happens to us. This gift giving could be private or in the open but it would be our way of thanking Jesus and identifying our recognition of Christ's love to us.

**Youth:** Can you identify God's blessing to you? Can you tell others about it?

**Adults:** Our children are a special blessing to us. Could we have a time when we publicly thank Jesus for this blessing?

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings of healing, both physical and spiritual that you send to us. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***United Church in Christ in Japan***

## ***Walk the Talk***

by Jennifer Hager

*He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the lions. -Daniel 6:27*

Many of my friends like the book of Daniel the best of all the books of the Old Testament. My friend Suzan and her husband even gave their son, Eric, the middle name of Daniel in honor of God's word.

In our passage from Daniel today, we find the story of Daniel in the lion's den. How wonderful it is to see the king convinced of his wrongdoing of Daniel. The king rejoices in the morning when he finds Daniel safe. Daniel, God's faithful servant knew that God would spare him from the lions. But it was Daniel's action that convinced the king that God was the living God.

King Darius then wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language this tribute to the living God.

Daniel was willing to be thrown into the lion's den to demonstrate his faith in the Lord. His actions punctuated his words and the king Darius was convinced.

**Youth:** Do you try to match your actions with your words?

**Adults:** What steps do we need to take to live our faith and let our actions show God's love?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Almighty God, we give ourselves to thee. Please make me a living, breathing example of you so I may honor and glorify you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Reformed Church in Japan***

## SUNDAY, MAY 3 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalms 93:1-5

Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-15

1 Peter 5:1-11

Matthew 7:15-29

Psalms 136:1-26

# *Oh, Them Lions...*

by Pete Seiferth

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. -1 Peter 5:7*

Discipleship can be tough. In today's readings, Paul and Jesus both shared images of wild animals who would seek to discourage or misdirect those who are called to follow Jesus' purposes for life. Jesus mentioned false prophets lurking as ferocious wolves around the sheep pen. Paul described the enemy lurking as a roaring lion seeking to devour those who are not alert.

The Christian band Lost and Found wrote a song years ago called, "Lions," and the lyrics to the chorus go:

*Oh them lions they can eat my body  
But they can't swallow my soul  
They keep on trying to crash my party  
But they can't get control  
No way, baby, uh-uh*

Just as there are dangers in the world that will seek to derail our lives of discipleship, or our development as leaders, Scripture gives us great hope, so that we can trust that those lions won't "crash our party." Jesus tells us to beware of the goodness of something by the fruit it produces. Good tree, good fruit. Paul offers assurance to those in leadership that, even though times can be tough, the God of grace provides strength and restoration—and often this encouragement comes from knowing other Christian brothers and sisters who have gone through the same thing—and that our family of humble servants lives all over the world.

While our anxiety is real, and can be overwhelming, we are able to stand up in tough times because Jesus and his church gives care to us. So next time you see someone in a tough spot, don't just say, "get over it." Provide a humble word of care, and offer real help—because remember, we are family.

**Youth:** What is the scariest animal you can think of? What do think about the fact, that no matter how scared you are, God loves and protects you?

**Adults:** What kind of things have "crashed your party" lately, and you've wondered where God is? How have you helped others know God's peace in anxious times?

**Prayer:** God of Strength, restore us and make us strong to care for others in the ways that Jesus has cared for us. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Older Adult Week***

## MONDAY, MAY 4 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 97:1-12

Wisdom of Solomon 1:16-2:11

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 6:1-11

Psalm 124:1-8

# ***The Lord is on My Side***

by Marie Ruiz

*If the Lord had not been on our side... Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. -Psalm 124:2,8*

Have you ever told someone “If I didn’t have the Lord, I don’t know what I would do”? I have said this on many occasions especially when difficult and very trying circumstances came my way. I so often will recognize God’s provision, protection and mighty arms that uphold me, when faced with deep trials. And yet if I really were to think about it, I should say this every day because every day without a trial is evidence of God’s hand of protection on my life.

God is ever present, always with us and seeks to guide us in all our ways. We are sometimes oblivious to his presence, but he’s there, right there waiting for us to have a dialog with him in prayer.

The Psalmist so eloquently praises God on Israel’s behalf for the imminent dangers that posed a threat to this Sovereign nation. And it is all by God’s grace that we are the recipients of this assured protection. We can be confident that the maker of Heaven and earth is mightier than any foe that seeks to destroy us. Praise his holy name!

**Youth:** What everyday troubles or worries do you experience that make you fretful or nervous? Can you pray to God and tell him what troubles you? God will protect you and calm your fears.

**Adults:** In this life there will be many trials, and in our day, many concerns and worries. But our hope and confidence is in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He is our protection!

**Prayer:** God our protector, provider, lover of our souls, thank you for your gracious favor that goes with us every day, every hour and every minute. We give you praise. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***United Church in Christ in the Philippines***

## TUESDAY, MAY 5 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 98:1-9

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

Colossians 1:15-23

Luke 6:12-26

Psalm 66:1-20

# ***Don't Mess With Perfection***

by Jerry Smith

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. -Psalm 98:1*

When I was the administrative officer on the U.S.S. Ticonderoga, I worked directly for the Executive Officer of the ship. No matter what I wrote and how well I thought I wrote it he would change it. I decided that I would present all the facts in the best order possible then he could do whatever turned him on. I wonder if he could find anything wrong with this Psalm? I couldn't and I think you also will see it's perfection!

Read again the first verse and continue, "The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn-shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the people with equity."

