

Lenten Devotional Guide 2020

Otterbein United Methodist Church



LENT

Wednesday, February 26

Hebrews 12:1-14

The Difficulty with Discipline

The subject of how we respond to discipline calls to mind a pair of memes. (If you aren't up on the lingo, a meme is essentially a picture that gets repurposed with an often funny caption. Often the same picture gets used for a variety of captions on a similar topic.)

In one meme, the caption reads, "When I discipline my dog," and the picture shows a sad faced hound, who clearly realizes that maybe climbing onto the table and eating the turkey the family was going to have for dinner was not such a good idea. The dog's head is pointed down and their eyes are big. The whole face says, "I'm ashamed. I messed up, and I want to get back into my family's good graces."

In another meme, the caption reads, "When I discipline my cat," and the picture shows a cat who Does Not Give a Hoot that the counter is not for cats. There is no shame because cats do what they want to. Sometimes the picture will include a human shaking a finger at the cat, and the cat attacking the shaking finger. The idea here is that the cat will ignore discipline and continue to ignore the rules.

As humans, most of us defer to cat mode when someone tries to discipline us. Why? Well, as adults, we feel like we are supposed to have our acts together. We are not children any longer and don't need someone telling us how to live our lives.

But we still find ourselves doing wrong—maybe it seems like a small thing, such as going a few miles over the speed limit. But there was a police officer, and we got stopped. We got a ticket. And now we have consequences—a fine to pay, perhaps points on the license, maybe we have to go to court.

I had my own moment like that this summer. My yearly car inspection had expired the last day of July. August 1, I was driving home from the grocery store when I got pulled over and informed that my inspection was expired. I was polite to the officer, but when I drove away, I was in cat mode. Thinking to myself, "really? One day over? Isn't there supposed to be a grace period? I was going to get the car inspected. It's on my list of things to do before I leave for vacation." But I hadn't done it. And I know it's a required rule meant to ensure the safety of vehicles on the road. I know my car will pass inspection. Now, I had to take time off from classes to go to traffic court and prove that my car indeed was inspected. It became an inconvenience. But if I had done it right in the first place, I would not have had any extra steps to go through.

And this allowed me to move into dog mode—I should have had my car inspected the last week of July instead of letting it expire. I should do better at following instructions in a timely fashion. This is a rule meant to keep cars safe, and I can fix this problem.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to accept that sometimes we need help in following directions. Please guide us back to Your path and assist us with accepting guidance and discipline when we need it. Amen.*

Maryann Wolfe

Thursday, February 27

John 17:1-8

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."

John 17:1

Verses 1-5: Throughout the Gospel we have been told that His "*hour had not yet come.*" Jesus begins to express the desires of His heart in verses 1-5. Now, it "*has come.*" Now he prays that He may be glorified. No one can glorify Him but the Father and he prays that he may so accept it as to bring glory to his Father in turn. His "*hour*" had come for the Father to "*glorify Thy son*" which would be through His death, resurrection, and ascension. He will be glorifying his Father by doing His will.

In verse 2 Christ was given two things: the authority over all mankind and the power to give eternal life. He continues to define this "*eternal life*" as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

In verse 4, Jesus talks of His glorification and that it has already been done "*I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast give Me to do.*"

In verse 5, Jesus states "*Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was.*" It is believed Jesus was saying He had finished what he came into the world to do, but in order for Him to come into the world, Jesus had to set aside his glory and become a servant. Jesus is now asking God to reinstate His glory as He leaves the world. Jesus is also telling us that he is one with God and the Holy Spirit, thus reaffirming the holy Trinity of Christian belief. Through this belief, because all three are one in the same, they cannot bestow glory on themselves, but have to ask for it from each other.

Verses 6-8: Jesus is specifically praying for those closest to him, the disciples. The disciples to whom Jesus gave the words given by God and they believed Jesus was sent by God.

As Lent is our time of preparation, we can understand these last prayers of Jesus before his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Diane Ritchie

Friday, February 28

Philippians 4:1-9

Joy In Giving – Words of Encouragement

Have no worries and trust that the Lord is near. If help is needed, pray to the Lord and seek guidance from him. Allow the Lord to protect your heart from evil things as you serve him. Have thoughts that are good and praiseful, along with thoughts that show righteousness for the Holy Spirit which also shine through those around you. Above all, practice good Christian principles.

Having trust in the Lord is always a good thing to do, but at the same time, is not always easy to do. This is because the relationship between the individual and the Lord takes time, while the Lord puts trials in the individual's path. These trials allow the individual believer to place their trust in the Lord because they believe and know that the Lord is near, in case assistance is needed. In some cases, an individual may have a hard time trusting the Lord, because they can't see him, and therefore may not believe in him. The best thing to do from a Christian perspective is to pray for the individual. This is known, as my mother would say, as the "power of prayer," and can also bring a believer closer to God. Prayers truly work, but at the same time, don't happen when the believer may want the prayer to work. Instead, the prayer happens on God's time and then God puts the prayer to work!

Dylan Andrade

Saturday, February 29

John 17:20-26

Lovely

February is, for some, a season of love, compassion, endearment, and celebration. Others may feel February is a month of searching, questioning, and yearning for something more. Do not be weary my friend, I have good news for you. You are lovely.

During this month and throughout this life; do not fret. For you are the child of God. Through your darkest days and your brightest mornings, God is peeking through the clouds and the foggy windows in an attempt to capture the beauty of his children. God sees no wrong in your history. He sees no flaws in your unique beauty. God believes in you and loves you for you. You are lovely.

Throughout your busy Samaritan lives or during your laid back days of retirement, you may fall short of the job that God has given to you. Throughout your life you have your mentors and role models who have engrained the importance of secrecy and staying loyal to those we love. God's love is not one of those secrets. God expects you to be the voice for all he has done for you yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The answer is clear in John 17:20-26:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father. Just as you are in me I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me. Because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I

have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Along with God’s prayers, you as well have been instilled with the power of prayer, as the rest of his children. With Gods undeniable love and support, there is no need to ever question your value or your purpose. You are lovely. When you feel low, look to the heavens, and when you feel high, remain looking to the heavens. All that you may go through and achieve is because of your Father, God. It should not be kept a secret that you are loved, not only throughout this season, but for all days to come. For some, this month may make you feel alone, but simply look ahead at everything God has placed in front of you and know that you are never alone. You are lovely in his eyes.

Danielle Nelson

Sunday, March 1

John 12:44-50

The Message of Jesus

This passage comes near the end of Jesus’ life on earth – after He had lived among the people, taught them about God for three years, and performed many miracles. It is in Chapter 12 that we read about His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. In the same chapter, verse 37 reads: *“even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him.”* Can’t you feel how sad and disappointed this must have made Him? Time was running out – His life on earth was about to come to an end!

So, in verses 44-50, Jesus tries one more time to help the people understand His message: *“When people look at me, they see God, the One who sent me. I came into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

We don’t have to wonder what God is like – we need only look at the life and teachings of Jesus to see a loving God, His beautiful plan of salvation, and eternal life with Him demonstrated in the life of Jesus on earth. There is a song that says *“After all He’s done for me...how can I do less than give Him my best and live for Him completely, after all He’s done for me.”*

Rosalie Bailey

Monday, March 2

Mark 1:1-13

Do you remember being baptized? I know that I was baptized but don't remember it since I was so little. Getting baptized is very important. Getting baptized is where you surrender to God and promise to serve him. In Mark 1:1-11, John baptizes and preaches to a lot of people, including Jesus. He baptized them in the Jordan River. Because of Jesus being baptized, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit spoke to him. He said, "*You are my own dear son. You will go to the desert for forty days.*" When Jesus arrived, Satan was there trying to tempt him. Jesus had help from God and his angels to refuse Satan. They protected Jesus from all the bad things there. God protects and takes care of us just like he took care of and protected Jesus. When you get baptized, it makes God very happy, so if you have not been baptized yet, you should consider it.

