



**Our Journey to the Cross**

*Walking with Prayer*

**2010 Lenten Devotional**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LANCASTER PA



**Randy Riggs**

## *Introduction*

It is the middle of February, and the days are beginning to lengthen. The day's light stays with us a bit longer as a prelude to the spring that is yet to come.

The season of Lent draws its name from the Anglo Saxon word *Lencthen* which refers to spring and the lengthening of days. It is a period of forty days and forty nights (not including Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday when Christians prepare themselves to hear the good news which Easter brings in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lent is intended to be a season of preparation. In some traditions people will fast. They choose a day or days during the week when they do not eat anything to remind themselves of the sacrifice which Jesus made when he went into the wilderness before he began his ministry for 40 days and 40 nights. He fasted and he prayed as a way of preparing himself for what he knew he had to do during his earthly life. Others have learned to give something up which is an important part of their lives, like chocolate or cigarettes, and remind themselves each time they have a craving of the sacrifice which Jesus made on Calvary's cross for all of humankind.

Here at First Presbyterian Church we want you to do something which will bring an extra sense of the presence of God in your life during this season. If fasting helps you achieve that goal, then fast. However, we would rather encourage you to add something to your life in the way of a disciplined devotional life which may not always be your practice during the other 325 days of the year.

Members of our church have written the devotions in this booklet to be used by their fellow members during Lent. The theme they were asked to focus on was *PRAYER*. It will be the theme of our Lenten preaching as we focus on *THE PRAYERS OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS*.

I hope you will accept their invitation to join them in preparing yourself to hear the good news of Easter morning by using this devotional. I pray that it will be one of the tools you use to clean out the old and prepare yourself for the new. May you keep the fast of Lent, and may it bring you to the good news of Easter joy. I will see you in church as together we make our journey to the cross, and beyond the cross, to the empty tomb.



*Ash Wednesday*  
February 17



S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:40 p.m. Sanctuary**

In a contemplative style and sacrament of the Lord's Supper  
Optional distribution of Ashes

**6:00 - 7:30 p.m. Shirk Hall**

Agape Meal of rice & beans followed by the Sacrament of the Lord's  
Supper. Optional distribution of Ashes *[This is a ticketed event - reservations  
may be made on website or by purchasing a ticket in the Foyer on Sundays,  
February 7th and 14th. Cost: \$5/Adults, \$15/families]*

## 2nd Day of Lent

Alicia Conklin-Wood

**Scripture:** Psalm 42:1 – “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God.”

For many years, I did not have a name for my prayer. As a young woman I had learned the ACTS prayers (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication), but there was no name for my longing. Then I learned that even our “longing”, like our “sighs too deep for words”, are prayers of the heart. Now I know that my longing for “something more”, something deeper, is simply God’s way of reaching out to me/us, just as we reach out to God. Some call it a love story. I was set free to pray as my heart wanted to, in traditional fashion, or simply resting in the presence of God, to be prayer enough. Allowing regular times for silent sitting with the Holy One felt right, like sitting with a friend. When my mind ceases its magpie chattering, then there can be enough space deep within my heart for God’s love to grow.

I love to swim, floating on a lake looking up at the passing clouds and birds. A poem captures why I love such experiences. *“As swimmers dare/ to lie face to the sky/and water bears them, As hawks rest upon air/and air sustains them, So would I learn to attain/ freefall, and float into Creator Spirit’s deep embrace/ knowing no effort earns/ that all surrounding grace (The Avowal by Denise Levertov).*

Henri Nouwen said “Prayer is living in the presence of God”. For me, Nouwen’s words mean that God is present in all life. We only have to become more attuned or awakened to that Presence. And now I know that when I am filled with awe at the beauty of a thousand diamonds sparkling in winter’s sun on a pine tree in the park in the sun on a winter day, God is there. When I weep with another who is hurting, or look into the face of a loved one, God is with us. God is present when we work to right injustices toward people or the natural world. God is among the Haitian people, and can be seen every time someone offers a bottle of water to another, or scratches at the rubble to rescue a total stranger.

**Prayer:** Creator God, thank you for your always Presence. Awaken me ever more to your Love and Presence. Amen.

**Randy Riggs**

*3rd Day of Lent*

**Scripture:** Romans 8:26-28

There are times in life when words don't seem to capture all of the thoughts and feelings that are racing around in our heads. When we hear the news of 200,000 people who died in an earthquake in Haiti or a tsunami in Southeast Asia, or when we receive difficult news from our physician that ourselves or a loved one has a life threatening illness, sometimes all we can do is sigh.

It is at times like these that our scripture for today brings comfort. *"... for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, know what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in all things God is working for good for those who love God and who are called according to God's purpose."*

The apostle Paul must have had moments like we have to have included these words in what some commentaries call "his most mature letter." Sighing may be an appropriate prayer response to overwhelming news. To trust that the Spirit hears those sighs and translates the deepest concerns of our hearts to the very heart of God is both biblical and practical. And thanks be to God that the One we worship doesn't need us to have the right words in order to respond to those concerns.

**Prayer:** When all I can do is sigh, O God, hear my sigh as a prayer of longing for your guidance and your healing touch. Amen.

# 4<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Alisa Bair

**Scripture:** Psalm 20:1-2

A cornfield, a college dormitory, a cemetery, a church parking lot, my living room, a street in our neighborhood, a hospital conference room, an alley between two skyscrapers in New York City. Each was, at some acutely distressful point in my life, a place of refuge where I retreated to implore God.

What stands out as much as the locations, is the way in which I was helped. Occasionally there was an immediate change in circumstances. But always, without fail, there was a discernible change in *me* – like ions shifting in the atmosphere, or the rapid reordering of a book's table of contents.

I am not always passionate in my prayers. Every now and then someone will thank me for praying for them, and I thank God that he helped them in spite of my having forgotten to pray. Other times, I weep long and hard on behalf of someone else, and feel like I'm a conduit for heaven's prayers through me.

I am comforted that access to God can occur anywhere, anytime, and that there is no one right way to pray. In his superb book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Richard Foster identifies 21 different types of prayer. In a similar way, Marcel Tabuteau, one of the great figures in American music, identified over 50 dynamic levels.

Life will play us like a violin, and we are invited to compose our portion of the symphony in response. Sometimes, like Tchaikovsky, who indicated a delicate bassoon solo **pppppp** in his *Pathétique symphony*, we pray in a barely audible whisper. At other times, like Gustav Mahler, who in the third movement of his *Seventh Symphony* gives the celli and basses a marking of **fffff**, along with a footnote directing, "Pluck so hard that the strings hit the wood." we need to pound God's heart and cry out in a loud voice.

We've been given fine instruments to offer in prayerful sacrifice, and great liberty and range in which to express our humanness in this holy, unending conversation with God. What a gift of grace.