**Youth:** Do your teachers correct your papers in ways you consider helpful?

**Adults:** Do you see the perfection of this 98th Psalm?

**Prayer:** Lord, we shout your praise for the perfection of our salvation! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Presbyterian Church in Singapore***

## ***Christ Marks the Spot***

by Jennifer Monroe

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. -Colossians 2:2-3*

Imagine hunting through your grandmother's attic. As you poke around through dusty old furniture, boxes of outdated clothes, and broken children's toys from yesteryear, you find an ancient-looking steamer trunk. Way down at the bottom, underneath stacks of old photographs and some decaying books, you find what appears to be a piece of parchment paper. Carefully opening it up, you gaze at its contents and realize that you are looking at a map, complete with a large red X right in the center. It's a treasure map, detailing the exact location of a grand fortune that has belonged to your family for years but has been hidden away and then somehow forgotten.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he says that God's plan of salvation for his people the Israelites was like a treasure map that had been hidden away for many centuries. It was a "mystery that had been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (1:26). The "ah ha!" moment has finally happened, the mystery has finally been revealed, and the answer is: Jesus! Ironically, he is the solution that no one anticipated or could have guessed. It turns out that Jesus was not simply a wise moral teacher or a means by which one could have a special spiritual experience; he is the key to the whole puzzle. Jesus is Lord of the universe and in him are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). Perhaps an even more amazing detail is that this plan that God has kept hidden for centuries now also includes Gentiles, those who formerly were left "out of the loop." And, incredibly, Paul encourages the Colossians to remember that if they have received Christ as Lord, they now have access to all of this treasure, formerly hidden in Christ and now being brought to light. It belongs to them! If you found a treasure map in your grandmother's attic, what do you think your next step would be? Would you carefully put the map back in the trunk and close the lid, pretending that you'd never found it? Or would you run downstairs, waving the map and shouting to your family, "Come on! Let's go get our treasure!" I think if we began to understand these "glorious riches", the "hope of glory" that we have, that nothing could keep us from sharing the good news with the whole world.

**Youth:** How is Jesus like a treasure?

**Adults:** What does it mean in your life that Jesus is the answer, the key to the puzzle? How can you share that with others?

**Prayer:** Jesus, we declare that you are Lord, we praise you for your presence in our lives, and we thank you for the hope of glory you have given us. Keep us rooted and built up in you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Presbyterian Church in Taiwan***

## ***A Solid Foundation***

by Karen Foss

*Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. “But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.” -Luke 6:46-49*

You may know someone that comes to church on Sunday morning and then goes home and forgets what being a Christian is all about. You know that old joke about “how do you get to Carnegie Hall... practice, practice, practice. This holds true for our faith. We shouldn’t just attend church we need to be practicing being the church. The best way to do this is to read the Bible daily, get involved in a good Bible study group and live what you’re learning.

My Life Application Bible footnote for these scriptures sums it up this way “Obeying God is like building a house on a strong, solid foundation that stands firm when storms come. When life is calm, our foundations don’t seem to matter. But when crises come, our foundations are tested.”

My personal life is a reflection of this. Sixteen years ago when my son died, I wasn’t attending church or reading the Bible and his death rocked me off of the little foundation I had. While I believed in God, my faith was weak. Last November when my husband died it was much different. We attended church regularly, read the Bible and were involved in a great small group Bible study. While I still grieved, I knew where my strength came from.

**Youth:** Have you done any building? Do you know how important a good foundation is?

**Adults:** What are you doing to strengthen your spiritual foundation?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help me continue to build my foundation by studying your word. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***National Day of Prayer***

## FRIDAY, MAY 8 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 96:1-13

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-23

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 7:1-17

Psalm 49:1-20

# **One Day Near Nain**

by Scott Coverdale

*When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."*

*-Luke 7:13*

People die every day. We all know that is true. People die young or old. Sometimes even children die whose mothers are widows. God knows that happens. Jesus knew that happens. But one day when Jesus was padding down the shoulder of a dirt road, little clouds of dust puffing up around his feet at every step, he saw a woman, a widow, following her only son's dead body out to the cemetery. And she was crying. She cried out her broken mother's heart with such a desolation that it would have broken your heart, too, if you had been there. And on that day outside the village of Nain, Jesus was there. And that woman's crying broke his heart. And he begged her to stop crying because he couldn't take it any more. Of course she couldn't stop just because he told her to. Her only son, her beloved child, was dead and was being carried to a hole in the ground. So then Jesus, because he could, because he was connected to his heavenly father, put life back in the boy and returned him to his mother.

Would God have given life back to that boy if Jesus hadn't been there to hear that mother crying? I don't know. It seems like God was exposed to her suffering through his man on the ground, through Jesus. And even though people die every day, even widow's children, her crying got through to Jesus, and Jesus got through to God and in an impulse of unrestrained pity, God set that boy's heart to thumping again, and whatever it was that had sent him on that trip to the graveyard was backtracked and rewritten.

I am not about to make sweeping statements about the nature of the Trinity or the power of prayer. I am ready, though, to be comforted by the knowledge that the God of the universe can be moved by the grief of a widow on a dusty road outside the town of Nain in the year thirty-something A.D. He doesn't always intervene to reverse our mortal grief, but knowing that he cares and that his heart is moved by us, can give us real comfort.

**Youth:** How do you feel when someone you love is crying? How do you think God feels when we grieve?

**Adults:** Does the grief of other people ever break your heart?

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for being vulnerable to our grief. Help us to be moved, also, by the need of other people who you love. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Presbyterian Bible College (Taiwan)***

# ***The Shepherd's Arsenal***

by Dick Leon

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. -Psalm 23:1-4*

Psalm 23 tells us God is like a shepherd and we are like sheep.

I grew up in a city so I don't have any firsthand experience with sheep and shepherds. But I once spoke at a Dude Ranch in the wild open lands of Northern Montana. Ranchers came from all around for a week long Bible conference. I had to borrow some cowboy-like threads to try to look the part. But these dudes of Big Sky country soon saw right through my duds to the city wimp that I was.

Along the way I asked one man what it was like to herd sheep. I've never forgotten his words! His appraisal: "Sheep are the neediest animals around, they cannot survive without a shepherd!"

Hmmm, what do you think? Does that appraisal fit us? I think so!