Prayer: *Dear God, Thank you for protecting us and taking care of us. Help us to serve you and not be tempted by Satan. In Your Name, Amen.*

Chelsea Joiner

Tuesday, March 3

Genesis 37:12-24

Things do not always work out the way you think they will. As I meandered through my high school course work, it became clear to me that I liked two things: history and education. I liked my history teacher, but no more than any other; the subject itself was fascinating. I also was often the default tutor for some of my classmates. I seemed to have an ability to translate a challenging topic to others and the patience to work them through tough spots. I left high school fairly certain that I wanted to be a high school history teacher. Fast forward four years and I am done with college, a degree in hand and all the requirements for being a history teacher in tow, but no motivation to do so. There were few openings, and the work I should have done to be ready, I was not motivated to do. My career path moved to another course and, over time, led me to the church.

Joseph, one of the younger sons of Jacob, was sent on a simple task to see how his older brothers were doing in their work of tending the family flocks. His travels took him from Shechem to Dothan and eventually Egypt. His work as a messenger ended in a pit left for dead, then on to slavery in the royal palace of Pharaoh, and the eventual steward of the Empire. Our scripture ends, though, in a pit, and sometimes life is like that. The best of plans are ripped asunder by the ravages of life. Well-meaning plans are tossed about by unforeseen problems or inadequate preparation. Sometimes circumstances outside of our control lead us to places where we see no way out. Whereas our problems might not be career struggles or being left for dead, the idea that we are somehow in control of everything is a myth we tell ourselves. Joseph did not begin his journey intending to end in a pit no more than I started college hoping to be a pastor. As you can see, the

unexpectedness of life varies in how severe it is; comparing Joseph and my experiences is not an apple-to-apple comparison, but there is a thread that connects all of us around the topic of unexpected outcomes.

During the season of Lent, it is not bad for us to acknowledge this shared experience and, in some cases, to mourn the brokenness of the unexpected. Even though Joseph's pain of betrayal eventually led to salvation for his family, how hard must it have been all those years to be separated from them and to know they had betrayed him. At times in life we can look back on our disappointments and see the beauty of God working even in those. I know I can as I look at the path not chosen, teaching, and the eventual road I ended up on, pastoring. That beauty, though, does not invalidate the pain of things going poorly. Joseph ended up doing well but it was not an easy journey. Look for God's beauty in the unexpected this Lenten season, but do not be afraid to acknowledge the pain that can sometimes accompany it.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Wednesday, March 4

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

God's Mystery Revealed!

In this passage we see the difference between human wisdom and God's wisdom. Human wisdom is limited to what can be observed and worked out with human reason. Scripture points out the value of reason and knowledge while demonstrating a difference between what man's mind can achieve and what God's Spirit can reveal. The wondrous fact of salvation through Christ was decreed in the counsels of the Most High before the world was made. The whole mystery of man's redemption from his fall and his restoration was in the mind of God from all eternity.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he did not present the gospel to them with lofty speech and impressive arguments. He presented the truth as simply as he could so their faith would be based on God's power and not human wisdom. The rulers of this age did not understand it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. And the same situation exists today. Those without God's Spirit are limited to what can be observed and worked out with human reason so they reject all spiritual truth as foolishness. Only those Christians with the indwelling Holy Spirit and who have studied the Scriptures can understand the truths revealed by God, including Christ crucified for human sinfulness. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to understand and believe spiritual things.

Lent, the most Holy time of the year, is a time of solemn observance and preparation for the physical death of Jesus Christ leading to Easter and His resurrection to glory. God's Mystery is revealed to all believers that through Jesus Christ's crucifixion, we shall be glorified with him in heaven!

Prayer: *May God help us to become people who truly see Him. We look forward to the Glory for which we have been prepared. Amen.*

Patsy Liskey

Thursday, March 5

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

Building my Foundation on the Knowledge of Jesus

I think there are countless times when I am sitting in Sunday School and Church and I hear something that I feel is new material for me. I am building my foundation of information. I do my own reading, but I look forward to what I might hear in Sunday School class and Worship. Just recently, I followed up with a church member on something they said about a month ago; it had stuck with me. At the same time, to really hear the word, your heart has to be open to it as well.

Last night I attended Bible Study for the first time in a long time. The topics being discussed are hard, but I was learning within the Christian environment how to navigate the waters when topics are hard. Reading our Bible and spending time with Jesus is important, but we can also have discussions among ourselves to share our perspective. This takes a life time to develop. Life is challenging and knowing Jesus provides the roadmap for life. However, we have to be open to see that road map.

Bonnie Andrade

Friday, March 6

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

We often think of Lent as a time to prepare spiritually for what God desires of us, a time of repentance and reflection, equipping us to celebrate Easter and move positively toward God. The first two verses of today's reading, though, take us in another direction and can provide a different challenge to our Lenten disciplines. Paul reminds us that God's spirit dwells within us and that our bodies are a temple. As much as we might be inclined to not think of our bodies as holy vessels, they truly are, and how we treat them is a reflection on the kingdom of God. We do a fairly decent job as the church in focusing on spiritual work. We have Bible Study, Sunday School classes, regular worship, but our long-term focus on caring for our bodies has often been neglected in the life of the church. This should challenge us as a church to do better.

We have been blessed over the past eighteen months to have Pastor Faith around to provide for our care of self, but we are just beginning to see the amount of work that really should be done. If our bodies are a temple, then we need some serious maintenance and repair work done, for it has been a neglected practice in the overall life of the church. I hope you take the time to attend to the physical care of your body during Lent. Show up for a Saturday class with Faith or make a doctor's appointment that you have been avoiding. Take time to go for a walk at one of the wonderful parks in the city or better yet, arrange for your small group to go together. We need to be better at caring for ourselves. Allow Lent to be a time to renew your commitment to living in a way that reflects the sacred worth of your whole self.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Saturday, March 7

Genesis 41:1-13

Pharaoh had experienced two disturbing dreams but none of the wise men had been able to decode the meaning. Scrawny cows eating fat cows? Plump heads of grain consuming withered heads of grain? Joseph, a young man in Pharaoh's prison, was able to clarify the meaning of the images, thus enabling Egypt to prepare for future drought and famine. Joseph gave all the credit to God, who had provided him with the interpretation.

After studying this passage, I too had a crazy dream: *Extreme weather was approaching; a tornado. Relying on a battery operated radio, I heard the meteorologist urging everyone to head to the lowest level of a building as a **1,000 MPH tornado** was on the way! He advised that your storm shelter be supplied with water and other essentials. I was descending the stairs to the basement...* then, I woke up. I felt confused like Pharaoh. What did it mean? All I could think was—"in the aftermath of a 1,000 MPH tornado, NO ONE is going to need water or supplies!"

Later that day, I again pondered my tornado dream. Maybe it was a hint that I should store the emergency bottles of water in the basement instead of the garage. Or, could the dream have a deeper meaning?

Perhaps the message was: "think of where you are in your Christian journey and make the necessary changes to be in accord with Christ's teachings." Or possibly: "find ways to help others know the grace of God." Maybe: "pray more; talk to God."

Lent is a time for preparation, self-reflection, and repentance. The following "essentials" will aid our preparations in strengthening our journey as Christians:

- Worship and praise God for his goodness and mercy.
- Thank Him for his many blessings in your life.
- Share God's love in reaching out to others.
- Ask for His guidance in all you do and say.
- Confess your sins and receive the forgiveness that is yours.
- Open your heart and pray for patience and God's guidance as you mature as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Carole Gaines

Sunday, March 8

Romans 6:3-14

Obedience

For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:14

When I was growing up as a young lad, my father was a role model. He taught me right from wrong. One day, I took something that didn't belong to me. When Father questioned me about the item, I didn't tell the truth. My father pointed out to me that I had just sinned by not being truthful. He shared with me how I should be obedient.

Many years later when my father passed away, I felt the pain of his passing. Jesus felt the pain of parting, too. In the last days of Jesus, as he made the journey to the cross, Jesus gave his life and died for our sins.

Through our obedience with Jesus Christ, we too can receive the grace of God that overcomes sin and death. No one passes His grace, not even the worst sinner. Anyone may come to God in prayer and be changed forever.

During this Lenten season, we need to be reminded that Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin.