**Prayer:** Come Thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above; praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's redeeming love. (Robert Robinson)

## A Member of the Healing Ministry Team

5<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** Lamentations 3:25-30 (The Message) – *“God proves to be good to the man who passionately waits, to the woman who diligently seeks. It is a good thing to quietly hope, quietly hope for help from God. It is a good thing when you're young to stick it out through hard times. When life is heavy and hard to take, go off by yourself. Enter the silence. Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions: wait for hope to appear. Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face. The 'worst' is never the 'worst.'”*

Prayer was taught to me in childhood. It was a daily practice at home. And I remember having a lot of questions about it. As I grew older and life became complicated – prayer was done on the run. Now that I am much older, I find prayer as necessary as breathing. Prayer has become a daily turning to God; setting aside time alone; in silence allow my thoughts and heart to quiet; seek humbly for forgiveness; ask for healing for myself and others, and the world; and in silence wait and listen with an open heart for the mystery of God's answer. I have experienced calmness, relief, peace, hope, reassurance and many times surprises!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for your merciful love and faithfulness. Help me to quietly hope for help from you, especially for those in great need and in distress. Lead me with your Holy Spirit and use me according to your will. Amen.

# 6th Day of Lent

**Don Hackett**

“What is in my Heart?”

**Scripture:** Matthew 20:20-28

*“When the ten others heard about this, they lost their tempers, thoroughly disgusted with the two brothers.”*

They were disgusted. James and John had beaten them to the question (*to be in the top positions of power in the new kingdom*). We can be the most self-righteous when the person we are condemning is so like us. We do not like looking in the mirror, do we? The disciples saw in James and John the greed and lust for power that was in their own hearts. It was ugly. It would ruin them all if it was not dealt with properly.

Is there something growing in my heart and yours that, if unchecked, could ruin us all? Has pride, fear, lust, or a hunger for power and praise found a home in me?

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, come now into this place. Enter into our hearts and minds. Convict and cleanse us of any thought and passions that are not from you. Free us to live in your pure love, forgiveness, and hope in Jesus Christ.

**Bruce Wittmaier**

7<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** I Thessalonians 5:17 – “*Pray without ceasing.*”

At first glance, Paul's admonition to "pray without ceasing" seems a bit ridiculous. How could we get anything done if all our life is spent with bowed head on bended knees? Does God really want that from us?

Perhaps the problem is not the admonition but our understanding of prayer. The prayer of which Paul speaks far transcends the notion of a formal talking to God, which is what prayer means to most of us.

Rather, prayer for Paul is constant openness to communication. God is right there, sometimes speaking, sometimes listening as we speak, but always ready to communicate. We, too, can always be ready - ready to speak our thankfulness, our concerns, whatever is on our hearts. And we can be ready to listen to what God has for us as well.

It is hard for us to imagine how great a blessing such a relationship would be. It is there for us whenever we seek it. The challenge is worth attempting.

Pray without ceasing.

**Prayer:** God of steadfast love and faithfulness, energize us to keep in such close communication with you that we are indeed praying without ceasing. Amen.

8th Day of Lent

Wednesday, February 24



M I D - W E E K L E N T E N S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Sanctuary / 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. Chapel**

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, special music and scripture shared and interpreted by a contemporary illustration focusing on our theme of prayer. *[Noon service followed by a light sandwich luncheon in the Foyer.]*

*9th Day of Lent*

## Jack Houdeshel

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:5-8

Eugene Peterson has written that the most ardent and earnest prayers consist of only one syllable – HELP and THANKS. Truly it is not a complicated matter.

However, for more extended prayers, I have found it helpful to follow the guidance of the acronym ACTS.

Thus:

A = Adoration

C = Confession

T = Thanksgiving

S = Supplication (asking for the "supply" of our needs, and Intercessions for others)

It is at this point where I have found the greatest help in the Book of the Psalms. (We often think of the Psalms as the "Hymn Book of the Bible," but so far as I am concerned, it is also the "Prayer Book of the Bible.")

For Adoration see Psalms 19 and 100

For Confession see Psalm 51

For Thanksgiving see Psalms 50 and 147

For Supplication (Help) see Psalms 27 and 40

**Prayer:** Almighty God, I come to You in worship and adoration, confessing my sins and asking for your forgiveness. I thank You for all of your watch and care of me in your works of Providence and ask that You will continue to guide and guard me. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

# 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Gail Alexander**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

As a small child, I first learned to pray: “Now I lay me down to sleep...” A simple prayer, but one that made me feel safe. I somehow knew that God would always listen.

Growing up was not an easy task. I prayed often, very often; for myself, for others, for situations surrounding us. I trusted God to honor my prayers with holy judgment. I learned to lay my heart before Him, knowing that He would understand exactly what I meant; thankful that He could read my mind; asking for His will to be done. I learned to trust in God's timing and to be patient in waiting for His answers, even though at times, I may have asked, “God, why are You so slow?”

Most recently, the power of prayer has made a resonating impact in my life, as a defining prognosis for my brother has gently been extended; by the grace of God, through the prayers of many.

I've come to know the importance of continually yielding to God all of my needs and the needs of others; to come present to Him and to my own heart. But, I must also listen to hear His heart for me: His love, His will, His promises.

Prayer is a joy that calms my fears and gives me peace.

**Prayer:** Dearest Lord, thank you for listening to the innermost thoughts of my heart, through prayer. Help me to hear the still, small voice of Your Spirit as I reflect on my journey with You and Your work in my life. Through your Son I pray, Amen.

**Gary Meier**

11<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** Luke 18:13 – “Humanity's Prayer”

There are great prayers in the scriptures: David's prayer of confession (Psalm 51), the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6) and Jesus' Great prayer (John 17) are but a few. But my favorite prayer is found in Luke 18:13; *"God be merciful to me, a sinner."* Here, just a few words say volumes. The words are crisp, clear and cannot be misunderstood. There is neither pretentiousness nor pride in this prayer. There is only the universal cry of humanity for pardon.

And God has promised to forgive, and this too is succinct and sincere: *"I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."* (Jeremiah 31:34)

A repentant sinner. A merciful God. What more can we ask!?

**Prayer:** Merciful God, I am prone to sin. I will what is good, but I too often succumb to what is evil. God be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.

# 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Judy Kruse**

“Developing a GPS”

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:105 – *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”*

“Let's bow our heads, close our eyes, fold our hands and think very hard about God.” Joan and Janet's words to our children touch me every time that I hear them.

As I thought about those words, I wondered if one of the results of heeding them might be the development of one's own GPS (God-Powered Steering, that is!) which, like the electronic invention, would guide our every step, every word, every deed and, unlike the electronic one, would always point us in the right direction. Our GPS would always be switched on, would never run out of power, would always be reliable, and would come with a lifetime warranty. Both forms of GPS, however, can function only within their programmed parameters and thus each one is only as good as what has been put into it. And that's where those beautiful words to the children are so helpful to all of us.