I also learned from my rancher friend that sheep will never lie down and rest unless they feel secure. Look at the shepherd's arsenal against those situations that make sheep insecure:

- The rod was used to ward off predators.
- The staff was used to roll sheep back onto their feet when they were 'cast down' (fallen on their backs) and were unable to get up on their own!
- The anointing oil kept pests from making nests in their ears.

We, too, are insecure if we don't have protection against our predators, help for when we are cast down, and something to counter the pesky ideas of our world that make nests in our ears! Jesus is the One Good Shepherd whose arsenal makes us secure!

**Youth:** What cures do you have when the 'audio pests' of this culture make nasty-spirited nests in your ears?

**Adults:** When you become 'cast down' do you have anyone like Jesus to pick you up?

**Prayer:** Thank you, good Lord, for being our Good Shepherd through life! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu***

## SUNDAY, MAY 10 LECTONARY READINGS

Psalm 93:1-5 Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-8:1 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 Matthew 7:7-14 Psalm 136:1-266

# ***Google the God Beyond Google!***

by Andy Ross

*Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days, O Lord. - Psalm 93:5*

Ok — right now, think of where you are standing (or sitting) in the context of your location ... in Tucson, ... in Arizona, ... in the United States, ... in North America, ... on the planet Earth. Think for a moment why you exist. Think about what is holding you to the planet (ok, but who created the gravity system?).

Google computer software now allows many computer users to look at the globe, type in a location, and then the program zooms in slowly to that location, getting closer and closer, allowing you to actually see that location up close, using satellite photography. It's a thrilling development.

And it prompts me to wonder — to wonder about a God who made this world; to wonder about a God who is “robed with majesty,” who is mightier “than the thunder of the great waters.” Our scriptures seem to have a theme relating to how we choose to stand in life — and how our standing in life is directly affected by the majesty of an awesome, holy and compassionate God.

So, look again at where you are right now. Who created you? Who is the one who gives you each breath of life? Who is the one who so wondrously created the world you live in? Do you know this Creator, Savior, and Sustainer God? Do you have a moment to stop googling on the computer, and simply worship the God who made us, and saves us?

**Youth:** Where in the world would you like to travel, if you could? Why? How would the people in that place describe God to you? How would you describe God as you know him, to others there?

**Adults:** What places have you traveled? Where have you seen scenes of glory, that reflect the majesty of God? Why?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you, for not simply creating this amazing world, but inspiring us with life, and guiding us through life each day. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (Atlanta, Georgia)***

## *Forgive Us Our Debts*

by Jennifer Monroe

*Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little. -Luke 7:47*

I have always appreciated the fact that at Northminster, when we say the Lord's Prayer, we use the words "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" rather than "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." To me, using the word "debts" makes what we're talking about very clear, whereas "trespasses" seems quite a bit more vague and removed from my experience. I know very clearly what it means to be in debt, and I know, equally as clearly that I really don't like it. In our self-sufficient culture, most of us could probably agree that we don't relish the thought of owing anyone anything, be it money, time, or allegiance.

The woman who comes to honor Jesus by anointing his feet with an expensive bottle of perfume knows very clearly just how indebted she is. She is a sinful woman, a prostitute, and ordinarily someone of Jesus' reputation would have had nothing to do with her. The Pharisee who is his host for the evening is aghast at her intrusion and Jesus' seeming acceptance of her, and he thinks to himself, "If this man were really who he claims to be, he would know who this woman is and he would stay far away from her!" The point, of course, is that not only does Jesus know *exactly* who this woman is, but he also knows who Simon the Pharisee is. Simon had ignored some of the most basic laws of Jewish hospitality by not offering Jesus any water to wash his feet, not greeting him with a kiss when he entered his house, and not anointing his head with oil. He is pretending to be a righteous, generous, and perhaps even open-minded man by having Jesus over for dinner, but in reality he doesn't think he needs Jesus and is unconcerned about Jesus' opinion of him. He is under the delusion that he "owes little" and therefore his love is paltry and weak in comparison with the woman who is very well aware that she "owed much" and yet "has been forgiven much". Her remarkable gesture shows the courage of one who understands just how much she has been forgiven. The question is: how much do *you* love Jesus? Do you see yourself as a pretty moral, upstanding, pillar-of-the-community kind of person, simply in need of a handshake or a pat on the back from Jesus? Or have you begun to understand just how much debt you've been forgiven, how much grace has been poured into your life, and how much you're coming to love the man who welcomes you with open arms, regardless of what you've done?

**Youth:** Have you ever been in debt to anyone? What did that feel like?

**Adults:** With whom do you most identify in this story, Simon the Pharisee, or the unnamed sinful woman?

**Prayer:** Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving our debts. Teach us to know and love you more and more every day. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Uniting Church in Australia***

***Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa (New Zealand)***

## ***Do You Believe This?***

by Frank Shallenberger

*The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. —Psalm 98:2*

I love the Old Testament writings especially, the Psalms. The prophecy of David regarding Jesus Christ is simply remarkable to say the very least. Through the presence of our Lord Jesus, God did make his salvation known. He fed the hungry, stood up for the oppressed, restored sight to the blind, healed the cripple and put his arms around little children, righteousness being theirs.

God revealed his righteousness to the entire world through Jesus public life for he fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. These Psalms of David's are but one example of this.

Since God went to all this trouble to gain salvation for believers how is it possible that so many living today have no faith at all or do not believe in Jesus Christ? It is no wonder that Jesus says "no one comes to the father except through me." There is only one way to obtain salvation and that is for faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Youth:** Have you met Jesus Christ in your Sunday school classes? Do you believe in him?

**Adults:** Are you one of those who has read these verses and yet has not believed? Have you discussed your problem with the pastor or a good Christian friend? Salvation is yours for the taking. Do it now, you may not have another time.

