



Questions of Life

2011 Lenten Devotional

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LANCASTER PA

An Invitation

Years ago I read a book by Robert Raines entitled, *Living the Questions*. Raines assumed that what was important in the Christian journey was not the answers we received, but the questions we asked and how we lived our lives leaning into those questions. So I am always surprised when someone comes to me and says, “*I know I shouldn't have questions, but....*” Questions are the way we learn. Seeking answers to life's questions is the way we grow.

This Lent, in worship services held in the Sanctuary, we are focusing on the *Questions Lent Asks*. We also invited members of our congregation to share the questions they have asked and the answers they have found. This devotional booklet is the result of those questions.

We encourage you to spend time each day leaning into the questions raised by your fellow faith travelers here at First Presbyterian Church. May your own Lenten journey be filled with curiosity and questions, and may the joy we celebrate on Easter be an exclamation point instead of a question mark. I look forward to the journey with you as we keep the fast and prepare ourselves for Easter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Randy Reijo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

First Day of Lent

Ash Wednesday

March 9



S E R V I C E S

NOON - 12:40pm Sanctuary

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

6:00 - 7:30pm Shirk Hall

Simple vegetarian Agape Meal followed by the Sacrament of the Lord's
Supper. Optional distribution of Ashes *[This is a ticketed event - reservations
may be made by email [laura@fpclanc.org] or signing up in the Foyer on
Sunday, February 27, and March 6. Pay at the door - Cost: \$5/Adults, \$15/families]*

Mid-week Lenten Services

Wednesdays during Lent

March 16, 23, 30; April 6, 13

Noon - 12:30pm in the Sanctuary

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

Followed by a soup & Sandwich lunch in the foyer.

March 23 & April 13

6:30pm in the Chapel

Taize Services

[a service of prayer, music and meditation]

2nd Day of Lent 3/10

Rev. Randy Riggs, Senior Pastor

Question: Who is my neighbor? **Scripture:** Luke 10:25-37

The answer is different for each of the three people who passes by the injured man and does not help. Two out of the three could be any one of us. They are people who just don't want to get involved; people late for an appointment; or people who are fearful of the man lying in the road - that if he stopped to help he would be the one who would be robbed. Perhaps they are like many of us who when we see a need we feel helpless to address that need, so we just keep on moving.

Bruce Larson tells the story of what happens to us when we shut ourselves off from the needs of others. It is a man who was building a home in a place that was very difficult to get water. So his friend asked an old Vermonter to come over and divine the source of water on his property. Sure enough, the old timer found the spot. He said, "Just dig fourteen feet down and you will find an underground river. When you hit the water, you must pump it out every day."

Larson's friend followed the instructions and found the underground river. He pumped it out the first day, and more water came in. In the next few days the water rose to eight feet and then seemed to stop, so he left it. Some months later, when the house was finished, he immediately turned on the water. The first day there was enough, but by the third day the well was dry.

He called the man who had helped him find the water to see what he had done wrong. The man asked, "Did you pump it every day?" Larson's friend said no, he hadn't, and the Vermonter said, "You fool! An underground river is made up of thousands of little capillaries running underground. When you pump the water, you enlarge the capillaries and more water comes in. However, once you stop pumping, the water backs up, the capillaries close, and the river is formed somewhere else."

Prayer: Lord, you know I want to be more like you, but my energy runs low and I can find every excuse in the book not to do the things you call me to do. Fill me to overflowing that I may always respond to the need I see in someone else as the neighbor you have given me to serve. Amen.

Rev. Alicia Conklin-Wood, Parish Associate

3/11 3rd Day of Lent

Question: How can I be faithful with all the distractions around me?

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22-23

On my morning walk one day, there was a truly pesky, distracting horsefly. He wouldn't leave me alone, no matter how I batted him away. Distracting to say the least! Grrr.

Then a line from scripture caught my attention: *"The steadfast love of God never ceases. God's mercies are new every morning..."* (Lamentations 3:22-23). It hit me -- I needed to change my perspective. I began to see how this pesky horsefly was like so many things that distract me from what is truly important, from the Holy One, and from the work I've been called to do. I began to be grateful for the insight to reframe all the "bad" things that can haunt me as only "pesky distracting horseflies!"

Prayer: God help me to see your mercy and love in everything that happens each day, and not let "distractions" blur my vision.