How have you programmed your GPS today?

**Prayer:** Make me know Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all day. (Psalm 25:4-5)

**Linda Rice**

*13<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11 – *“I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

*“Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit”* (Luke 23:46). This was Christ's prayer of relinquishment. He turned the control of His life over to God so that God could fulfill His ultimate plan for His heavenly/earthly kingdom.

I find myself using the prayer of relinquishment many times. Turning everything over to God, who is the only one who can see the “big picture,” has become part of my prayer life ever since the birth of our grandson, Jackson, five years ago. Jackson was born with a heart defect that required open heart surgery when he was three days old. I had no control over this situation, so I let God work out His plan.

I think that I must daily work to relinquish my life and the lives around me to God's ultimate plan. Even though I want things my way, God may be able to see things from the broader perspective and thus know better what will be for the best.

About a week before Christmas, we learned that our son-in-law, Keith Gates, had lung cancer. This was devastating news. Keith is Jackson's father. Keith has begun chemotherapy to reduce the size of the tumor so that it will be safe to do surgery. Keith's life and the lives of our family are in God's hands. I know that God is with us and things will be okay.

**Prayer:** Oh powerful, yet personal God, You are always with us in our struggles and in our joys. Thank You for Your love that will not let us go. AMEN.

# 14<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Kay Phillips**

**Scripture:** Psalm 55:1-2 - *"Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught."*

Sometimes the simplest of prayers can have the most profound effect on you. This was true many years ago as we sat around the table for Sunday dinner. It had been a very tiring weekend.

It was the first weekend in December, 2001, and Doug and I had taken our old family dog to be euthanized emergently at midnight the night before. He had never been robust, yet had lived to 8 years. In the recent 2 weeks he had been to the vet and been treated symptomatically, and during Thanksgiving weekend, seemed to have really rebounded. This was particularly good news to our oldest daughter, Chelsea, who was home on break from her 1<sup>st</sup> semester of college. Since we got Artie the weekend of her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, she always considered him to be her dog.

But 5 days after she left, he was obviously in distress, and it was discovered that he had large masses in both lungs. We were hopeful that Chelsea could see him again, knowing that if she did, she would not want him to suffer. However, the vet kindly said Artie would not make it the 2 weeks till she was home again. So we decided to bring him home for the weekend in the hopes that we could reach her. Our first conversation was met with disbelief, how could he have declined so fast, followed by pleas to not act too quickly. In those days the cell phone coverage in the mountains of Mansfield made calls unpredictable, so we only promised to keep calling often with updates.

continued

So there we sat around the dinner table, Doug, Emily, my brother Chris, and myself. We had been unable to reach Chelsea since we first spoke the day before, so she still did not know. We were weary, teary, and worried for her. As we grasped hands around the table as is our custom to say grace, Doug and I looked at each other, silently pleading with the other to say the prayer. In that moment, Chris volunteered to say it. And this is what he said, "Dear God, please be with Kay and Doug. They had to put their dog to sleep last night and they are hurting. And please make Chelsea call soon." His simple prayer, said with love, was meaningful then, and not forgotten now.

**Prayer:** Father God, I thank you that you are a God who delights in our coming to You. Thank You that you hear our words, whether for ourselves or others. Amen.

15<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Wednesday, March 3



M I D - W E E K L E N T E N S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Sanctuary / 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. Chapel**

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, special music and scripture shared and interpreted by a contemporary illustration focusing on our theme of prayer. *[Noon service followed by a light sandwich luncheon in the Foyer.]*

## Mary Louise Toews

“Listening to Our Bodies – A Way to Pray”

**Scripture:** Romans 8:26-27 (The Message) “.... *God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves.... And keeps us present before God...*”

During a 6-week course at FPC titled “Exploring the Power of Christian Healing”, the facilitator encouraged us to use a positive affirmation as a way of deepening our faith journey. An example of this would be “God is love.” My previous affirmations didn't fit with my present concern – how do I listen to the voice of my physical body and what it was trying to tell me?

A friend shared these words which became very helpful in connecting with that deep longing within – “GOD'S GRACE SURROUNDS AND SUPPORTS ME.” I visualized His Grace as an invisible shield protecting me as well as comforting me during times of stress and danger. I've known His Word to be as healing as the deep massage given for my aching shoulder muscles. I've imagined His hands holding me steady and secure during trying circumstances. I affirm that it is God's strength and not my own which I need to rely upon. My desire is that the truth of this affirmation would permeate my very being from day to day and that it will restore a wholeness that is missing.

There is mystery concerning prayer's power and energy force. One simply begins to know and grow in awareness that something far greater than our small selves is at work.

So, I invite you to find your own affirmation that declares God's movement in your life. In doing this, you too will find increased wholeness of body, mind, and spirit and be blessed by Our Father, who is longing for you as well.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, grace us with the certainty of your never-changing love and care for us. Please lead us to what will restore our wholeness and peace. Cleanse the wounds of our humanity – be it in Lancaster or Haiti, and grant us mercy. Surround and support us during our Lenten Journey as we try to follow you. Amen.

16th Day of Lent

# 17<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Randy Riggs

## Scripture: Psalm 46

A few years ago a friend of mine asked me if I would be willing to form a weekly prayer group with him. I enjoyed this man's company, and the thought of spending regular time with him appealed, so we each invited two other friends, and our adventure in prayer began.

Each of the men who joined the group had a common desire: to go deeper in our relationship with God. One of the men, who is a Spiritual Director, suggested that we use the tool of contemplative prayer. Being quiet before God was not my style. I am too much of an activist, but the others in the group were intrigued by the possibility. So I agreed I would give it a try.

We agreed that we would spend ten minutes of silence each week at the beginning of our time together. Now if you are like me, 10 minutes of silence is a *long* time. At first I could not keep my mind from making a to-do list for the day ahead, but then I realized that this list was not bringing me closer to God.

It was Father Richard Rohr who gave me the tool that unlocked the mystery of silence. It was my breathing. He calls it the "Yah-weh" Prayer. As you breathe in, you say "yah," and as you breathe out you say "weh." Yahweh is one of the names used for God in the Old Testament. It has no translation. It means what it says. It is the name chosen for God.

The Psalmist writes: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" If you are someone like me who has trouble being still, perhaps the "Yahweh Prayer" is a door into the possibility of meaningful silence where God can speak to you instead of you doing all the talking.

**Prayer:** Teach me the art of being still, O God. Stop my mind from all the frivolous thoughts that cross it each day. Let me be still, and know that you are God, and if you are God, then I am not. Thank you for that gift.