**Prayer:** Father God, touch the hearts of all of those who have not yet been convicted by the Holy Spirit and asked Jesus to dwell within them. We know it is your desire that all be saved. This we ask in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Synod of Lincoln Trails (Illinois and Indiana)***

# Walk His Walk

by Cheryl Moore

*And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me. -Jeremiah 32:38-40*

How do we the Church, God's own hands, feet and body, convey his heart to others? It sometimes seems that people outside the "Church" body equate our Lord, who is perfect and infallible, with imperfect people who are struggling everyday just trying to tell God's story. We sometimes find this difficult to do but we have to stay on course and fix our eyes and hearts on God's "Everlasting Covenant" (Promise).

How many times have you heard someone say "Well, if that's the way Christians act, God is not for me!?" It is up to us to show that while we are not perfect and seem to muddle through and make mistakes, God's perfect heart, perfect love and forgiveness turns no one away. We, as representatives of Jesus Christ, need to try to "walk his walk" and "talk his talk". Not only are we charged with encouraging those who do not know him but we must provide a Christ-like example and support for our Christian "family".

We are his hands on Earth! Sure, we will mess it up on occasion! The good news... as imperfect as we are, God's everlasting covenant with us through Jesus, fills us with his love and helps us to always strive for good and never depart from him!

**Youth:** Do you encourage others or use your words to hurt? How do you show God's love to your friends even if it's not popular?

**Adults:** Are you trying to "walk his walk" and "talk his talk"? Share Jesus with someone today! Show him in your actions!

**Prayer:** Father, make us aware of your one heart and one way so that we may always follow you, be an example of you and never depart from your perfect love! In Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Blackhawk (Illinois)***

## ***Meat or Not Meat***

by Anne Price

*The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. -Romans 14:3*

In order to fully understand this verse I had to read the entire chapter a couple of times. The main idea that I received from the Apostle Paul was not to judge others by having an opinion on doubtful matters.

This verse was on the subject of food. Jesus himself declared that all food is clean. The meat referred to in this verse is meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. We are to eat to the glory of God whatever it is that we eat. We have no right to judge how another eats.

For many years I struggled with a weight problem. I tried every diet that came along. Now as a Lifetime member of Weight Watchers I am no longer a slave to food. My fellow members who keep their weight off are free to choose the foods that they want, just in reasonable quantities. Some of us are meat eaters, vegetarians, vegans and so forth. We don't look over each others' shoulders and say that only one type of food is good.

The danger of criticism is how it may affect others. I don't want my Christian witness to be hindered by what I say or do. I have my own struggles. I have no right to judge how another eats or drinks. It is suggested that I do not do anything to lead another to what is not right for them. It is up to me to cultivate my own relationship with God and not to impose it on others.

**Youth:** When you eat do you ever think about how this food came from God as a gift?

**Adults:** Have you ever been judgmental about how another eats and not look at your own plate?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, please keep me looking at my own habits and not judging how others eat or drink, for everything that God creates is good. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Chicago (Illinois)***

## ***The Almost Blind Architect***

by Dale McArthur

*But Jesus Said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone from me." Then the woman, seeing she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." -Luke 8:46-48*

During our seminary years our national church held its big meeting in a nearby city. We thought it would be educational if we could attend. One of our friends had relatives living there providing sleeping quarters. When you have little money, you beg a bit. One evening we were invited to one of their friend's home for dinner.

This friend was an architect for a suburban town and had a life changing story to tell.

In an annual visit for eye examination, his optometrist told him he was going blind and in a couple of months he would not be able to see. There are few blind architects practicing, so you can imagine the life shattering impact this news had on him.

He went home and began to prepare his life for the weeks to come, asked his church to pray for him and was trying to decide what to do with his business.

One evening as his eyes were beginning to dim, a lady from the church called by phone and asked if she could come by to visit him. He agreed and her visit was quite simple. She asked him to sit in a chair, she walked behind him and placed her hands on his eyes. He said he felt a warm sensation, she thanked him and departed. The next day he went to his doctor for a follow-up and the doctor told him he was cured, the tumor was gone, and wanted to know what happened.

Unless one has walked this path we would not know how this man felt but he was showing eternal gratitude to his Lord for the healing in his life.

We don't remember a thing that happened at the church conference but we sure do remember the testimony and love shown to us by an almost blind architect.

**Youth:** Can you be aware of the secondary lesson going on around you and the additional meaning for your life?

**Adults:** Can "Open my eyes that I may see" have a new meaning for us?

**Prayer:** Lord, help us see and understand your work all around us. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Great Rivers (Illinois)***

## SATURDAY, MAY 16 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 92:1-15

Wisdom of Solomon 19:1-8,18-22

Romans 15:1-13

Luke 9:1-17

Psalm 23:1-6

# ***Mt. Hope Church***

by Jennifer Hager

*He makes me lie in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. -Psalm 23:2-3a*

Psalm 23 is a standard Bible verse for children to memorize. I can't remember how old I was when I first learned it. When we were kids, living in the eastern suburbs of Pittsburgh, our family attended Mt. Hope Presbyterian Church. It must have been there because we moved to a different part of the city when I was twelve.

Many (many) years later, this part of the Psalm entered my understanding. The Lord's grace taught me the verse when I was twelve and brought it to my understanding when I was fifty!

I suffered a freak back injury that left me unable to walk except in severe pain. The injury was quickly diagnosed and I recovered fully in short order. But the word of the Lord was on my heart. The back problem slowed me down, quieted my soul from a troublesome work situation that I was in. During my recovery, I rested physically, mentally and most importantly, spiritually. Eventually my back healed and I returned to work with a restored soul.

**Youth:** When you are sick or don't feel good, do you try to take the time to think about Jesus and how he promises to make us better?