4th Day of Lent 3/12

Dianne Wisotzkey

Question: Why doesn't God give me the perfect personality and resources to confidently handle the challenges in my life?

Scripture: Isaiah 64:8 - *"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."*

In my teens, I never would have predicted that I would one day count myself as blessed to be a homemaker with 5 children. When I think of the perfect person to do this job, I imagine someone with a much more patient disposition, many more creative ideas, and someone who can cook wonderfully nutritious and tasty meals that everyone loves. I have wondered sometimes, "God, are you sure you meant for me to be doing this, with all of the mistakes I make?"

A while ago, I copied into my gratitude journal part of a devotion by a woman who prayed for years that God would change a certain trait of hers, to no avail. She wrote, "Oh, how long it took me to figure out that you don't tell the potter what to do with the clay! He made me the way He wanted me, and it took me a long while to accept that. It took even longer to realize that Jesus is changing me to be more like Him. Some things He does not change. We all have the personality He created in us. We need to allow Him to shape and mold us as He chooses, and to give us gifts to accomplish the plans He has for us."

I can see how God is using my organizational skills, perseverance, and counseling training to benefit my family, even as I long to develop more fruits of the Spirit. My imperfections and mistakes keep me humble and seeking Him. My needs make me willing to reach out to others for help. God knows our strengths and weaknesses when He leads us down a path, so I believe we just have to do our best as an offering to Him and trust that our contributions are being used for good.

Prayer: Thank You for your promise that You, who began a good work in us, will be faithful to complete it. Help us to open ourselves to be used for your purposes today just as we are.

We Need A Place to Belong

Scripture: John 3:1-3 – *“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night...”*

Nicodemus is not the only person who needs to belong to Jesus. We all need a place to belong. We all need a place where we can drop our bags and feel relaxed. We need a safe place. We need a group of people who know our name and are glad to see us. We need a place where we are loved and not judged. A place where our needs are met and we are able to meet the needs of others in caring community. We need somewhere where we belong. The place I felt always welcomed was my Aunt Peg and Uncle Dick's house. They were my home away from home. As my dad's career in the military took us all over the world, we often stopped and stayed with Peg and Dick in Western Pennsylvania. Even as a young man and a middle-aged husband and father, we returned to their home. Why? We belonged.

Where have been safe places for you? In the house of your childhood? In your home now? At a friend's house or another relative? In the church? In a class or Bible Study? We need to be with people are on this faith journey with us. We need to walk through life with people who will keep us focused on what is important and help shape our lives.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, lead me to a safe place. Enter into my heart and mind. Convict and cleanse me of any thought and passions that are not from you. Help me find faith gatherings that will help me to keep seeking you in Jesus Christ.

6th Day of Lent 3/14

Judy Kruse

Question: What is worship?

Verse: *O for a thousand tongues to sing my dear redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of God's grace!* (Charles Wesley)

We watched from our perch in the choir loft as our four-year-old daughter joined the other “choir orphans” (children having both parents in the choir and who were too old for the church nursery but too young to sit by themselves). So there in the front row they were: little cherubs all lined up, clad in their very best Sunday attire and graciously shepherded by one of the matriarchs of the church. Each child sat quietly, simply looking around, or reading a book, or drawing a picture, just as sweet as you please. All except our Karla, who wriggled and giggled and squirmed and resisted every effort of her caregiver to encourage more worshipful behavior. When church mercifully ended, we quickly retrieved our errant daughter and, to our chagrin, were presented with a note which she had directed to her custodian: “Dear Mrs. Ingram, I wish a hole would open up in the floor and you would fall through it. Love, Karla.” Our embarrassed response was that Karla would write a sincere letter of apology and that we expected better behavior from her in the future.

The next week we cringed as Karla took her usual place and then began writing furiously. Although she didn't seem to be causing trouble, we could hardly wait until the end of the service to see what she had been up to. Imagine our amazement and joy when she proudly handed us her bulletin which she had filled with hundreds upon hundreds of singing faces and even proudly announced that her artwork represented the opening hymn: “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.” We never know what or how a service of worship will impact us, but I will be forever blessed by that hymn and that little girl (now with three even-more-wiggly babes of her own) and the message that spoke to her.

Prayer: Speak to us, Lord, even when we wiggle and seem not to pay attention.

Candee Buckbee

3/15 7th Day of Lent

Question: What is God's will?