**Dick Foster**

18<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

About a year or so ago I was conducting a Bible Study on the book of Thessalonians and I came across this verse and the phrase “pray continually” or pray without ceasing. I thought to myself that means I should constantly be in touch with God. I cannot be always on my knees, but I can have a prayerful attitude at all times knowing God is present with me, knowing my dependence on Him and determining to obey Him.

So I began to pray frequent short prayers throughout the day. Like remembering someone who asked me to pray for their health or praying for a student preparing for an exam, or praying for something I need to remember to do, or praying for my family, or asking for forgiveness for something I did that I should not have done. This does not eliminate my regular daily time of prayer which I have every night. It's keeping in touch with God all the time.

**Prayer:** Dear God, I thank you for another day to obey and serve you. Please forgive me for my sin and keep me aware of Your presence with me. Bless my family. Guide and direct in the activities of our church. Be with our missionaries as they share the gospel throughout the world. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN!

# 19<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Sarah McCaughey

**Scripture:** Mark 4:26-29; Isaiah 43:18-19

A few years ago, a personal tragedy followed quickly by a family tragedy in the span of a few months, left me in the depths of despair. At the same time, I was about to leave a career in college campus ministry – something I had not predicted or anticipated. My storehouse of hope was completely depleted. Words of prayer felt bitter and foreign in my mouth.

At a gathering of ministry colleagues, a man named Tony that I barely knew struck up conversation and asked why I was troubled. I described the pain of the past year. He paused for a while, and then said: *“You should grow something. You know, like a plant. I think it would be good for you to plant something and watch it grow.”* I thought to myself: *“How trite! You don’t even KNOW me. Who do you think you are?!”* I whole-heartedly wrote off the advice.

A short time later, I was given a small houseplant as a gift. I set it on my windowsill. I noticed how day by day it stretched and reached toward the sunlight. Even when I turned its leaves away from the window pane, in a short time time it would stretch and twist and bend until it faced the light again. That was more than I could say for myself. In the pain of that season, a stubbornness had taken root in me – I was not interested in turning and stretching out in prayer toward a God that I felt had allowed terrible things to take place in my life. I desperately needed sunlight, but chose not to seek its source.

I now accept that Tony’s advice was a word from God for me. He was right. I needed to watch how a plant behaves – how it constantly craves and seeks for sunlight, how it persists in drought, how a “dead” plant can still send up small shoots and begin again, how some growth happens quickly, and some painstakingly slow. Today, my apartment is filled with growing things. They remind me how to pray.

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you for the example of Creation – how it inherently yearns, reaches and stretches skyward for nourishment. Help me choose to do the same. I want to perceive the “new thing” you are growing in my life. Amen.

**Alisa Bair**

20<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:1-3

For several days, a pall had come over me that would not lift. I sank into the living room rocker. *This is what clinical depression must feel like*, I thought. I stared blankly into the darkness, thinking of ways to take the edge off. What would happen if I trusted God for a change, instead of turning to temporary fixes? *You've said You're enough*, I prayed. *Well, prove it.*

Twenty minutes later, the doorbell rang. It was my neighbor, wanting to pick up her house key. She read my face, and her kind, questioning words opened up my inner darkness ever so slightly. She offered a simple prayer before she left.

Later, when the phone rang, my husband handed it to me in spite of my gestures that I didn't want to be bothered. *It's your mom*, he mouthed. I didn't have the strength to protest when she said she needed to meet me for lunch the next day. Over soup at Panera's, my mother got right to the point: "Something's wrong, I can tell it." Tears began to spill in response, and with them I began to name some of my feelings.

I drove home and had barely hung up my coat when the doorbell rang again. This time, it was a former ministry colleague, who lived out of town. "I felt really strongly that God wanted me to stop by and see you today," she said. We sat down to tea and conversation. Three hours later, she wrapped her arms around me and prayed.

Later that evening, I realized I felt noticeably happier. I had wanted an immediate fix. Instead, God gave me people who, in increasingly deeper layers, called out my pain and would not let it fester. I discovered that prayers don't have to be long or contain more than a mustard seed of faith. And that God, if you allow him to be, is more than enough.

**Prayer:** God, help me to not be frightened if a sadness rises up before me larger than any I have ever known, if a restiveness, like light and cloud shadow passes over my hands and over all that I do. Help me to remember that something is happening with me, that you haven't forgotten me, that you hold me in your hand; you will not let me fall. *(adapted from Rainer Maria Rilke)*

# 21<sup>st</sup> Day of Lent

A. Bryer Helmer

**Scripture:** Psalm 46:10 – *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

Since my conversion experience in 1962, prayer has been a very important part of my life. Throughout these 48 years, I have continually been drawn to God through the Lord Jesus Christ and driven by my desire to “know Him.”

For many years, much of my praying consisted of pouring out my side of the story to the Holy One with little thought of listening. Finally, both God and I became tired of all my words. The old adage: “When pupil is ready, the teacher will appear,” happened to me. I was introduced to a different way of God communication: Centering Prayer. This practice consists of setting aside 20 minutes either once or twice a day to just “be” in God's presence, doing nothing but letting go, letting go of every thought that appears (they are endless) and returning to a sacred word which gets one back to the intention – to just “be” in God's presence. After time and a lot of starting and stopping, this practice has become very important to my day.

Because nothing “special” ever happens during that 20 minutes, it took awhile for me to become aware of the internal changes which were taking place. The first was that I began to experience, in far greater measure, the deep love God has for each person and every living thing. All question of who's “in” and who's “out” vanished. A calmness seeped into a deep-seated anxiety of many years. I have also noticed an increase in creativity and release from old fears. I feel awake and open in new ways. Would this transformation have taken place anyway? After all, there are many paths to prayer and I certainly haven't given up the other ways I connect with the Divine. I don't know, but I shall be eternally grateful that I have learned the great blessing of coming to God in stillness.

“St. John of the Cross said: 'Silence is God's first language.' The language of God is silence because only in silence do we listen deeply. God is not shallow. In silence, we learn love” (quote from Anne Benvenuti).

**Prayer:** Guide me, O Lord, toward the stillness and the comfort of Your presence. Help me today to be still and know that You are God. Amen.

22<sup>nd</sup> Day of Lent

Wednesday, March 10



M I D - W E E K L E N T E N S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Sanctuary / 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. Chapel**

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, special music and scripture shared and interpreted by a contemporary illustration focusing on our theme of prayer. *[Noon service followed by a light sandwich luncheon in the Foyer.]*

# 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of Lent

**Andy Spedden**

**Scripture:** Acts 28:26-27, Romans 12:2

Currently, I'm involved in the Protestant Music Ministry at the State Correctional Institution of Smithfield, in the commonwealth's Department of Corrections. In Acts, we read about stubbornness. Although the Spanish Choir here is receptive to a variety of sacred music, most of the English Choir's members come from backgrounds where up-tempo, clap-along music is dominant. As such, they are often stubborn towards learning down-tempo, meditative music.