Prayer: *God of mercy, thank you for forgiving and forgetting our sins when we confess them to you. Teach us to believe and trust in you. Help us to be examples of faith in all that we do as we travel along life's highway. Amen.*

Art Mitchell

Monday, March 9

Genesis 41:46-57

1 Corinthians 4:8-20(21)

Mark 3:7-19a

Why should we brag about our talents and achievements as if they are not gifts given by God? Instead, we should use our gifts to better ourselves in the stead of Jesus Christ, because he gave us the greatest gift by making the ultimate sacrifice. God grants us a multitude of gifts throughout our lives as tools to better the world, and instead of harboring those gifts for ourselves, we must find a way to share them with those who are not so blessed. In that way, we act as instruments of God's will and are following in the path of Christ. It would be arrogant of us to assume otherwise or to think that our gifts are something we create. We have been blessed with our singing and artistic talents, and through that gift we have been able to show the light and love of God at Otterbein and in concerts in the community.

Joel Clemens & Mary Galvin

Tuesday, March 10

Genesis 42:1-17

Not long ago I was going through a time in life that was very difficult for me. I had received two degrees in what I thought I wanted to do for the rest of my life, only to begin reconsidering *how* I wanted to use those degrees. Depression and anxiety hit me hard for the first time in my life. I began journaling some, and to go back and read those entries is challenging: “I want to make a difference but where am I meant to be? What am I meant to do?” I felt lost.

Throughout Genesis, and in these verses, we see a lot of detail of Joseph’s life - more scripture is devoted to those details than to creation, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. Genesis spans an incredible amount of time, but we get to see a lot about Joseph. Why is that?

Through unveiling of Joseph’s life, we are able to see just how involved God really is in the minutiae of our lives, even when it feels that we are waiting and waiting for an answer or comfort. Joseph probably felt very near to God when he was blessed with prophetic dreams. But I imagine that closeness was harder to hold onto when he experienced his brothers’ betrayal. When you examine these verses and the ones preceding, it’s easy to see that God never left Joseph - he was there the whole time, working towards the good for Joseph and many, many others. God is near and has a plan for you - even when the going gets rough, even when it feels like all is lost. God has never left you. Your plans are just unfolding and the details of your life are just becoming more apparent.

Prayer: *Dear God, help me to remember that you are always near, even when we feel far from anything. Help me to see the ways you are working my life. Amen.*

Sarah Macomber

Wednesday, March 11

Mark 4:1-20

This passage finds Jesus ministering to the people of Capernaum. So many have shown up to hear him that he has to get in a boat and preach to those on the seashore. This would be the first time Jesus uses a parable to teach the truth. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It takes the common, everyday events of life and uses them to illustrate the deep things of God to those who are open to his teachings.

The sower stands for a person who sows the word of God. The seed is the gospel of grace. It is the good news that Jesus came into this world, he died for sinners, he rose from the dead, and offers salvation to everyone who will receive him into their heart and life. In this parable, some of the seed produces fruit and some does not. It depends on the soil, which represents the heart or mind of the person who hears the Gospel and how they respond to what they hear. Some have closed minds and don’t want to give God a chance. Some are confused and only call on God when it is convenient for them. Some are trying to have both God and sin. They start out well, but soon end up going back to their old ways

of sin. The seed that falls on the best soil allows the seed to germinate and the plant begins to grow and produce fruit. When the seed of the Gospel enters this kind of heart, it bears fruit to the glory of God.

We all need to think about our soil and whether we are allowing the seed of the Gospel to bear fruit within us. The Lenten season is a great time to reflect on how this parable applies to us.

Prayer: *Dear God, as we approach Easter, allow me to have a more open mind and heart for the Gospel of the Lord. Let the seeds that are sown within my heart and mind blossom and flourish so that I may bear fruit to the glory of God. Amen.*

Susan Pollard

Thursday, March 12

Mark 4:21-34

Today's scripture from Mark is a familiar one. It offers us parables about lamps and measures. At this point, Jesus is deeply involved in his ministry on Earth, telling stories, called parables, from a boat on a lake to the crowds of people gathered around that lake. Why does he weave his message into parables? Jesus is using items such as lamps and seeds and situations (such as farming) to help his followers and others identify with and better understand his message.

Through these parables, Jesus is revealing the kingdom of God to the whole world. These images help show what Jesus is "planting" through his teachings. In his time, many rejected these teachings; in fact some were already plotting to destroy Jesus. However, this does not change what Jesus has come to do.

Notice how this passage ends: *"With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them."*

It seems that Jesus is teaching in this way to see who will hear, who will listen, and who will follow him. As Jesus spoke these words, we might think of His words being like the seeds that were scattered on the ground or the light that shown from the lamp. Will that seed planted in our hearts grow and flourish? Will we choose to allow that light shining on each of us be a light along our path in life? To follow Jesus and his teachings or to reject that which is offered is what each of us must decide as we journey through this life on Earth.

The kingdom of God is available to each of us. This is the kingdom that God has promised to each of us if we will choose to follow Jesus and his teachings.

Prayer: *Jesus, as we read and study the messages found in your parables, guide us to a greater understanding of how we might assimilate these guiding principles into our life here on Earth. Amen.*

Bill Pollard

Friday, March 13

Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Calms the Storm

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Mark 4:25-41

Do we respond like Jesus or the disciples aboard the ship when storms are surging around us? We are often inclined to worry and fret about the many elements that are out of our control, but Jesus calls us to remain calm, and to trust in His guiding ways. To us, it may sound impossible to think that we could remain at peace when it seems that the many trials of the world are crashing down upon on us, yet, that is what Jesus was able to do.

Sometimes it is fear, worry, and doubt that initiate our call to Jesus for help, but in Mark, it is evident that we need not worry, for Jesus is with us. After all, if Jesus is with us, who could be against us? Perhaps it is worth asking yourself if Jesus is aboard the ship in your own life's journey. If He is, then why worry when the winds begin to swirl, and the waves rise above the bow of the ship, or beyond the edge of your control?

If even the wind and the waves are subservient to Jesus, then so too must be our storms in life. After all, Jesus was SLEEPING, while these unnerving events were occurring. I can't even begin to imagine sleeping through such a terrifying storm, yet Jesus did. This peace and inner calm can only be found in Jesus, and He calls us to remain faithful despite our worries and doubts.

Let us all be reminded that Jesus is onboard with us, and that we need not be afraid when life comes crashing around us. Ask yourself, "Why are you so afraid?" With Jesus, our fears are quieted and peace and calm are restored.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to be aboard our ship when life seems to be chaotic and worrisome. We are grateful to have His calming presence in our lives and strive to worry less and pray more. In You we place our faith and trust. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

John and Deanna Nye

Saturday, March 14

Mark 5:1-20

This passage from Mark describes the time that Jesus and the disciples took a boat to the other side, the east side of the Sea of Galilee, to the country of Gerasenes, Gentile territory. It was there that they immediately encountered a man possessed by unclean spirits who lived among the tombs. This man could not be constrained by chains or shackles. He broke them to pieces. No one could subdue him as they were not strong enough. The possessed man howled day and night among the tombs or the mountains. He would bruise himself with stones. Everyone had to be so terrified of him! All except Jesus!

So like Jesus to step out of the comfort zone – to go into the land of the Gentiles, to go to unclean areas such as tombs, to encounter a man possessed by demons. All three would be considered majorly unclean by Jewish tradition. So like Jesus to break down those barriers of what was considered clean and unclean.

The man saw Jesus from a distance, ran, bowed down to him, and then shouted at the top of his voice, “*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*” Jesus commanded the unclean spirits to come out of the man and then, at their request, were sent into the 2,000 swine grazing nearby. The entire herd rushed to the sea and was drowned. The herdsmen, who had been tending the swine, ran to the city to report all that they had witnessed. The people came out of the city to see what had happened, to see Jesus and the man sitting there in his right mind. Their reaction was unexpected as they begged Jesus to leave. Jesus had completely turned their world upside down. That healing changed that scary man into a normal person at the expense of 2,000 pigs! Those people must have been very afraid of Jesus with his awesome power and authority. Jesus has a way of breaking down barriers in an instant. The man, now healed, wanted to follow his healer, but Jesus told him to stay in his community and tell everyone what the Lord had done for him.

So like Jesus, serve God where you are, show love and mercy, and proclaim to others what God has done for you.

Liz Lawson

Sunday, March 15

Romans 8:1-10

The law of Moses could not save us because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent His own Son in a human body like ours except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 8:3 (NLT)

The law of Moses alone cannot save us because we need spiritual guidance as well. As we live a Christian life, we will want to obey both the laws and the Holy Spirit.