**Adults:** Are we preparing our minds and souls with God's Word so he can restore us when we need it?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, Almighty God, thank you for loving me so much that even when I was a child, you were preparing me for my relationship with you. We ask that you continually prepare us for your will. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Midwest Hanmi Presbytery (non-geographic)***

## SUNDAY, MAY 17 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 93:1-5

Deuteronomy 15:1-11

1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Matthew 13:24-34a

Psalm 136:1-26

# ***His Love Endures Forever***

by John Charles Cheek

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. -Psalm 136:1-4*

I was reared in a small fundamentalist church in a small rural community. I grew up singing gospel hymns like *The Old Rugged Cross*, *Power in the Blood*, and *I'll Fly Away*. When I became a Presbyterian as an adult, I learned an entirely new set of hymns. These were more high-church hymns, like when *I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*, and *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*. When I helped to establish the contemporary worship service at Northminster, I was introduced into yet another style of worship music. And for me it took a little getting used to. I was particularly challenged by repeating phrases again and again. I wasn't used to it, and it didn't sound like worship music as I knew it.

But if we read Psalm 136, there is the same refrain, repeated again and again and again, "His love endures forever." This is worship music of Israel, and it drives the point home in an effective way.

Not all musical styles and not all songs are in my comfort zone. But I believe with all my heart that, when followers of Jesus Christ lift up their voices to praise him, his name is glorified, regardless of the style or genre or title.

**Youth:** What's your favorite song about God? Sing a little of it right now.

**Adults:** What is your favorite hymn or praise song? What makes it your favorite? How does it speak to you right now? Sing a little of it, as an offering to God.

**Prayer:** Lord God, please fill our hearts with songs of praise to you, for your love endures forever. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Church of the Indian Fellowship***

## MONDAY, MAY 18 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 97:1-12

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

James 1:1-15

Luke 9:18-27

Psalm 124:1-8

# *What is Righteousness?*

by Jerry Smith

*He humbled you, causing you to hunger then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but on every word that that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

*-Deuteronomy 8:3*

The other night, some brothers and sisters of the Lord gathered at a home for fellowship and study. Just as we were getting started one of the participants asked me "What is Righteousness?" To be honest, I didn't know. Oh, I gave a few Scriptures out of Romans but we, or I, didn't answer the question and instead of taking 15 minutes to search the Scriptures to come up with a complete answer, we went ahead with the planned study. This incident has troubled me because I believe it indicates our priorities are wrong, and also because maybe we are more comfortable relying on a program than the Bible for our answers.

This caused me to do my own Bible study and come up with an answer I would like to share with you.

### **RIGHTEOUSNESS IS:**

Living a moral life pleasing to God (from the definition of righteousness found in my dictionary/concordance).

Through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22).

As we are molded, guided and nurtured by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God as it is revealed and brought to life to us by the Holy Spirit. By our Scripture for the day and the purpose of the Holy Spirit as found in John chapters 14, 15 and 16.

**Youth:** Do you realize that righteousness is a lifelong commitment?

**Adults:** Would you rather follow a prepared Bible study than the Bible itself?

**Prayer:** Lord make us hungry for your Word. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

*The Presbytery of Ohio Valley (Indiana)*

# ***We Must Keep On Keepin' On!***

by Judy Williams

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. - James 1:2-3,15*

Each day there seems to be a new trial to test our faith. Facing so many trials takes perseverance beyond what we formerly believed we could muster!

Health concerns, financial hardships, job situations, family upheavals, coupled with ordinary daily frustrations all beset us. Yet we know that every good and perfect gift is from God. And our God rewards our persistent faith in times of trouble.

I recently finished reading *Pure Gold*, the biography of the Scottish Olympic runner, Eric Liddell. When asked how he could run so well his reply was, "I run the first half of the race as fast as I can, and then with God's help, I run the second half even faster." Following in his family's tradition, Liddell became a missionary in China where his persistence in the face of unimaginable trials saw him maintaining his own faith while bringing many others to Christ before his untimely death in a Japanese internment camp.

However discouraged we may feel, God expects us to keep on keepin' on!

**Youth:** As the school year draws to a close, will you remember to pray that God will help you always to do your best in every situation? When you face a difficult task will you carry it through to completion?

**Adults:** When responsibilities pile up and seem to overwhelm you, will you remember to pray for God's guidance and for the strength to carry on no matter what obstacles you face?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, as with Paul's admonition to the Hebrews, let me run with perseverance the race marked out for me. Let me fix my eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross. In his name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois***

# ***Are the Trials of Life Getting You Down?***

by Frank Shallenberger

*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. -James 5:14-15*

These two verses are more misunderstood than most any other verse in the Bible.

Was James speaking of physical illnesses or spiritual illnesses? All of us know that God hears our prayers and can bring healing to us if he so wishes. So, what did James mean when he wrote these words? English translations can be confusing. The Greek word which was translated sick actually means “to be weak.” It is usually used in the Gospels and the epistles as a reference to someone with a “weak faith.” In verse 15, the word that is translated “sick person” actually means “to be weary.”

James was not writing about people who are diseased or ill. Instead he was writing about those of us who have grown weak and weary in the midst of dealing with our trials and tribulations; job loss, foreclosure, problems with children or with our marriage, etc.

The Greek word translated “anoint” actually means “to rub with oil” not to christen with oil. There are many instances related in the Bible where oil is used to honor someone by pouring it on their hair and rubbing it into their body. The weak and weary will be refreshed and encouraged. If any individual has sinned, these prayers will ask the Lord to forgive him so that he might be restored to spiritual health as well.

Today, we most likely would take these suggestions to mean listing our names in the bulletin for prayer, asking our pastor to pray for us and asking Jesus to forgive us. I doubt if any of us would truly wish to be rubbed with oil though perhaps a good massage might accomplish a great deal.