When I was a college music major, my heart was stubbornly focused on addiction and codependency. I wasn't receptive to the knowledge being offered. Now, when I harmonize text or arrange an existing song, it doesn't come as easily as it would to someone who'd been receptive to music theory. But that's where the healing message of Romans 12:2 comes in.

Since early June, 2009, I've harmonized or arranged 100 songs, including a full repertoire for both choirs, for Advent/Christmas/Epiphany. Also, God has blessed me to pronounce Spanish proficiently, so I may better minister with the Spanish Choir, "grande es tu fidelidad!" ("Great is your faithfulness!"). These blessings have come because I've put away stubbornness, as part of turning away from addiction and sin. When we do that, we'll be blessed to be a blessing, even in ministry "inside the walls!"

**Prayer:** Lord, help me not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of my mind so that I will be able to live in Your good, pleasing and perfect will. Amen.

## Randy Riggs

24<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:36-46

It is hard to pray for God's will to be done and really trust God with the outcome. The prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is the ultimate example of what he taught his disciples to pray in the Lord's Prayer: "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.*"

There is a legendary story on the campus of the seminary I attended about a professor who wanted to drive home the point that doing the will of God right here and right now is why Jesus came. He was teaching a class in *eschatology* which is the study of the final days; the second coming of Jesus. In his lectures he made the point over and over again that Jesus was not so much concerned about what would happen in the final days as he was concerned about the way people treated each other right here and right now.

On the mid-term examination, the final question was this: *What is the name of the woman who cleans this building and what do you know about her life; her family, where she lives, and what is important to her?* One student raised his hand and asked, "*Will this question really count toward the grade on the midterm?*" The professor responded, "Absolutely. *If the second coming is more important to you than the woman who takes care of you every day, then you don't understand why Christ came in the first place.*"

On the night Jesus is betrayed, at the very end of his ministry, he struggles to be faithful to what he has taught his disciples. He is in the Garden of Gethsemane; a word which means "olive press." Eugene Peterson says that his heart was so heavy that he felt like the life was being crushed out of him. He does not want to die. He does not want to leave those he loves. Yet he prays, "*Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.*" **Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.** Thanks be to God for that witness.

**Prayer:** Lord, I long to know your will and do it. Help me to look at the things right in front of me, and teach me to do that which you would have me do. Thy will be done. Amen.

# 25<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Sam Rice

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1-5 - *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”*

It is in times of desperation that God is most evident to us if we can pause to see Him embracing us in His loving arms. A mere glance at the First Presbyterian prayer list makes it clear that many of us are desperate for God's healing presence in our lives. But as we struggle to cope and make sense of the tragedies in our lives, I am mindful of the faith that the Haitian people model in the midst of great loss. How would they cope with such devastation when in a few seconds their lives have been totally changed? With the loss of everything that has value except their faith in a loving God, the Haitians seem to constantly express their faith and hope as they are interviewed by the media.

**Prayer:** Oh God of Grace and Mercy, we stand in awe at the example of the people of Haiti and how they in such desperate circumstance and suffering have sufficient character to trust and still have hope through the Love that you poured into their hearts. May we have the same strength of character.

**Janet Paul**

*26<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent*

“The Ultimate Prayer”

**Scripture:** Matthew 26: 39 – *“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

Prayer is difficult for me, not praying itself, but how to pray. What do I say, how do I say it? I know God listens, I know He always answers (not always the answer I want!) and I know He never turns on His answering machine. I have seen many different mnemonics to assist in prayer but they seem contrived. At one point in my prayer life so many people for whom I had been praying for life and healing only got sicker and died that I was tempted to take the survivors off my prayer list!

When I examine my prayers I feel I should apologize to God because it sounds like a laundry list of things I want, people I want God to bless, events I want to take place. And then somewhere near the end, almost an afterthought, I belatedly add: 'Not my will, but Your will, God.'

So it is a comfort to me to know that Jesus, in the last days of His human existence, left me with the fact that even He asked His Father for something that wasn't in the Father's plan. But He added so much more by bowing to the Father's will. Jesus left us with so many models of how we should live our lives. I believe His ultimate prayer is one of the best!

**Prayer:** Father, may I live my life under Your will. Help me to bow to it with a grateful and loving heart. In Your Son's name, Amen.

# 27<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Jane Faust

**Scripture:** Psalm 103; Romans 8:24-39

Psalm 103 and the latter half of Romans 8 have had a strong influence in my life. Psalm 103 has become bedrock; it forms the framework of prayer for me – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Psalm 103 reminds us that the starting point is to bless the Lord and to forget not all his benefits. Just numbering the benefits sets the perspective. Remembering God's blessings shows me my own failings which leads to confession. We dare to confess boldly because we know He has a compassionate understanding of our frailty. From Psalm 103: *“as far as the East is from the West, so far He removes our transgressions from us.”* Yes, God is gracious and slow to anger, but as a holy God the Spirit will convict us when we are wrong. Oftentimes part of healing and wholeness is the willingness to change.

I remember praying quite regularly about the betrayal of a confidence. I was shocked, shaken, and furious. After much repeated prayer about this, the Holy Spirit showed me very clearly that I was enjoying the memory of my betrayal, and enjoying my anger as well. That was a laser beam of truth. It was time to give it up and leave it to God. What a blessing to be relieved of that burden!

During the 18 months of illness of Dwight, my husband, we had time to talk further about faith, illness and death. It was no longer just a concept; it was upon us. During that time, my prayers primarily were that what was best for Dwight would come about. Snatches of Scripture came into consciousness throughout, especially God's promises that He would never leave us or forsake us, reminders that He had sent the Paraclete to believers – an advocate, a comforter, one who would

continued

“come alongside.” Special comfort came from Romans 8:28 that *“in all things God works for good.”* All these promises buoyed my spirit; I was strengthened, but that did not remove the dread of separation.

When death came for Dwight I was so thankful that he had been spared further damage from Parkinson's disease – especially cognition; so much of Dwight was cerebral. Thanks be to God! What was best for Dwight had indeed come to pass. He was released to God for the ultimate healing of His presence. But then the desolation of “the ever present absence” set in. That corresponded to the pit in Psalm 103 – the deep darkness away from God. In his great mercy, it was just as in Psalm 40: *“I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.”* Gradually, light, joy and hope returned. I believe with all my heart that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

**Prayer:** Gracious God may we never forget the wonders of your extravagant love and grace especially as seen in the gift of your Son. Help us to lead faithful, obedient, and joyful lives. Help us to bring the light of your love into this broken world, knowing that you are working before us and with us.