According to Paul, people are divided into two categories: those controlled by sin and those controlled by the Holy Spirit. If it were not for Jesus' divine love for us, we would all be in the sin category.

God's purpose for sending Jesus to earth in human form was to prepare Him as a human blood sacrifice for our sins. We are offered freedom from sin and power through the Holy Spirit to do the will of God. Jesus gave us freedom from sin through death on the cross.

In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices were offered at the temple to show Israelites the seriousness of their sins and blood had to be shed before sins could be removed. However, animal blood could not really remove sins (Hebrews 10:4) and this is why Jesus came into the world like one of us.

In Christ, we not only have our sins forgiven but we have a chance at a new life. God gave us free will to choose our own destiny and, every year during Lent, we have a time for spiritual discipline, repentance, forgiveness, love, and life renewal. When Jesus gave His life on the cross and shed His blood for our sins, He showed His ultimate love for us and continues to forgive our sins if we ask. Every day is a new day and we should thank God daily through Bible reading and prayer for the opportunity He gives us to begin again.

Prayer: A Prayer of Praise - Jude 1:24-25 (NLT):

And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling and who will bring you into His glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy. All glory to Him, who alone is God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to Him in the beginning, now, and forevermore. Amen.

Wilma Mitchell

Monday, March 16

Mark 5:21-43

Jesus Heals

After reading today's scripture, think about the similarities in the two miracles recounted in this passage. Some of the similarities that I noted include: (1) the number twelve is a component of both miracles, (2) the matter of faith is addressed in each miracle, and (3) the act of touching is important.

According to an internet search, the number twelve appears in the Bible 187 times. A few examples are the twelve sons of Jacob forming the 12 tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus. Twelve is important to us today as a part of our calendar (twelve months in a year) or when we select a dozen items for purchase.

For me, the overriding significance of the number twelve in this scripture is that it is considered a symbol of faith. Two amazing examples of faith are illustrated - the faith of the sick woman and of the father. Jairus sought out Jesus and pleaded with Him to come and touch his daughter so she would be healed. The woman's faith is exemplary in that she simply sought to touch the garment of Jesus believing she would be healed.

Contemplating this life-changing touch of Jesus caused me to recall the Bill Gaither hymn *He Touched Me*. A portion of the lyrics assert: "*He touched me and made me whole.*" Jesus still touches us today. He heals us and makes us whole just as He did the woman and young girl.

Judy Richardson

Tuesday, March 17

Mark 6:1-13

¹ *Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.*

Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus taught in that synagogue service. Were the people astounded by the content of his teachings or his authoritative manner? Most likely, both.

^{2b} *"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?"*

Doesn't a small town generally celebrate a local person who has made it big? Jesus' hometown folks have reason to be proud. We would expect them to welcome him with a ticker-tape parade. They made it clear that they are aware of Jesus' wisdom and mighty works. Even so, they still cannot bring themselves to believe.

³ *"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.*

Instead of seeing the Messiah at work, they point to the humble roots of His family and profession. They say, in effect: Who does He think He is? This is the carpenter who worked right here with us. How could Jesus be anyone special? They knew His family. They were just too familiar with Him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Jesus implies that he is, indeed, a prophet and that His own people are guilty of rejecting him. Faith should have been the response in that town in Galilee, the region where Christ did so many miracles and so much teaching.

How might this compare to present day Christians? Would Jesus be amazed by our faith or our unbelief? If we grow up in the church, or have been in the church for many years, is it possible to grow too familiar with spiritual truths that we become indifferent to our calling as believers or our faith wavers?

Do my actions at times reflect this lack of paying attention to who Jesus really is, or what He calls me to do? How about when I put my agenda first and call on God only when that doesn't work? Or when I keep silent when I see injustice? When I love some of my neighbors as myself, but not all of them? Or when I pray the Prayer of Confession without sincerity and think repentance is something the non-Christian needs, not me? Could I be like the people of Nazareth, have a lack of faith and not accept Jesus for who he claims to be?

Prayer: *O God, forgive our times of unbelief and lack of faith. Continue to work in our lives that we might be positive witnesses for You. Amen.*

Betty Redmond

Wednesday, March 18

Genesis 45:16-28

In today's scripture, Pharaoh learns that Joseph's brothers have come to Egypt. He instructs Joseph to have his brothers go back to Canaan to gather their father and all their families and to return to Egypt, at which time Pharaoh will give them the very best of Egypt and they'll be able to enjoy the "fat of land." Before they even set out on their journey, Pharaoh tells Joseph to give them provisions for their journey... carts, new clothing, shekels of silver, ten donkeys loaded with the best of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread. How generous!

But wait a second...these are the same brothers who disliked Joseph because he was their father's favorite and he was given a very special coat. These are the same brothers who wanted to kill him. These are the same brothers who threw him in the bottom of the pit because they were jealous and then decided to sell him into slavery because they

wanted to be rid of him. Then, they even told their father that he had died! What horrible siblings!

That just doesn't seem right. Look what Joseph's brothers did to him, yet now Pharaoh is giving them a bunch of provisions for their journey to Canaan and he's promised them the very best of Egypt when they get back. That's not fair...that's not the way it should be.

We've all been there. A friend knowingly hurts us, yet things seem to be going great in their life while we're having trouble getting over the pain. We work extra hard at our job, yet the person who slacks off gets the promotion. People take advantage of our kindness, yet don't appear to be phased by their wounding actions. None of that seems right or the way it should be. So how do we make sense of it all?

One key part of the passage (and the ones preceding it) is that Joseph doesn't appear to hold any malice against his brothers. He could have easily told them to get lost from the first time they showed up at the palace and Pharaoh would have probably had his back. But he doesn't...in fact, earlier in the story, he even tells them “...*do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*” (Genesis 45:5). He was able to see God at work through everything that happened to him. It's a lot harder to hold on to anger when you add God's plan into the equation. No, it's not always easy to see what God is doing when we're in the middle of the storm. Sometimes it seems that the storm will never end and we're not sure there will be anything left of us if it does. The important thing to remember is to hold on to the truth that God is working and that he has a plan for what we go through. It won't always make the pain dissipate right away, but hopefully resting in that fact will give some comfort during the storm and may even help us get out of it sooner.

Thought for the Day: *The Lord knew what He was doing even when I didn't.*

Melissa Miller

Thursday, March 19

Mark 6:30-46

Jesus and the disciples have been teaching and ministering to a huge crowd of people. He tells his disciples to get some rest and something to eat. The crowd follows them, making it impossible for them to take a break. The disciples suggest to Jesus that he dismiss the crowd so that they can go into the nearest town to find food and shelter. Jesus looks at the people and sees them as forlorn sheep in need of a shepherd. He is moved by them and instructs the disciples to give them food. Understandably, the disciples question this command and explain that they have only five loaves and two fishes, but he instructs them to gather the people into groups of fifty, which they do. They then find that they can feed the entire 5,000 people and have plenty left over.

The account of the feeding of the 5,000 appears not as a magic trick, but serves as an assurance that Jesus is, indeed, the long-awaited Savior. Today we are the sheep in need

of a shepherd. When I was struggling last summer with the seemingly endless problems in connection with moving from Roanoke to Harrisonburg, it seemed as if everywhere I turned, there would be something that needed tending to, and I worried and fretted, giving in to stress. Gradually I became aware that problems were being solved with very little help from me, usually by an encouraging call, a hot meal, advice, and offers of help.

These unexpected gifts reminded me of lines from 1 Peter 5:6-7: *If you will humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, in his good time he will lift you up. Let him have all your worries and cares, because he cares for you.* And from a prayer by Thomas Merton: *You will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me and will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

Lynda McConnell

Friday, March 20

Mark 6:47-56

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other...
Matthew 24:10 (NIV)

Years ago, a very dear friend received some very bad news. His uncle that was like a father to him had just died a very tragic death. The family asked me to tell him. That was also very hard for me, but I tried to be there for him. His uncle had quit drinking and smoking and started attending church about a year before. I said maybe that was what God was preparing him for. I had never seen him cry before, but with his face covered in tears, he said if that was God's way, he would never attend church again.

After many visits and long hours of talking he finally came back to his faith in God. Faith gets us all through those dark days even when we seem to turn our backs on God. Can you imagine the faith the disciples would need to have had when they saw Jesus walking on water?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father hold our hands as we walk through our daily lives that we may know the way. Amen*

Thought for the Day: With the faith of a mustard seed, you can move mountains.