**Youth:** Do you ever get “down in the dumps?” If you do, to whom do you go for help?

**Adults:** When you find yourself overwhelmed by trials and tribulations, where do you turn?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we your children are often overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life. Many times we fail to heed the injunctions of James to call upon our elders and our pastors for assistance and prayer. Imprint upon us the understanding that you, our God, will help us through our difficult times if we but ask. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Wabash Valley (Indiana)***

## ***Never Alone Again!***

by Dick Leon

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." -Matthew 28:18-20*

The first words from Jesus in Matthew's gospel are spoken when he appears at the River Jordan to be baptized by John. John demurs but Jesus insists, saying: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

The last words from our Lord in Matthew's gospel bring us full circle. Jesus has now fulfilled all righteousness by his death on the cross and we are commissioned to go into all the world "making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

"Righteousness" means having a right relationship with God. We learn from Jesus that righteousness is not something we can do. It is rather a pure gift to us from God and based on what Jesus did do!

So our calling in the world is now made simpler, a) we are to be announcers to others of this "good news" that God loves us with an uncommon, unearned and unexpected love, and b) we are to simply obey his teachings and trust in his unmerited favor!

But, perhaps the best news of this great closing commission is the promise that we are never alone when we obey this calling. Jesus physically exits from this world (in the ascension) so that he can spiritually return to this world and be permanently present to each of us through the Holy Spirit ... also called "the Spirit of Jesus."

Wow, think of it. A commission to disciple-making that sounds like it is a huge task has become a word of deep reassurance of his gracious presence with us to the end of the age. God indeed is good!

**Youth:** Ever wonder what your God-given purpose is in life?

**Adults:** What part of "go and make disciples" don't you understand?

**Prayer:** Lord, you have given us our marching instructions and yet many of us remain stuck in the barracks. Nudge us forward into the battle so that we may be effective witnesses to your grand love and so we may experience your sure presence with us along the way! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Whitewater Valley (Indiana)***

## ***Ascribe to the Lord!!***

by Marie Ruiz

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. -Psalm 96:7-8*

I love to sing - it's just in my makeup to move to music and sing along especially when a song moves me. Now I know that some people will tell you they can't sing or they don't have perfect pitch and so would rather mouth the words. But we all feel the rhythm of the beat and can get excited by the music we hear and how it touches our innermost being.

In this ninety-sixth Psalm the opening line is "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth." That means everything created can express itself in song. What I mean by this and I think what the text means by this phrase is not just a melody that we audibly voice but the praise that our being brings to everyday life should be a reflection of the character of God—sweetly sung so that all can hear and enjoy. The Lord has given each of us a unique style and melody to our life, some forte, others pianissimo, for some mezzo forte. We all carry a tune that others listen to day in and day out. Does this melodic tune you carry ascribe to the Lord? Does it reflect his song?

This is a true sign of worship. Let's get singing!

**Youth:** When you hear a song on the radio do you like to sing along? When we learn from God's word, it should be like a melody we can't get out of our head - we want to sing it all the time. That's what God wants us to do—sing his praises continually.

**Adults:** We need to learn from the Psalmist when he says "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." Are you singing a holy song?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, every day we learn something new from your Word. Help us to proclaim a song that is delightful to your senses, and be a light to those around us. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Synod of Living Waters***

***(Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee)***

# *The Twenty-third Psalm*

by John McKee

David, The Psalmist,  
Was a man of God  
Who wrote with a passion and zeal

Of a God whose love  
Burns intense for his people  
With a warmth that all of us feel.

He, being a shepherd,  
Wrote the 23rd Psalm...  
A psalm that has soothed countless souls

As they pass from this earth  
To the life everlasting  
Realizing at last their prized goals.

"The Lord is my Shepherd,  
"I shall not want;"  
The Psalmist begins with these words

He then speaks of still waters  
And of cool green pastures  
To calm the faint hearts of God's herds.

"Though I walk through the valley  
"Of the shadow of death,  
"I fear no evil," said he,

"For Thou art with me;"  
He continues the Psalm...  
"Thy rod and thy staff comfort me."

He tells us of a table  
God prepares just for him  
In the presence of all of his foes.

"Thou annointest my head  
"With oil," writes David,  
Exclaiming, "My cup overflows."

"Surely goodness and mercy  
"Shall follow me  
"All the days of my life," he then writes,

"And I shall dwell in the house  
"Of the Lord forever."  
Now that's a vision that truly excites.

Let us join in prayer for:

*The Presbytery of East Tennessee*

## SUNDAY, MAY 24 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalms 93:1-5

Ezekiel 3:16-27

Ephesians 2:1-10

Matthew 10:24-33,40-42

Psalms 136:1-26

# Watchmen!

by Andy Ross

*Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. —Ezekiel 3:17*

I never got to be in charge. When I was little, being the youngest of three children, my older sister and brother got the delightful task of keeping an eye on me. When my parents had reached that point they realized they no longer had to pay for an outside baby-sitter, they imposed that task on my siblings. As they would leave for the evening, they would look sternly in my sister's or brother's eyes and say something like, "Watch HIM!" while glancing over at me ..."

It's good to have people in charge, right? People who watch out for us, in case we are getting into harm's way — are there for a good reason!

In the Bible, we read many pages written by God's prophets, like Ezekiel. They often sound bummed out, or angry, or even like they're yelling — and that's because sometimes they were/did. God's prophets are like some folks in the church today; God needs people to be watchmen — people who are on the lookout for what's going wrong, where danger is lurking, and where we could be messing up in a way that's hurting ourselves, or others. Watchmen cry out warnings we need to hear, even though sometimes we don't like it. Watchmen point out the dangers we create when we fail to love others, and love God, and live lives of peace and justice that God describes for us in the Bible.

Today — you might not feel like you are in charge of a whole lot. But if you think about it, there is your life, and so much to this world, of which you can be a responsible watchman (or watchwoman) for God. Today — watch out for the ways God's Word can bring correction, justice, and healing to your life and those around you. Don't be afraid to speak up!

**Youth:** Who looks out for you? Who are the people who don't seem to have others looking out for them? When have you been warned in a way that has helped you?