# 28<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Judy Kruse

“Programming a GPS”

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:23-24 – “Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I am a do-er. Just sitting – even if I am praying – is difficult for me, so I was wondering if a prayer program could also include the following:

Caring for God's creations of earth and sky.

Caring for my body, providing it with the essential nutrients and exercise and NOT polluting it with junk.

Refusing to speak ill of people.

Providing a kind word to people: praising a child who is behaving especially well, thanking someone such as the restroom attendant for a job well done, or telling someone they look nice.

Spending time with someone who is lonely or ill.

Making something which would have special meaning to someone.

Refusing to be engaged in violent behavior.

Forgiving a wrongdoing and ridding myself of grudges.

Asking for forgiveness.

Responding to others with love, not judgement.

Making myself open to God's direction of each and every word and action.

Could all that be a prayer? I sure hope so! And if each one of us were led by this GPS, wouldn't that be amazing?

**Prayer:** Lead me, Lord. Lead me in Thy righteousness. Make Thy way plain before my face. Amen.

29<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent  
Wednesday, March 17



M I D - W E E K L E N T E N S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Sanctuary / 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. Chapel**  
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, special music and scripture shared  
and interpreted by a contemporary illustration focusing on our theme of  
prayer. *[Noon service followed by a light sandwich luncheon in the Foyer.]*

# 30th Day of Lent

**Candee Buckbee**

**Scripture:** Hosea 2:14 – *“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.”*

Within the book of Hosea we witness God's anger at the wayward Israel. However, we also hear Him invite her to the desert to pray, promising to speak to her heart. The dry, empty, quiet desert is often where we will hear God the loudest.

I attended a silent spiritual retreat on a cold weekend in January at a Jesuit monastery in Pennsylvania. It was an intentional, personal withdrawal from life, where I expected to be released from the grip of dark memories and pain. Silence was demanded at all times, even mealtime, and was awkward and unnatural at first. How could holding your tongue all day bring any healing? Most all therapy requires an emptying of the heart, a spilling of feelings, the release of pressure.

Father Barry led us in this silent retreat, from the world of words into the quiet, secluded, stillness of contemplative prayer. We gave up cell phones, computers, television, and people, so that we could seek and find God and His voice. We learned that we can often try to hide from God in our busyness and noise, but He is always present, with eyes fixed on us.

We were guided, in our prayers, to be honest and open as we communed with God outside, in the chapel, or in our rooms. And so I dared to pray and spew my anger and disappointment, much like God had spoken to Israel. It seemed sacrilegious, disrespectful, and so sinful. My rest and reflection had turned into a wrestle with God.

He did not answer my anger or questions of why. He waited until I calmed down, and then treated my lamentations with cleansing and healing scripture followed by the Holy Eucharist. I learned that it is ok to be angry with God on that retreat, and that He would rather us rail against Him than ignore Him. All He wants is for us to seek Him.

**Prayer:** Our God, give us the desire to seek you, no matter where, and then let us find you. Amen.

**Linda Zook**

31<sup>st</sup> Day of Lent

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:4 – “*Thou art with me.*”

*Threes* grab my attention. When I hear the same message repeated through different sources 3 or more times, I take special notice. It's what researchers call triangulation; one source lends credence to another. It has been happening with my living day-to-day. The message is that God not only wants to change my *life*, He wants to change my *day*! This was the topic at the Thursday morning Women's Bible Study. I've always focused more on the big picture of my life and what God wants me to do with it. But the *aha* message at Bible Study was that God wants to change my day – this day – and tomorrow and the next day. I realize that one day at a time is less daunting for me to *get it right* and, more importantly, draws me closer to God - every day.

I learned about *breath prayer* at the Exploring Contemplative Prayer course more than a year ago. Basically, the technique is to breath in a few words then breath out a few words. Inhale “Thou art” – exhale “with me.” This affirmation from Psalm 23 is one of my favorites. I draw confidence from it when I step forward to share my testimony with the congregation; I am soothed by it at night when a trial of the day is keeping me awake; I am assured by it when I'm just awakening to a hectic day. Breath prayer is more than the words; it is a cadence, rather than a mere recitation, that slows my heart and my mind and draws me closer to God. It changes my day.

One day in the Church lobby I picked up a copy of *Solo, an Uncommon Devotional* that contains 365 entries. I make it part of each day following a perpetual calendar according to the day of the year. Day 246 suggests “living in the reality of the Trinity – [that the Trinity is] active and living [in me]!” Eugene Peterson, the author asks, “What might it look like to live your life today immersed in the reality and power of the Trinity?”

**Prayer:** Great God of each day, thank you for reminding me of your presence with each breath I take and for giving me the power of the Trinity to live my life, day by day according to your will. Amen.

# 3<sup>rd</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Lent

Jack Houdeshel

**Scripture:** Psalm 18:6

It was January of 1948. My wife (Mary Evelyn - "Skip") and I were living in Wolf Point, in the northeast corner of Montana, on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. I had been appointed there by the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church (USA). My service was called an "internship" between the second and third years of my studies at Princeton Seminary. We were to minister to Dakota Indians in four Chapels in various locations on the Reservation. Since I did not have a car, we had to work out our schedules with my supervisor in order to borrow his car.

One of our places of service was in Poplar, about 20 miles east of Wolf Point. On Monday evenings we went there for a youth meeting and choir rehearsal. This was held in the home of Harry Jones, a Dakota pastor and his family. When we were leaving, I noticed that the thermometer on his front porch registered minus 39 degrees. We had only gone about three miles when the temperature gauge indicated that the radiator was boiling. I didn't know much about cars, but I was sure that we couldn't drive 17 miles with a boiling radiator.

I pulled off the road and started the car intermittently in the hopes that the coolant which was boiling would melt that which was apparently frozen. It didn't work. It became apparent that we were stranded. Skip suggested that it was time for us to pray - I agreed - and we did. There was snow on the fields on either side of the highway and with an almost full moon. After a while, Skip heard a car coming with a faulty muffler. The man was driving without headlights, since the visibility was so good, but because of his noisy muffler, Skip heard him. I jumped out and flagged him down and he graciously stopped and rescued us, taking us back to Harry Jones' house, where the thermometer then registered minus 42 degrees. That was just one of many experiences in which I have become convinced of the efficacy of prayer.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, I thank You that I can call upon You in times of distress, knowing that You know of my condition and honor my prayer. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Dan Snyder**

*3<sup>rd</sup> Day of Lent*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-2

Palestine-Israel is, to me, the land of the grand myths. On the Mount of Olives there is a church built over a rock with a size 12 depression in it where some claim that Jesus 'pushed-off' as he ascended to heaven. In Jericho there's a giant sycamore that is said to be on the spot where Zaccheus met Jesus.