Loretta H. Crider

Saturday, March 21

Mark 7: 1-23

If you give me the proper instructions, I can do just about anything. Got a recipe, I can bake a cake. Give me an address, and I can drive you there. Directions to an unassembled Ikea item, not a problem. Show me the rules and I will follow them. Most of us can function at this level in life to at least get by. In fact, most of us excel at clear direction, especially if accompanied by follow up and reward for success. Our world often operates under this model and we have been trained well by the educational institutions to do this work in our professional lives. When we find people who are able to excel outside of this model, we praise them and reward them with accolades. They often are revolutionary entrepreneurs or world class artistic minds; they accomplish what most of us are unable to do.

In this Mark text, Jesus encourages us to step outside the confines of structure and order, not into a world of chaos, but a world of grace. Allowing Christ to be central in our lives and not being confined to a set of rules and regulations that will keep us in relationship with God, but instead starting our journey in relationship and allow that to focus all that we do. This is the work and order that the church is called to and it is counter-intuitive to much that we learn outside of the church. We are asked to not see ourselves as the center of all, but instead to look first to Christ and allow that relationship to be the touchstone of everything else. Christ takes Jewish rules and simplifies them while still making them more challenging. He takes all the regulations and boils them down to loving God and loving neighbor. He expands neighbor to an uncomfortable distance for many of us, but at the core, is a simplicity that we all need if we are to live into the fullness of the Christian life.

In this particular passage, Jesus also reminds us that what goes into our bodies is not nearly as important as what comes out. Reading the Bible is great, living it out is better. Going to church is a wonderful practice, living each day in that same way is harder and more necessary. Mission trips in our neighborhood every day are a better practice than a once in a lifetime trip to Guatemala (or wherever). Jesus wants people who act like disciples, not ones who know all the right things to do. We are not called to follow instructions, but instead to follow Jesus.

The church needs to work hard at this lesson because the world does not. We need to look to the creative people in our midst and follow their example. We need to look to the saints who embody a relationship with Christ first and foremost, allowing their practice to reflect their walk with Jesus. This is hard and ongoing work; Lent is a great time to recall this and work diligently at improving.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Sunday, March 22

John 6:27-40

As we move forward in this season of Lent, in joyful anticipation of Palm Sunday and then Easter (just three weeks away), let us also remember to simply stop what we are doing once in a while. Stop everything that may be going on, and take a moment to reflect...reflect back on things that we have done that made us who we are, things wish we hadn't done. What was learned? What would you do differently?

As I read John 6:27-40, the words made me reflect on my time with BSF and the children in my classes. They are all adults now. There is a box, in pencil, around verse 35 in my Bible with an asterisk. I still remember it. That was a great lesson for the children AND the leaders in our group who were blessed to share it with them. Jesus said *"I am the bread of life."*

In our present society, those words are needed more than ever. In the coming months we are all bound to hear, ad nauseam, the phrase "are you better off now, than you were four years ago?" Instead of tuning out...reflect on it. Answer the question.

In my case, I found comfort in verse 27, in which the Lord said "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." As some members of our congregation before me have done, my five years "working" as a member of the Weekday Religious Education Board of Directors is nearing the end.

What a wonderful blessing it has been. I am better off than I was five years ago. The school children are hungry for His "bread." The teacher's testimonials prove it. But all that is now uncertain due to the school system's proposed schedule realignment. Pray for the children, for WRE, and for the school leaders to make the wise decisions needed to allow the program to continue.

John Liskey, Jr.

Monday, March 23

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

Recently I have been visiting homebound members of Otterbein and taking Communion to them. I have done such visits for over 30 years, but not in at least 10 years until now. For those who can still comprehend what the cup and small piece of bread mean, there is always an immediate response of joy. It lifts me up to see such smiles and enthusiasm when I serve them communion. It makes me wonder if I still feel the thrill when I receive the bread and cup on communion days. Or if it has become a ritual that I am so used to that there is little emotional response.

For those I visit who do not recognize the communion plate and cup, I come prepared to share with them in another way. Usually they have been members of this church for many years. In that case, all I must do is tell them their church remembers them and asked me to say hello for them. This always brings as great a response as they are capable

of. In a way, you are the bread and the cup for them. You are the presence of Christ for them.

So, as we work our way through this season of Lent, perhaps we should ask ourselves “How can I be the presence of Jesus Christ for someone else?”

Rev. Larry Clark

Tuesday, March 24

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Paul’s writing to the church in Corinth is done with great love, but you also get the feeling that he, at times, can be frustrated with how the church is behaving. The practice of communion is seemingly turning into a glorified meal, not at all how Paul taught them. People are eating before the entire group arrives for worship and some of them are getting drunk on the wine. Their unity is slipping and Paul chastises them for this. In the ensuing instructions, Paul gives us the words of institution that reminds us that our unity at the meal comes not from our presence, but from the presence of Christ. These words and instructions are invoked every time we gather around the table.

Most of Paul’s instructions in this text seem antiquated to us. No one gets drunk on the sip of grape juice we share on a Sunday morning, nor is anyone arriving at different times and eating all of the communion elements. Paul’s words about unity, though, are instructional when we look at some of the things that keep us apart in the life of the church. We have managed to find ways to disagree about almost everything. We often ignore the central tenets of our faith that unite us (Apostle’s Creed, Articles of Religion) and instead nit-pick on the minutia of church polity and theology to find ways to explode the cracks in our foundational understandings of church. We reflect the dissonance of society more than we reflect the harmony of the gospel. We need to learn to disagree in grace and keep working at the same goal: transforming the world through the efforts of making disciples. This becomes our true work, work that is modeled by Paul and Jesus and made available to us through the sacrament of Holy Communion. The next time you hear these words for Corinthians, think not of the familiar routine but of the challenge of Christian unity.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Wednesday, March 25

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gift of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Every member of the body of Christ has been given some spiritual gift or talent. We aren't all given the same gift but when all of these gifts are put together, they help build up our church and community. This can certainly be seen here at Otterbein. Some are teachers, some are planners, some are cooks, some visit and bring comfort, some see to the needs of the community, and so on. Instead of our members using their talents for their own selfish gain, they are more than willing to share with all of us. That is why everything here runs so smoothly and we are an example to other congregations.

That is the same thing God did for us when he brought his son to earth. Jesus came to teach us to be faithful followers and how to use our gifts. He was then crucified so that all of our sins could be forgiven. What a wonderful gift from God and he didn't stop there. He then gave us the Holy Spirit. According to this scripture, it is the Holy Spirit that determines which gift we should have. We just need to put them to use.

During this Lenten period, may we do a self examination of ourselves and our talents. Are they being utilized as they were intended? Maybe we need to rely on others to help us see our true purpose. Even so, we are all working toward the same goal. God doesn't give us these things just for our own benefit. I feel that we're blessed to be a blessing.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, during this season of lent, may we be more receptive to your requests of us and be willing to go out into the world and share our gifts and talents with others. Amen.*

Kathy Billhimer

Thursday, March 26

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

I Corinthians 12:12-14

When I was a teenager in the Northwest Texas Conference, every summer a group of 80 to 100 youth would gather to form a choir called Spirit Wind. We would meet for 2 to 3 days at a camp or on a college campus and rehearse intensely to prepare to go on a tour of churches in the Conference. I remember thinking every year that there was no way we would learn all of that music. Then, we would come to the first concert - a bunch of tired, sometimes grumpy, probably smelly teens (we had to wear our Teen Spirit perfume!), full of hairspray (it was the 1980's) and hormones. We would change into our red polo shirts and our khaki pants and file onto the stage, and the Spirit would be there before us - we would remember most of the words and most of the notes, and everyone who came loved it! It was a beautiful and exhausting journey - singing in tiny churches where we outnumbered the congregation who came and singing in beautiful large churches with pipe organs and comfy pews where we would take a nap in the afternoon before we sang.

We ended each concert with the song *Many Gifts, One Spirit*, arranged by Allen Pote. By the end of the 2 week tour, many of us would be in tears when we came to this song as we circled the church holding hands and raising our voices - knowing (in our teenage way) that the Spirit had unified us and soon we would be going our separate ways again. The power of that song has stuck with me, and I am still moved to tears when I hear it.