**Adults:** What kind of warnings have you appreciated in life? Why?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you, for giving us your prophets, those watchmen who remind us to live responsibly and by your Word. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Presbyterian Heritage Sunday***

# *Planting Potatoes*

by Dale McArthur

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." -Luke 9:62*

Part of growing up at our house was helping Dad plant the spring garden. He would borrow a horse and a single plow and plow our large garden. It took a strong person to manage the plow by holding on to the handles and keeping it in the furrow. I was just a little guy that walked behind the plow.

The spring ritual was, we would plow the garden, rake the soil level and prepare it for seed. The first seed to go into the ground was always potatoes. We would cut up the potato so each section had an eye. The eye is what grows the new plant.

Planting was an art, too, as there were three sections put in each hill and then covered over. Dry seasons took some water, too.

We kids didn't realize the seriousness of a garden as our family of four kids and two adults could not survive a winter without a large garden, canned fruit and vegetables.

The result of keeping a hold of the handle of the plow was a garden that provided nourishment and survival for our bodies.

So it is for working in the kingdom through the church. It takes steady work planting, and people to keep a church program growing to help enrich the spiritual lives of all who come in contact with it. It's a matter of survival in the garden of love.

Working in the church also provides us with strong spiritual bodies that can survive the winters of life.

**Youth:** Does that new experience you are looking for include time spent in a spiritual garden?

**Adults:** Do you have calluses on your hands from working in a spiritual garden?

**Prayer:** Lord, help us all find the garden of life that strengthens our lives. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Holston Presbytery (Tennessee)***

## Buddy Creek

by Scott Coverdale

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the sanctuary behind the curtain where Jesus went before us, has entered on our behalf. -Hebrews 6:19-20*

There is a cave in Arkansas named Buddy Creek Cave, and I went there one night with a couple of friends, John and Jeff. This cave is very interesting from a spelunking point of view. The first interesting thing about the cave is the entrance. Except in the very driest season, the cave can only be accessed under water, by submerging yourself into a stream and letting the water pull you down into the cave itself.

When I was twenty, I fancied myself the adventurous type. On this occasion, however, I will admit to a certain dread. I was young, though, and my brain had not yet fully developed certain faculties of good judgment, so I overcame my initial hesitation and followed the instructions of one John Berggren. I took off my boots, jeans and shirt, stowed them carefully into plastic bags, and into a small pack. I put on some shorts and then a harness made of nylon webbing. I clipped onto a rope and, with a little friendly encouragement, waded into the swift waters of Buddy Creek. John had supposedly done this trick three times before, and assured me that the scary part would be over in half a minute. I took his word for it, took a deep breath, and submerged myself into the current. The water took me into the dark and through the rocky underwater passage. I knew direction only from the rope which John steadily released against the pull of the current.

I made it, of course, else I would not be living to write the story for the Northminster devotion book. I am also not necessarily advocating this particular aquatic spelunking maneuver. But when I read in Hebrews about our “hope as an anchor for the soul,” which enters the “sanctuary behind the curtain,” I cannot help but think of Buddy Creek Cave and how that illustrates to me the issue of our security lying in the work and strength of someone we do not see, “Jesus who went before us, has entered on our behalf.” Since Jesus has gone before us, and has made peace for us with God, we can go confidently through the day, whatever it brings.

**Youth:** Have you ever had to trust someone in a scary situation? Tell about that.

**Adults:** In what ways does our faith in Jesus quiet our fears? In what ways might we still suffer fear or anxiety?

**Prayer:** Please teach us, God, one way or another, to trust in your word and strength for our well-being. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky***

# Trust

by Karen Foss

*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. -Luke 10:21*

In this chapter of Luke, Jesus sends out seventy-two messengers to go before him to the towns he will visit. He gives them explicit instructions on how to act, what not to take with them and what to eat. He also gives them the ability to heal the sick and drive out demons. Now the seventy-two have returned. They are filled with joy at their successes. Jesus cautions them to not be filled with pride. In verse 21, Jesus gives thanks to God that spiritual truth is available to everyone regardless of position or abilities. The way to Jesus is through childlike trust, as He is opposed to spiritual pride. We need to trust in God's grace and not our own qualifications or abilities. It's easy to stand back and see a project successfully finished and want to take credit. We have to remember where those abilities came from!

The trust I see in my great-grandson's eyes when he's with me is a reminder that I should have that same trust for my Father in heaven. He cares about me. He will take care of me. He has forgiven me my sins. He loves me unconditionally.

**Youth:** Who do you trust? Do you know that you can go to Jesus with your problems and ask him for his help?

**Adults:** Do you look for help in the Bible? Many answers are available in there.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, you are the only one that we can truly trust. We know that we can turn to you when times get tough and you will see us through. Lord, thank you for the assurance of your grace. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of the Mid-South (Arkansas, Missouri and Tennessee)***

## ***Lay the Burden Down***

by Anne Price

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.*

*-Psalm 68:19*

During the present times most of us are having some kind of financial concerns. If we listen to the media we can feel even more fearful and helpless about our own security. This passage to me is a joyous confession of hope that God's victorious campaign will continue until salvation of his people is complete.

If I huddle into a corner depending on our government to take care of me I will be sorely disappointed. This verse reminds us that God daily bears our burdens. I cannot go back and change yesterday and tomorrow is one day away. With the help of our Lord we can make decisions that will lighten our loads.

This time can be beneficial to get us to watch our expenses. Most of us may have to make some changes that we had not planned on. The last place that I personally will cut back on is my offerings to the Church. The way I figure it, God lets me use most of my income and his works need to be financed.

Most of us have had to face problems that turned out to be opportunities to those of us who believe. We praise our Savior who carries us through every day.

**Youth:** How can you help your parents by not asking for what you do not need, still knowing that they love you.

**Adults:** Do you feel that God is by your side even when life is difficult?

**Prayer:** Glorious Lord, you daily bear our loads when we lay them down. Thank you Father. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee***

## Choose Carefully

by Judy Williams

*“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” -Luke 10:41-42*

The familiar story of two sisters’ response to a sudden visit from Jesus and his disciples has been the topic of many sermons and discussions.