Then there are other myths that are creating socio-political disaster. Those who are using Judaism to cleanse the land of Arabic people maintain the myth that Jews have a mandate from God to do so. And Palestinian refugees whose homes were confiscated in 1948 when the first wave of Zionists invaded still hold the keys to their homes believing that they will someday get their homes back.

Most of the myths are evident to an outsider. But to those on the inside they are very much alive and real. In fact these myths govern much of life for the people in that part of the world. And so it made me think of what myths I cling to as an American; as a Christian; as a Presbyterian; as a white man. I wonder how many of those myths are contrary to the growth of God's kingdom in me?

Prayer is a way for us to close off our ears to the myths that come to us through the 'noise of culture' and tune our hearts to the truth found in silence with the Spirit of God. Some of these myths are so strong that deep silence is needed to hear a living truth. I hope to find space and time for this kind of prayer this Lenten season.

**Prayer:** Jesus, save me from being conformed to the patterns of this world and may I be transformed by the renewing of my mind. My prayer is that you will prove to me what is your good, acceptable and perfect will as I offer myself a living sacrifice to you. Amen.

# 34<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

**Becky Miller**

**Scripture:** Joshua 1:9 - *“Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

The above verse has brought me tremendous comfort while studying in Australia and teaching on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico. In early 2010, God once again brought these words to life to me.

On January 7, 2010 I got ill at work which was not unusual for me. The past two months my digestive tract has not been working properly. My body was feeling pretty depleted and weak, but I was excitedly anticipating my annual review. Unfortunately, my review did not meet my expectations. I held back tears. After work, I gave my husband, who is also my best friend, a quick ring to gain some strength and encouragement. He arrived that day in Israel and told me during our few minute conversation he did not have internet connection. I had hoped we could communicate through Skype or at least email during his 3-week cross cultural trip. With International calling costing \$2 a minute on cell phones, we spoke for less than 5 minutes. I felt like my life line had been cut.

As I drove home, I literally cried out in my car, “Where are you, God? Do you really love me? I can't take anymore.” I felt physically, emotionally and spiritually empty. Where was God?

I called a dear friend, who normally is hard to reach, and she picked up. She showered me with Godly words of truth and encouragement. While talking with her, my husband called and said he had found an internet connection. I was able to get on Skype, which is a free way to see and hear someone via a webcam. God heard my soul's plea to be in touch with my husband during what felt like an unbearable day.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to trust in you and call on your holy name each and every day. Thank you Lord for sacrificing your perfect son, so that we can have communication and a relationship with you. Please replace our fears and anxieties with peace, joy, hope and love. Thank you for hearing our heart's deepest cries and responding. Help us to hear the needs around us and respond with you. Thank you for your rich blessings and guide us to be a blessing to others. Amen.

**Judy Kruse**

3.5<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

“What is Prayer?”

**Scripture:** Romans 8:26 – *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”*

I don't really understand prayer. I don't understand what it is, nor do I understand why I pray. I just don't understand what purpose it serves. In Communicants Class decades ago, we learned about various types of prayer – adoration, supplication, and so on (see: I WAS paying attention!), and that was helpful in describing prayer. But I am still learning what prayer is, and the only thing that I truly understand about prayer is that my life would be empty and incomplete without it.

Prayer is the very embodiment of the literal meaning of INSPIRATION: to breathe in. I can't survive without it.

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit, our hearts inspire.

36<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Wednesday, March 24



M I D - W E E K L E N T E N S E R V I C E S

**12:00 - 12:30 p.m. Sanctuary / 6:30 - 7:00 p.m. Chapel**

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, special music and scripture shared and interpreted by a contemporary illustration focusing on our theme of prayer. *[Noon service followed by a light sandwich luncheon in the Foyer.]*

## Mary Louise Toews

37<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

“Prayer – An Oasis Time”

**Scripture:** Revelation 22:17 NRSV – “...anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.”

It was late in the afternoon when I left for Mariawald, A Catholic Retreat Center in Shillington, Pa. I had reservations about going. I was leaving Jake, my husband, hobbling around at home with a painful broken toe to fend for himself. Also, there were phone calls to make concerning a family member's health. The “To Do” list was long! But, I reminded myself that I had already postponed this retreat time to attend an important meeting. Yes, I would go, knowing there would never be a perfect time.

When I arrived, the door was unlocked, my key was on the table, and a welcoming light shone in the bedroom. Sister Rosa was nowhere to be seen in the large building, but I knew she was nearby. I settled in, read the prayer offered for the beginning of time apart, and began to relax.

Later, when I heard Sister Rosa's footsteps, I greeted her and we chatted. I repeated the above litany of concerns and she quietly listened. “When I feel anxious, restless, and unable to pray anything else, this is my prayer – I CAN'T, YOU CAN, I'M YOURS. I use it daily.” These few words contain so much meaning. What gift – another sister seeking God's wisdom and path, sharing with me in love.

May her words bless you as well in your struggles.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I give you great thanks for the moments of oasis in my life. Here, you provide me with living water and I can rest in the shade of Your love and protection. Please equip me to carry back home some water to also share with others. Amen.

## 3.8th Day of Lent

Sue Young

**Scripture:** Psalm 145:13 – *“The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.”*

In Living Beyond Yourself Exploring the Fruit of the Spirit, Beth Moore raises the question, “Do we believe who He is and what He says?” Over the last several months our family has been going through some challenging times and I have felt God asking me, “Do you trust me and do you think I am capable of handling the situation?” Too many times I try to handle the situation myself, as if I think God is incapable and needs my assistance. Prayer is a way for me to pour out my heart to God and then to be quiet and hear God speak to me.

Through the Healing Prayer Ministry I have been blessed to be used as a vessel for God's healing for others as well as to personally receive that healing. I believe that in these challenging times it is so important for each of us to pray privately as well as to gather with others to lift up our prayers as the body of Christ. In a current Bible study Priscilla Shirer says, “Prayer is the most potent weapon we have.” God has been most merciful and when I feel I can't go on, He showers me with an unexpected glimmer of hope that keeps me going.

**Prayer:** Thank you God that you are a powerful God who created the universe and raised your Son from the dead. Help me not to limit your power and to patiently wait for you to handle each situation in your divine time and way. Also help me never to forget the power of prayer and its importance. Alleluia, Amen!

*Palm Sunday*

March 28 [Holy Week Begins]



T H R E E   W O R S H I P   S E R V I C E S

**8:30 a.m. SANCTUARY**

**9:16 a.m. SHIRK HALL**

**11:00 a.m. SANCTUARY**

We celebrate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem  
with the traditional greeting:

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!"*

# 40<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent

Alisa Bair

**Scripture:** 1 Thess. 5:17

The Apostle Paul makes an astonishing admonition directed toward believers — we are to "pray without ceasing." A literal translation of the verse is *to pray incessantly* – or to continue without interruption.