So, let us continue to pray together - "Oh God we pray for unity, give guidance from above. In our differences unite us, in the circle of your love."

Many Gifts, One Spirit

Music and lyrics by Allen Pote

Many gifts, one spirit, many songs, one voice
Many reasons, one promise, many questions, one choice.
O, God, we pray for unity, give guidance from above.
In our differences unite us in the circle of your love.
O, God, remind us we are not alone.
Though we move on different pathways, we are walking to your throne.
Help us learn to love each other, show us ways to understand.
We are members of one family, growing strong by joining hands.
O, God, remind us we are not alone.
Though we move on different pathways, we are walking to your throne.
Take our many ways of working, blend the colors of each soul
into the beauty of a rainbow.
Give us life, Lord, make us whole.

Christy Blagg

Friday, March 27

Exodus 2:1-22

In the second chapter of Exodus, we find God's hand at work in the history of Israel, preserving the life of the child who will become Israel's deliverer. There are three incidents in Moses' life detailed in Exodus 2: his birth and rescue from a basket by the daughter of Pharaoh, his attempt to deliver some of his Hebrew brothers from the oppression of an Egyptian slave master, and his assistance to the daughters of Reul at the well in Midian, which led to his sojourn "in a foreign land" and marriage to Zipporah.

The second chapter of Exodus begins with the familiar story of the birth of Moses. In the previous chapter we have learned the decree of Pharaoh that all Hebrew baby boys are to be thrown into the Nile River to die. The heartache and grief of mothers and fathers every time they came near the river is unfathomable. The Nile, a source of life, now was a watery graveyard for their sons. Throughout their pregnancies women had to wonder whether they would have a girl who could live or a boy who faced an immediate death sentence. Moses' mother, Jochabed, hid her son for three months and then placed him in a basket where no one would ever think to look for him. She put him in the very river that was to be his grave. Pharaoh's daughter found him floating in the basket and had compassion. We learn Moses' sister approached Pharaoh's daughter to see if she would like her to find a Hebrew nurse for the child. In God's providence, Pharaoh's daughter finds the baby, and then hires Moses' own mother to take care of him!

The grace of God is often worked out in the lives of people through the providence of God. God's providence is His work that is often unseen or undetected by men at the time of its happening. God's providence is God's purposes being worked out in ways that we would never have expected and through people who we would not have chosen to use. The providence of God is that unseen work of God which moves men and history toward the goal which God has foreordained and which He has purposed and promised. Pharaoh's daughter, who was probably the most unwanted finder of the basket, turned out to be the one who could most effectively be used by God to further His purposes for Moses and for Israel. Moses' slaying of the Egyptian, his flight to Midian, his encounter at the well, and his marriage to Zipporah were all part of God's providential actions.

Every detail in your life, every incident, even every failure, is used by God to providentially further His purposes. We need to believe in God and trust in His grace, knowing that in every aspect of our life He is working together to fulfill His perfect plan, just like he did in Moses' life.

During this season of Lent, may we grow in faith as we trust God in every situation. God's providence leads us to Jesus, and Jesus back to the cross.

Sandy Schaefer

Saturday, March 28

Mark 9:14-29

Jesus came to us as a boy born not among kings, but through those who were thought not to be desirable. He came through Joseph and Mary and God sent Jesus through them not because of pity, but because of the faith they had in Him. Jesus continues to show us every day what the power of prayer can accomplish. This young boy was under a spirit that regular casting could not extinguish. It takes faith the size of a mustard seed for God to answer a prayer, but also, with faith, your heart has to also believe in him. That is the small place where we become distracted. We are not 100% in connection with God. We lack the ability to trust in him and we lack faith. Jesus proclaimed to the father of this young boy, prayed, and asked Jesus to help him overcome his disbelief. Once that happened, only then would God reveal His power unto us.

Over the summer of 2019 when my mother passed away, I knew she did not have life insurance and my thought process was, “how will we bury her properly with no money?” I began to pray and ask for guidance. It wasn’t until the third day after her passing that God began to show His true power and I never gave up, nor did I allow my faith to fall by the wayside. In this life, faith and prayer are our strongholds, our weapons in a great battle. We cannot fight this by ourselves because the battle isn’t truly ours alone, it belongs to Him. Faith and prayer is a common thing people say, “We (or I) will be praying for you.” The true power behind that statement is more important than anyone may realize at that moment. God shows us that if we believe in Him and the power of prayer, then once we walk by faith and not by sight, blessing will overflow again and again. Just like my mother, we buried her properly, and just like this young boy, the corrupted spirit that overtook him from birth was no more, all due to a single grain of faith and the power of prayer. When the time comes for you to pray, ask yourself, “What will I do with Jesus?” When He reaches down His hand and starts to test your faith, how will you receive Him? God said “*whoever shall believe in me shall dwell with me forever.*”

Ricky Goodwyn, Jr.

Sunday, March 29

John 8:46-59

A sense of belonging is something that has been engrained into us from the beginning. As young women who have grown up in the time of teen movies about cliques and sticking to the status quo, fitting in has been something that we’ve wanted more than anything.

Many times this can lead to assumptions about others that aren’t accurate and can cause more divides than we need. In order to feel a sense of self-belonging, we often look to what sets others apart from us in a convoluted view to eventually make ourselves feel more comfortable. From these words, we garnered that there is always something that can connect us and through our misunderstandings we can become a stronger group of people connected for a greater good.

Leah Finn and Camila Maric

Monday, March 30

Mark 9:30-41

In this passage, Jesus is taking his followers through Galilee, but he doesn't want other people to know. He desires to use this time teaching his disciples. Could it be that he knows that they still don't understand his ministry and what he expects them to do? He talks about being handed over to the authorities and being condemned to death, but three days after being killed, he will rise! Can you imagine the questions racing through their minds?

But do they ask those questions?

"What do you mean, Jesus?"

"If you are God's only son, why would this happen to you? Wouldn't God stop this?"

"What will happen to us?"

Insert your own question here.

Instead of questions or comments to Jesus as they follow him, they discuss and argue among themselves who is the greatest. Hmmm...And here we are, still trying to figure out and understand what it means to follow Jesus.

Then Jesus gathers his disciples and sits down with them. *"Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all."* (Mark 9:35)

At this point, Jesus brings a small child into the center, embraces the child and says, *"Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."* (Mark 9:37)

Once again, Jesus turns the structure of culture, religion, and the world on its head! The small child has NO rights, NO expectation of being first of anything. And yet, Jesus tells his disciples and us that this is who we are to be and to serve.

Prayer: *Gracious God, help us to focus on serving as Jesus taught his disciples, with humility and love. Help us to acknowledge our confusion when we get caught in the status claimed by the world around us. Bring us back to your kingdom of mercy and grace. Amen.*

Pat Wingert

Tuesday, March 31

Exodus 5:1-6:1

The Lord said to Pharaoh through Moses, *"let my people go, for they must make a holy pilgrimage out into the wilderness for a religious feast, to worship me there."* Pharaoh did not believe him...he said, *"I don't know this Jehovah and I will not let Israel go."* After much discourse, Pharaoh told the Israelites they would not be given any more straw and they must make as many bricks as they did before! Then they were beaten and Pharaoh demanded, "where are your bricks?"

The Israelites then begged of Pharaoh not to demand as many bricks. Pharaoh said all the Israelites must learn the lesson of not going with their Jehovah on a pilgrimage, but must deliver the bricks.

The Israelites then told Aaron and Moses that God had caused them to be abhorred before the eyes of Pharaoh and that some of the Israelites were killed. Moses went back to the Lord and told him the Israelites had been brutally treated by Pharaoh and they hadn't been delivered. The Lord told Moses to wait and see what he would do to Pharaoh. The Lord said that Pharaoh would not only let them go but would drive them out of his land.

Pharaoh thought of himself as a god and didn't think he should do what Moses and Aaron said. Moses, as God's spokesperson, had to prove to Pharaoh how very wrong he was. I feel that we should listen and do what the Lord says to us and not do what we think is the perfect thing. He whispers in our ears all the time. If you listen, he will tell you what to do.