Scripture: Matthew 6:10 – “...thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

I hear a lot of daily lamenting regarding God's will: what it is, where to find it, and how to be in it. We repeat Jesus' prayer weekly asking for God's “will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus also speaks in John's gospel about our “choosing to do God's will.” So when our world is chaotic and insufferable, is that God's will for us? Are we able to manage the chaos, and hope that life will improve, “God willing?” Or do we resign ourselves to fate?

I have found that it is easier for God to own the present and future, than for me to try and orchestrate it. I think God's will and our will meet when we are willing to listen and follow Him. We know we have free will, but WHO, really, is in charge? You do not belong to yourself. You are His. So if we let go, and attempt to stay close to Him, obey, have faith, and trust in Him, we will be in his will. We might slip out now and then, but He'll draw us back. And we might gain more peace.

In Elizabeth Elliot's words, “the will of God is never exactly what you expect it to be. It may seem to be much worse, but in the end it's going to be a lot better and a lot bigger.”

Prayer: God, do give us the desire and ability to find your will. Amen.

8th Day of Lent 3/16

Hester Long

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16

We were challenged with a parting blessing and benediction by Milan Opocensky, a Seminary professor in Prague, Czechoslovakia. We, a group of 40 Bi-national Servants (a program of the Presbyterian Church, USA) had spent the Holy Week with Milan. This was our Week of Work: to study what Christians faced under the Soviet regime. Milan challenged us, “as followers of Christ, a people of faith to bloom wherever we find ourselves – whether in the midst of adversity, war, conflict, fear, suffering, oppression, etc. Live fully, let your light shine for the world is full of darkness.” He said this 46 years ago. His message still rings loud and clear for us today.

To bloom requires faith and courage to be able to share nuggets of hope, support and comfort, healing prayers, new possibilities, paths, changes and growth, etc. I find this possible only through the “one who was crucified outside the city gates.” If we take our place “outside with Jesus...where the action is,” with the help of the Holy Spirit, I believe we can bloom, bear fruit, and shine, making a difference in our world today.

Prayer: God, grant us faith and courage. And may the amazing grace of Jesus Christ be with us today.

Rev. Randy Riggs, Senior Pastor

3/17 9th Day of Lent

Question: To whom does it all belong? **Read:** Luke 16:1-15

Before we can live generous lives, this is the very first question we have to answer: Who owns what we own? God has given most of us a very comfortable life. We have more than enough food and clothing. We live in comfortable homes. We have decent transportation. The poorest among us is richer than 95% of the world.

At First Presbyterian Church we take mission trips to third world countries. Over the course of our efforts we have learned that those trips are less about what we are able to do for the poorest of the poor we encounter. It is about what happens to us as a result of seeing how blessed we really are in this country. We have so many things which makes life easy here, but we live under the illusion that all we have belongs to us.

Randy Alcorn, author of The Treasure Principle, learned firsthand about losing and gaining possessions, and about heavenly priorities: *“Back when I was pastor of a large church, making a good salary and earning book royalties, the material possessions I valued most were my books. My money went toward many great books; thousands of them. Those books meant a lot to me. I loaned them out, but it troubled me when they weren’t returned or came back looking shabby.*

Then I started to sense God’s leading to hand over the books, all of them, to begin a church library. I started looking at the names of those who checked them out, sometimes dozens of names per book. I realized that by releasing the books, I had invested in others’ lives. Suddenly, the more worn the book, the more delighted I was. My perspective was totally changed. God was teaching me a key to understanding the treasure principle: God owns everything. I’m his money manager.”
(Source: Randy Alcorn, The Treasure Principle (Multnomah Publishers, 2001), p. 22-23)

The truth is that all we have belongs to God. We are only the managers of the bounty which God has bestowed on us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help me to appreciate all that you have given me. Teach me how to be a good manager of the bounty you have bestowed. Then teach me how I might share with others. Amen.

10th Day of Lent 3/18

Cathy Love

Scripture: Numbers 6:22-27 – *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*

In the final training session of the current class of Stephen Ministers, each of us received the book, A Year With God, a short meditation for each day. I have been inspired and impressed with my readings and unashamedly borrowed these ideas from it.

The Israelites received the Ten Commandments from Moses with God's promise that they would be blessed "if only they will obey." Fast-forward to Jesus' day and Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' " (Matt. 22:37-39).

God doesn't ask the impossible of us, but we stumble. When life goes well, we begin to feel a bit self-sufficient, pretty much in charge of our busy lives. It's nice to know that only Jesus was perfect.