It was during the illness and years of grief following the death of our daughter that I came closest to understanding this concept. My prayers had no beginning or ending. I was living in seamless prayer, prayer that had permeated my breath, my eyes, the posture of my body, my thoughts, my emotions – and all this while there was barely a formulaic "Dear God" or "Amen" on my lips. I was lost in an undulating sea of love and of sadness, pouring out the deepest yearning unto God known to humankind.

Like with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, God had turned down our request, *If it be possible, let this cup pass*. She didn't get healed, not even when thousands of people around the world were praying, or when we held a healing service for her, or when her family that loved her the most shook heaven on her behalf. And after she died, He didn't stop the hemorrhaging of our hearts – not for years. Clearly, there was more to this than our agenda.

Sometimes grief for me felt like being the only passenger on a hijacked plane with non-stop turbulence. I'd cry out to God in the expanse of space outside the plane's window and beg for Him to stop and let me off. It took a year for me to realize that

continued

Jesus wasn't out there in that expanse of space, nor was my pilot a diabolical maniac. The pilot was, in fact, my Lord and Savior, navigating in tenderness and mercy the turbulence of my journey, letting me suffer because he knew the way out was not around, but *through*.

I heard radio teacher Elisabeth Elliot say, "If all you have is sorrow in your heart, then that's what you pray." For those in deep suffering, it is the richest kind of prayer. That countless Christians throughout the centuries who have gone through horrendous suffering still embrace God, or embrace Him even tighter afterwards, bears witness to the truth that prayer is not one-sided.

**Prayer:** God be in my head, and in my understanding; God be in mine eyes, and in my looking; God be in my mouth and in my speaking; God be in my heart, and in my thinking; God be at mine end, and at my departing. – Sarum Primer 16th century

# 41st Day of Lent

**Don Hackett**

“Do Not Be Anxious....Pray.”

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:6 - *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

I woke up a little anxious the other morning. I was tossing and turning all night, waking up every few hours. I am still not sure why my spirit was so unsettled, but it is easy to guess...the economy is in rough shape, lots of people losing jobs, and friends struggling with life-threatening illnesses.

There is much that can weigh us down these days. The temptation is to believe all we hear on the television as true. Fear has a way of creating more fear if we feed on it. I needed to remind myself of what is really true about our world.

The truth is that Jesus Christ is in charge. Jesus, the Creator of all things, creates order out of chaos. Jesus comes into tough, chaotic situations and weaves them into opportunities for love, joy, healing, and transformation.

**Prayer:** God, forgive me when I do not trust you. Take away my fear and put your love in its place. Help me to listen and follow you as I come now in prayer. In Jesus Name, Amen.

**Dan Snyder**

*42nd Day of Lent*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:18; 2 Corinthians 10:4

While in Palestine-Israel I stayed three nights in the home of Simon Awar, his wife and three children. It was a privilege to eat with them, laugh with them and pray with them. It was a powerful way to discover what life is like for Christians in a land under military occupation. They told many stories of their struggle, but the one that stopped me in my tracks was of how they watched out their living room window as Israeli tanks were coming over the hillside to invade their village. They told of how they could see the rockets being fired from the tanks into Bethlehem destroying many buildings including the hotel that we had been staying in, now rebuilt. They described how the hotel burned for three days because of all the bedding.

As I listened I realized that I have never been as close to war as the Awar family. I am privileged to live in a peaceful land. But that peace and my attitude toward peace can be like a cocoon insulating me from the ethos of conflict.

The language of war is not foreign to the Bible and God's people. Even the New Testament contains urgings for Christians to be awake to the spiritual conflict alive around us. Paul the Apostle urges us use the spiritual weapons we have been given to demolish strongholds. In Ephesians we are charged to arm ourselves with God's weaponry including a life of prayer.

I found that I had much to learn from my friends in Palestine about fighting the spiritual battle we share in common because of the reality of the earthly battle that surrounds them every day. I hope that my prayers this Lenten season begin to take on the offensive edge that is called for from a Christian living in our times.

**Prayer:** Jesus, may I learn from you how to do battle on my knees against those forces that are opposed to your kingdom. May my prayers demolish the strongholds in our community that keep your kingdom from coming today. Amen.

# 4<sup>3</sup>rd Day of Lent

[No Mid-Week Services]

Edie Early

**Scripture:** Romans 8:26-27 – *“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”*

The doctor said, "In my experience patients who have heart valve problems with no symptoms often die in their in their sleep." I realized the time had come to have the valve replaced, but it would be three months before the surgery could be scheduled. I was overcome with uncertainty what to pray for during that time, but the Spirit brought to mind a prayer I was taught to pray every night at bedtime.

Throughout my childhood I prayed it by rote as part of bedtime routine. Now, many years later, it spoke to my need in a new way, bringing peace and freedom from fear. This is the prayer:

## **Prayer:**

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake, I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take.

**Tim Sidebothom**

*Maundy Thursday*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 20:24

Over the last 14 months I have had many opportunities to question God's plans for me. In scripture I saw that God had wisdom in mind for me and wanted my trust. I still wanted to see what He had in mind. When I got to Proverbs 20:24, my outlook shifted:

*"A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way?"*

He is looking for me to trust and get moving. I may not get to see the "big picture" on this side of Heaven. I talk to God about trust now, and my outlook is far more joyful.

**Prayer:** God teach us to trust You and give us joy for the adventure that You have planned. Amen



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M A U N D Y T H U R S D A Y S E R V I C E S

**NOON Sanctuary**  
Communion and the Ritual of Healing

**7:00 p.m. Sanctuary**  
A family-friendly service with Communion and elements of worship from all our worship styles: informal, contemporary and traditional

*Good Friday*

April 2



S E R V I C E S

**NOON to 3:00p.m. St. James Episcopal Church** [at Duke & Orange Streets]

A traditional three-hour vigil service, hosted by the Downtown Ministerium.

The service consists of Hymns, special music, meditations and prayers focusing on the Passion of Jesus. Pastors from the Ministerium will preach, including Pastor Riggs.

**7:00 p.m. Tenebrae Service - Sanctuary**

This Service of the Gathering Darkness takes us deeper into the Passion of Jesus and prepares us for Easter. Powerful in the dramatic retelling of experience of Jesus' death, we leave a darkened Sanctuary to return on Easter morning.

*Easter Sunday*

April 4



T H R E E   W O R S H I P   S E R V I C E S

**8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.**

Identical Festival Services of worship to celebrate the resurrection. Pastor Riggs will preach at both services, delivering the final sermon in the series "Prayers from the Cross." The sermon is entitled, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit - Prayers of trusting God with the outcome."

**9:16 a.m. Cherry Street Service**

A contemporary celebration of Easter led by our worship band and including the Easter message by Pastor Hackett, focusing on the same series and title as the other two services.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

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