Joyce Shank Jellum

Wednesday, April 1

Exodus 7:8-24

God had a pretty good plan in mind in Exodus 7. God would command Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. However, since Moses was not a good speaker, Aaron would relay that information to Pharaoh. However, God chose to harden Pharaoh's heart and make him stubborn so that Pharaoh would not let God's people leave. As a result of this, God would send plagues to Egypt, such as turning the water into blood. Through these plagues, God would not only punish Egypt, but he would reveal to the people there that He was the true God. He would also lead His chosen people out of Egypt through the process.

I have often wondered throughout my faith why God doesn't do supernatural events, such as the plagues, more often in order to show the world that He really is God. It wouldn't be hard for Him at all to turn the Nile River back into blood tomorrow. If He did this, it could very well have the same effect on people today as it did then. Those who have rejected God might change their minds on whether or not they believe in an omnipotent Creator. So why wouldn't God do this?

One of my favorite Christmas movies is *The Santa Clause*. There is a scene in this movie where a man who has just become Santa Claus is talking with an elf at the North Pole. He is struggling to deal with everything that is going on around him and is convinced that he is in a dream. Even though he is seeing the North Pole around him, he still doesn't believe in it. The elf responds, "Seeing isn't believing, believing is seeing." If God revealed his supernatural power to us today in the form of changing all of our water into blood and changing our walking sticks into snakes like he did in Egypt, would we be really be believing in Him? No, we would be seeing Him. That is why I do not think God performs miracles like this today. If He did, people wouldn't be believing in Him. They would just be seeing His work on earth and accepting that He has to be real.

Lent is the perfect time to evaluate if you are truly a believer or if you are like one of the Egyptians who rebuked God until they saw Him work. If you are like one of the Egyptians, challenge yourself to strengthen your faith and become a Christian who believes in God's omnipotence without any doubt.

Jonathan Williams

Thursday, April 2

Exodus 7:25-8:19

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Mark 10:17-31

Linda Conrad approached me and said, "pick one." So, I picked one believing it was the "one" God wanted me to have. So...I read all three (several times). They were all important, for me, in understanding the message. I also believe that each person who reads them will have their own interpretation and will find the key point that stands out for them.

As I read Exodus, I had a hard time understanding the God that I know sending frogs and lice to fill the land. As I read Mark, I remember learning the Ten Commandments as a child, they were clear. In Mark, Jesus repeats them; however, he goes farther as the disciples ask who can be saved: "*without God it is utterly impossible. But with God everything is possible*" (verse 27).

So...what I get from reading all three is how important our personal relationship with God is and how we are blessed knowing that He is with us on every "impossible" journey we take in life. Accepting the Holy Spirit within makes all things "possible." It is the gift He left for each of us. We have His presence and support to witness His great love to every human being we come in contact with on a daily basis.

Prayer: *Most gracious heavenly father, thank you for being teacher, comforter, and leader. Amen.*

Anna Steele

Friday, April 3

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

The key phrases in this passage are "*we do not lose heart*" and "*let light shine out of darkness.*"

Even though Jesus was crucified and technically left his disciples to carry on without him, they did not lose heart. They continued to spread the love of God and Christ and Jesus' teachings, allowing their light to shine.

Even though Good Friday and Easter may feel like sad times, we should not lose heart. We should continue to serve our church, our community, our friends and family, and our God. Hopefully we do so with joy, letting our lights shine.

This Bible passage also reminds me of my favorite quote: “In the midst of winter, I finally learned there was in me an invincible summer.” - Albert Camus. Darkness can turn into hearts full of joy and light.

This quote came to me years ago after my father died and I was terribly depressed and finding it hard to go on. Despite my despair, I finally came through to the other side, knowing what my earthly father would have wanted me to do even though he was no longer physically with me. He wouldn't have wanted me to lose heart. The same is true with our heavenly Father.

So even in our times of sadness or despair, let this Lenten season remind us to not lose heart, to carry on with joy and light doing the work that God and our lives would have us do.

Carole Barber

Saturday, April 4

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Do Not Sacrifice the Permanent on the Altar of the Immediate

...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

All our risks, humiliations and trials are opportunities for Christ to demonstrate his power and presence in and through us.

Problems and human limitations have several benefits:

- (1) they remind us of Christ's suffering for us;
- (2) they keep us from pride;
- (3) they cause us to look beyond this brief life;
- (4) they prove our faith to others; and
- (5) they give God the opportunity to demonstrate his power.

Why not see our troubles as opportunities? We know there is life after death. Knowing that we will live forever with God can help us live above the pain that we face in this life.

Let us live our lives by following Paul and Jesus, who were preaching out of concern for eternity. The Bible tells us to identify false preachers by finding out what really

motivates them. If they are more concerned about themselves than about Christ, avoid them and their message. We need to look around and free ourselves from false preachers and from those who say they are on our side but who choose to deceive us to increase their own power.

Mary Ely Griffith

Sunday, April 5

Zechariah 9:9-12

The Coming King

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*
Zechariah 9:9

Too often, even in today’s cultural or socioeconomic world (insert first-world problem here), our personal journeys are comingled with some degree of despair, where we cannot help but sometimes feel discouraged, fearful, or in opposition to portions of the world or personalities around us. It is in those moments that spiritual apathy can find traction. This attitude and reaction to life is timeless and does not discriminate, for it can find us all, and test even the strongest faith and moral character as it did in Zechariah’s day. It is, however, within Zechariah’s prophesy that we can dissolve all despair, and in knowing that God’s word endures and he fulfills his promises.

Zechariah was one of three post-exiled prophets who ministered to a small enclave of Jews, who had returned to Judah to rebuild the temple and their nation. Zechariah told of the Messiah, the One whom God would send to rescue his people and to reign over all the earth. Zechariah declared a profound message of hope – that their King was coming! Let’s take a closer look at the scripture reading and advance to the past for a moment. Zechariah had his work cut out for him, which is a gross understatement. First, I could not imagine the spiritual conviction he possessed, in a time where Christ had not yet walked the earth, to have such a strong faith and believe that God alone was his hope and security. And, while it is easy to give Zechariah the credit as it is written, it was the spiritual presence of God that enabled Zechariah’s surrender and willingness to do the work that was required. Secondly, while we cannot transcend time to understand in full context what it meant to be a Jew returning from captivity (of 70 years) in Babylon (modern day Babil Province, Iraq), it stands to reason that the climate during that time (~480 B.C.) was primed for discouragement. Zechariah’s message of prophesy and hope encouraged a community of Jews who, arguably by today’s measure, were justified in their despair.

It is awakening to imagine and then consider in awe, as we have the luxury of hindsight, to know that God’s promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ some 500 years after Zechariah’s day. Just as the prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth, so the

prophecies of His second coming will most assuredly come true. We are to be ready for his return, for He is coming! When He arrives, all nations will be subject to Christ, where His rule will encompass the entire world. At that time, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

We can be safe and secure if we trust and have faith in Him. Let us honor the season of lent with great joy in our hearts in knowing that Christ will come again! Let us make way for the King!

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, we confess it is too easy to be content with delighting in our own wisdom instead of embracing a loving adaptation to an ever-changing world that demands more of us. Please guard our hearts from spiritual apathy and keep our focus reverent, humble, and fixed on You. Amen.*

Kevin Andrade Sr.
(reference: Life Application Study Bible NKJV)

Monday, April 6

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

*For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ,
so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed,
it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort,
which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.*

2 Corinthians 1:5-6

I often say that I live a blessed life. God has placed good people and things in my life: caring, loving Christian parents; understanding, Christian husband for 47 years; fulfilling jobs; open communication in family relationships; supportive church family. There have been few real challenges and disasters in my life.

When I was on staff at Otterbein, I helped with the publicity and logistics of the Divorce Recovery Workshop. But I could not participate in the actual sessions because I had a good marriage and did not understand the pain and stress of divorce. So I decided to start sending “anniversary” cards. I hoped that in some small way these cards would remind couples of the good things they could celebrate about their marriage.

With the passing of my husband Steve, I found myself in the new category of “widow.” God continues to be with me and keeps blessing my life. Using my experiences, I have been able to talk with and hopefully help some other women who now find themselves in their unwanted category of widow. First I let them know that God has His loving arms around them. Next there is no set way to grieve. Everyone has to experience grief in their own time and way. When the logistics of finances, insurance, etc. seem overwhelming, I remind them to take time and breathe. Then do something “fun.” Providing a listening ear can be most important.