Isn't it interesting to know God's wish is for us to be happy? When things get tough, we back up and remember, "His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me." We call out to God, we bless his name and pray for forgiveness. We rely on his promise, "...He forgives my iniquities" (Psalm 103).

"There is no place where God is not, wherever I go, there God is. Now and always he upholds me with his power and keeps me safe in his love." (Anonymous)

Prayer: My dear, gracious God; I thank you for your many gifts. Help me remember I have time to study your word and to hold on to the "anchor" you hold out to me. Amen.

Anonymous

3/19 11th Day of Lent

Question: How can I receive what God might be saying to me?

God gave us clear commandments (Exodus). Jesus prescribed the blessed life in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) and gave us lessons on the faithful life in the parables. But does God have specific prescriptions, lessons and warnings for me? Should I hear voices? Or urgings without words?

It has taken a long time for me to stop asking and just listen. God hears me. The psalmist wrote *“I waited and waited and waited for God. As last he looked; finally he listened”* (40:1). Jesus told us that he would send the Holy Spirit to guide us. *“When the Friend I plan to send you from the Father comes – the Spirit of the Living Truth issuing from the Father – he will confirm everything about me”* (John 15:26). *“When the Spirit of the Truth comes he will take you by the hand and guide you with the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense of what it about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said”* (John 16:13-14).

It is said that the Holy Spirit is received, not grasped. That's it! I have to practice the discipline of intentional waiting. I cannot do it alone, under my will. I have to ask God to help me, when I am quiet enough, for long enough, to just listen without distracting thoughts. Focused, centered and alert contemplation.

Prayer: Give me the heart to hear your voice and will / That without fault or fear I may fulfill / your purpose with a glad and holy zest / like one who would not bring less than the best. (2nd verse of “Christ of the Upward Way”)

12th Day of Lent 3/20

Rev. Randy Riggs, Senior Pastor

Question: How Do I Set Priorities?

Read: Luke 20:20-26

Jesus recognizes that we have a choice in our responses to the events of our lives. We can either see things from the temporal, or we can choose to view things from the eternal. When the two are in competition with one another, the values of the eternal must be chosen first.

In our text for this day, the icon of Caesar is stamped on the denarius to show it belongs to Caesar. The icon of God is stamped on our lives to show that we belong to God. Our identity is that we belong to God, and the kingdom of God must always take priority in our lives.

Every time we baptize a child, we give that child a new last name, and we claim them for the values of the Kingdom rather than the values of the culture. In baptism, we call them by the last name of Christian, and that means that no matter what, the child will always have a choice about the values he chooses to follow. He can choose the values of our culture with its focus on material gain, and its focus on only things that we can see, touch, taste or smell. Or he can choose the values of the Kingdom and look at life from a different set of values.

I have always loved the words of a prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, the 16th century British naval officer who became an explorer:

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."

Prayer: In this world of competing allegiances, O God, help me to establish my priorities on the values of the Kingdom and not the values of our culture. Amen.

Ezetta Walter

3/21 13th Day of Lent

Question: Why Did God Create Seasons?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2a, 4 – *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...time to be born and a time to die; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.”*

If you consider the word “seasons” to mean the color on the leaves or the amount of snow on the ground, you might still ask God, “Why have seasons?” But the writer of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, clearly has spelled out for you a deeper question, “Why the seasons of life?” These verses deeply reflect the struggles, changes, and vicissitudes of life. Is it easy for us to accept God's plan that everything has its time? Do I really believe that every event that comes in its time has a purpose? During my mother's recent terminal illness and passing from this earth, I came face to face with needed embraces for this extraordinary woman, thanking God for her birth and my good fortune to have been her offspring, and then begging God to keep her here on earth for a few more days. Did I truly believe that God had a plan for my mom? Was I willing to defer to God's purpose in allowing her seven children those last three months to say good-bye? I stopped asking questions and thanked God for every blessing I had as her “angel”...her pet name, even if I often was not one!!

During our caring for her in those last days, God knows there was plenty of time to weep and there was plenty of time to laugh, too. My six brothers and sisters love to joke and poke fun at each other. Each in her own way does her best to out-giggle the other, but sister Jan has is known far and wide for hilarious laugh. Though many days in Mom's room were quite grim, there were also the Phillies games at night when Mom caught us sneaking out of her room as she slept away in her Phillies hat. She scolded us with her quick words, “Wait, the Phillies game isn't over yet!!!”