While Martha, in response to the arrival of Jesus and his followers, was busy with meal preparations for the guests (as was the expected role of women both then and even now), her younger sister had joined the men and was sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening attentively to his words. Mary’s action was unexpected, as a woman would not ordinarily enter the room during such a discussion.

Martha was distracted by all the work that needed to be done before serving this large group of people. If all the disciples were with Jesus that day, that would be 13 extra mouths to feed! She was upset with Mary for leaving her by herself to do everything. She came to Jesus, asking him to reprimand Mary for her laziness! I’m sure she was surprised by his reply! For he did not scold Mary, but in fact spoke in praise of what Mary had chosen to do. Martha was made to realize that spending time with Jesus was the better choice, and that busy-ness apart from Jesus would not be of lasting value.

We can apply this story to ourselves in this modern world. Complete devotion to hearing Christ’s words is what he wants from us—not the worry and fussing over the many worldly things that occupy so many of our waking moments. *If I choose to spend time with God’s Word, it will not be taken away from me.*

**Youth:** Can you understand why Jesus was pleased that Mary wanted to listen to what he was telling the disciples? Why do you think he told Martha not to worry and be upset?

**Adults:** How can you work on making more time for God’s Word a priority every day?

**Prayer:** Father, Let me never be too busy to hear your voice. Guide me in making wise choices today and every day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***The Presbytery of Mississippi***

# Enemy Mine

by Cheryl Moore

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. -Psalm 23:5-6*

I don't know how many people actually consider this part of this very familiar Psalm (even secular people know it!). As I read through all of the verses for today I began to consider "mine enemy". We as followers of Jesus Christ are to be in this World but not be like it. God has prepared homes, food, comfort, family and a Church network. Truly God has blessed us beyond all our wildest dreams and set before us a bountiful table! However, his warnings to us are clear; we are in the presence of a very real and entrenched enemy.

"For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness..." Ephesians 6:12.

This enemy is all around us trying to make us fearful, or trying to convince us that "bad things" are "good". God tells us "fear no evil; for I am with you". We must lean on his rod and staff and stand bravely in the face of the Enemy. If we do what is *right*, instead of what the "World" wants us to do then "Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow us..."

So in the end, when the dust of this World settles, we can marvel at the protection God has provided and we "will triumph in the works of his hands" Psalm 92:4.

**Youth:** Do you try to be like the rest of the world around you or do you set the example for others?

**Adults:** We have to live in a fallen world. Do you face the "enemy" with fear or with steadfast prayer, leaning on the Father's Rod and Staff?

**Prayer:** Father, we know you are with us always! Help us to lean on your ways and not on the ways of the "World". Give us the strength to always stand up for what is good and right in this World even when we fear! In Jesus' name. Amen!

Let us join in prayer for:

**North Alabama Presbytery**

## SUNDAY, MAY 31 LECTIONARY READINGS

Psalm 104:1-35

Isaiah 11:1-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

John 14:21-29

Psalm 1-11

# Stepping Out

by Lisa Grenier

*Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. -John 19:38*

Consider how risky it was for Joseph of Arimathea to go to Pilate to request Jesus' body. Showing any kind of association or sympathy with a crucifixion victim could raise suspicions. Do you remember how panicked Peter was when it was suggested that he was a disciple of Jesus? Any follower of the Lord faced danger especially now. Look ahead to John 20:19 to find the disciples behind locked doors because of their fear.

Today's key verse indicates that Joseph was a *secret* disciple of Jesus because he was afraid of the Jews. Joseph had a prominent position as a member of the Sanhedrin and had much to lose by being publicly identified with Jesus. Along with possible excommunication and a loss of his position, he also faced ceremonial uncleanness for seven days after touching a bloody dead body.

Despite the risks, Joseph stepped forward to claim his beloved Lord's body. He carefully took it down from the cross removing the nails and the crown of thorns which was pressed upon the Lord's head. He, (along with Nicodemus), washed the blood from the body as best as they could and wrapped it in linen with about 75 pounds of spices. Then they placed the Lord's body in Joseph's new tomb. God-given faith and courage enabled them to step out for Jesus and risk everything to give the Lord the *best* that was possible. Although they waited until after Jesus' death to fully give themselves to the Lord, their service to him was very valuable and especially tender.

**Youth and Adults:** What would it "cost" you to step out and be identified as a disciple of Jesus at school, at work, or in other social situations? How are you presently serving Jesus and are you giving him your best?

**Prayer:** Lord, please take away my fear and make me bold about being identified as your disciple. Empower me to serve and to always give you my best. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

***Pentecost Offering***

# ***Our Prayer***

by John McKee

Our prayer to you this day  
Is to fill us, O Lord,  
For our hearts are heavy with woes.

Keep us from despairing  
Over worldly concerns...  
Let us rest, Lord, in gentle repose

Knowing you're in control  
Over every event  
That transpires to fulfill the plan

You have had from the beginning  
Of your marvelous creation  
Long before man-made troubles began.

Shine your Light as a beacon  
To guide us each day  
On the pathway you'd have us to take

That we'll be pleasing to you  
In all things we do...  
Lead us to the right choices to make.

And, dear Lord, please protect us  
From Satanic influence  
Each minute of every hour

As he roams throughout earth  
With his minion spirits  
Seeking whom he may next devour.

We give thanks to you, Father,  
For the gift of life  
Sustained by the daily bread

Which you have provided  
Out of deep love for us...  
Thanks, Lord, for the roof overhead.

We're grateful for your Son, Jesus,  
Who loves us so much,  
That he willingly paid the steep price

Of surrendering his life  
To redeem his lost sheep  
As the Holy Lamb of Sacrifice.

Wounded for our transgressions  
Bruised for our iniquities  
The prophet Isaiah to us revealed \*

Although blameless and pure  
He died for our transgressions  
It is by his stripes that we are healed.

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