Each of us have had experiences where God has given us comfort: death of parents, spouse, child, or friend; surviving serious illness or accident; divorce; loss of job; moving away from family and friends; raising grandchildren; dealing with aging parents; or other life challenges. So we are now uniquely equipped to comfort other people because we have suffered and then have been comforted by God and other people.

Prayer: *Dear Father, Help me to find the ways in which I am uniquely blessed to comfort other people, because you have first comforted me. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Linda Conrad

Tuesday, April 7

Lamentations 1:17-22

2 Corinthians 1:8-22

In Lamentations 1:17-22, a spectator and victim speaks of famine and suffering in the destroyed city of Jerusalem. It is clear the suffering is the consequence for sin. The unnamed victim in Lamentations confesses failure at following God's word by speaking of "rebellious" behavior and many "transgressions." Reading Lamentations 1:17-22 in context with other chapters and verses, God's fury is blamed for the destruction; but at the same time, the victim recognizes the need for repenting and holds on to the promise of forgiveness if they follow God's word.

2 Corinthians 1:8-22 paints a different picture, one of a gracious and merciful God. In Paul's letter, he speaks of God rescuing his people from the "affliction in Asia" and his thankfulness for God's grace. Paul speaks of following God's word in 2 Corinthians 1:12, of having "*behaved in the world with frankness and Godly sincerity*" rather than of "*earthly wisdom*." To Paul, being "rescued" is a gift from the gracious God for following His word.

As I studied Lamentations 1:17-22 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-12 before writing this devotional, I struggled to reconcile an angry God with a gracious and merciful God. Because I try to live my life following God's word, I never focus much on the other path we can take, one of rebellion. The sermon in church on February 9, "Salt and Light," brought me clarity on the relationship between Lamentations and 2 Corinthians. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells his people they are the "salt of the earth." Salt that loses its taste "*is thrown out and trampled underfoot*." Lamentations 1:17-22 speaks of salt that lost its taste, thrown out and trampled underfoot. As in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, the result of letting "*your light shine*," seeing "*your good works*," and giving "*glory to your Father in Heaven*," following God's word is a much better path to follow.

Tammy Duxbury

Wednesday, April 8

Lamentations 2:1-9, 14-17

Mark 12:1-11

Old Testament passages tell how God dealt with Israel's disobedient ways: "*He brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonor*" Lamentations 2:2. Also, in Lamentations 2:14-17 we're told God's prophets were ignored, ridiculed and sometimes killed.

Jesus often spoke in parables, to explain Old Testament scriptures.

In the Parable of the Tenants, Mark 12:1-11, Jesus tells how God will deal with those who reject him and his teachings. As was custom in that time, wealthy people bought land and rented to others, expecting a portion of the crop to be returned as payment. The parable tells how the landowner, thoughtfully, prepared the land to be used as a vineyard; as in the Old Testament, God gave Israel all the tools needed for a fruitful, happy service.

When harvest time came, multiple times the landowner sent servants to collect his rent; all were beaten or murdered, just as the prophets in the Old Testament were treated. As a last resort he sends his son, who he thinks will surely be respected, only to see him ridiculed, tortured, and murdered. Of course, this references God sending Jesus, his son, who was rejected and hanged on a cross.

In this season of Lent, we will be reminded and saddened to know God watched his son be humiliated, tortured, and killed. As Christians, may we show our respect and love of God and his sacrifice by being the person he calls us to be.

Vicki Gaines

Thursday, April 9

1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

Maundy Thursday

Maundy comes from the Latin word for mandate or command and, in the context of our faith, comes from the "new" command Jesus gives to the followers of his Way as he washes their feet at the last supper. (See John 13, especially verses 34 and 35.)

On Maundy Thursday of Holy Week (the week leading into the celebration of Easter), followers of the Way of Jesus gather to remember and celebrate the supper Jesus hosted with his disciples prior to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the church in 1 Corinthians 10 about the celebration of Holy Communion, writes: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?* (10:16). In ways that are wondrous and mysterious, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross for our sakes, our sins and the power they can wield in our lives are destroyed. Such things no longer have any power to determine who we are and, more importantly, whose we are. Jesus' shed blood and broken body for us sets us free to be the very people God in Jesus Christ intends for us to be.

We had celebrated Communion in the church we served and a youngster jovially greeted me at the door of the church with a smile and said, “Wasn’t that just a great meal we had all together?” Joyous and thankful...he got it right.

Rev. Jim Wingert

Friday, April 10

John 13:36-38

*Simon Peter said, “Master, where are you going?”
And Jesus replied, “You can’t go with me now; but you will follow me later.”
John 13:36*

Jesus knew on the evening of Passover day that it would be his last night on earth before returning to his father. Jesus had been teaching them every day to love everyone and to treat people as they witnessed Him doing, as they would be teaching and performing miracles and carrying on His mission after He was gone.

Jesus came to earth as a baby. As He grew, He knew what his mission was. He experienced life as we have from a baby to an adult. He, I’m sure, experienced much love from His parents, his siblings, and his friends, but he, too, experienced ridicule, rejection, temptation, denial, and ultimately, unimaginable suffering. He took all of our sins, as He never sinned, and died for each of us if we give our life to Him as Lord and Savior of our life.

Simon Peter asked, “*Master, where are you going?*” Our question to think of is where are we going? Jesus left to go prepare a place for us so where He is, we will be also. Try to imagine forever – no suffering, no blindness, no pain, no fighting, no killing, no death. This, dear friends, is the most important decision you will ever make.

Ann Dellinger

Saturday, April 11

Hebrews 4:1-16

The disciples of Christ must have felt a huge weight of sadness and despair the day after Christ was crucified. He had been savagely killed as a criminal. The religious leaders and the main body of Jews had failed to recognize Christ as their Savior. They only wanted to have him out of their hair so they could go back to normal church and life behavior.

Scary things had happened that frightened even the disciples. The huge curtain between the holy place and the most holy place in the temple had been ripped from top to bottom the night of Christ's crucifixion. There was an earthquake and rocks were split. Some tombs had opened up and the people in them came alive and walked around. It was a time of great confusion and fear for everyone. No one knew what would happen next.

Hebrews 4:1-16 talks of the believer entering a place of rest, a Sabbath rest. It is a rest prepared for those who have ceased their efforts to work to save themselves and now

rest in the saving work of Christ on the cross. No doubt, the disciples' eyes were opened and they were able to see what God had done for them through Jesus' death on the cross. They were able to enter into a place of rest, because of God's mercy and grace.

May each of us turn our eyes from fear and anxiety for ourselves and the world around us to accept the Lord's rest, the rest that followed the resurrection.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the rest you offer us when we believe that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected to eternal life. We claim His rest and His life for our own. Amen*

Judith B. Espinoza

Sunday, April 12

Exodus 12:1-14

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

"This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance."

Exodus 12:14

What a glorious day! What a magnificent reality we celebrate! Death has been overcome in Jesus! Christ has conquered the grave! Jesus is Alive!

We are an Easter people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God! The Scripture for today doesn't seem like a good fit for our Easter celebration, unless we pause to remember the larger story of God's provision for His people while they were still in the land of Egypt. On the first Passover, the Lord instructed the people of God to slaughter a lamb without blemish and put some of the blood on the doorposts of the houses where they would be eating. The blood was to be a sign for God to pass over His people and protect them from the plagues that would come to the land of Egypt. The blood of the lamb on their doorposts was their guarantee that they would be saved from death and destruction.

Jesus is called the Lamb of God because he was and is the once and for all sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. John 1:29 reminds us of John the Baptists' proclamation, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"* Our celebration today is possible only because of Jesus' death on the cross and the power of God that raised Him from the dead. Easter reminds us that the same power of God that raised Jesus from the grave is available to us! This is our hope and our song. This is the firm foundation on which we stand. The resurrected Christ means that we are forgiven and can be set free from the chains that bind us to live victorious and redeemed lives.

Death has lost its sting. We have the hope and the promise of eternal life. We are free to live passionate and purposeful lives for the glory of God. On this Easter day, may you give yourself fully to the resurrected Christ and may you hold firm to the hope that is within you. Jesus IS Alive!

Pastor Faith Fowler