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This week I was brought to tears by the words of an Associate Pastor who begged us to remember our duty to raise baptized children of our congregation in the virtue of the Lord. As he reminded us of the horrible tragedy of the Tucson shootings by a crazed gunman, I wept to realize that no one had ever intervened to lead that 22-year-old to God, nor helped him to know he was loved as a child of God.

It is with mixed joy and sadness, that I quote to you the verse from Kahlil Gibran that has “kept me dancing” as I celebrate Mom’s life: *“We would ask now of death...only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, there you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly Dance.”*

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we ask you to help us understand that you have created the seasons in your own time. We know that whether this is a time to weep, to mourn, or even to say good-bye to this earth, we can truly dance as the leaves of your joy fall on our lives. We ask your blessing in the lives of each person who prays and reads this. Amen.

Dale Marx

3/22 14th Day of Lent

Question: How small should I pray?

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-6, & 13-16; Mark 4:30-33

You wonder sometimes, should I pray about the little things – does God care about the details? Recently some of our FPC Youth had conversations about how to decorate the new side room of the Youth Café. (The Youth Café, previously called the Tomb Room is on the lower level of the church). The talk went like this, “What color do you think we should paint this wall?” or “What about that wall?” This went on for what seemed like months! Until one day, while painting doors for Las Posadas, someone said, “This reddish paint is an amazing color!” So, we just started painting one of the walls... well, that started it all and eventually, we were down to one last wall, “What color should *it* be?” Again, another round of questions and ideas...

Nick was persistent, “It should be purple!” We looked through our stash of mismatched colors – no purple. My personal goal was to have it finished by Sunday. So, on Monday we tried the Habitat Re-Store (great place for random cans of paint) – they were closed. On Wednesday, I checked a couple stores – no purple! Now, it was Friday morning... As I was waking up, I thought, today is the day to paint that wall! God, I'm going to Lowes to get the paint...and, purple would be nice? Walking in and directly to the paint counter...there - just one can of mismatched paint, \$5!

Maybe God is all about the details?

Prayer: Jesus, may the details of my life be seeds for your great love.

15th Day of Lent 3/23

Rev. Marilyn Shinaman, Parish Associate

Question: What is eternal life? **Scripture:** John 14:1-3, Revelation 11:1

At a friend's Memorial Service, one of her relatives commented to me, "When you're dead, you're dead. That's it!" It took me by surprise as this person was a long time member of a Presbyterian Church. Although it wasn't possible to have a conversation with her then and there, I pondered how she could read and hear about the Good News of the Gospels and other passages in the New Testament and come to that conclusion. In the Gospel of John (14.3) it is recorded that Jesus said: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also." At his crucifixion when one of the criminals said to him: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," he replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23.42). The Author of The Letter to the Hebrews wrote: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11.1).

We cannot see beyond this life, beyond today or even this minute, yet our faith makes us certain of what we cannot see: that God is always with us and when our earthly life is completed, we will be ushered into the presence of God, there to dwell for eternity. The word translated in Hebrews 11.1 as assurance refers to a title deed. Having faith is like having a title deed to peace of mind about the future.

The Presbyterian Women are studying Revelation. The same words are recorded in 1.8, 21.6 & 22.12: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Earthly life, eternal life is having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Loving and gracious God, we believe, help our unbelief.

Anonymous

3/24 16th Day of Lent

Question: How can I put God's purposes for my life in sharper focus?

Scripture: Proverbs 11:28 - *“A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a God-shaped life is a flourishing tree.”*

Ephesians 1:11-12 - *“Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eyes on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”*

Recently I went back to Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life". We had studied the book and discussed it in small groups seven years ago. Much of it had faded from memory. Warren spells out God's five purposes for us: Worship – We were planned for God's pleasure. Fellowship – We were planned for God's family. Discipleship – We were created to become like Christ. Ministry – We were shaped to serve God. Evangelism – We were made for mission.

He lays out five ways to act on the five purposes: Center...our lives on God, not on ourselves. Connect...with other believers and experience real fellowship. Cultivate...spiritual maturity and God's character. Contribute...something back by discovering our mission. Communicate...God's love to others, sharing faith and participating in some kind of mission activity.

Warren begins his book with "It's not about you." He then gives us plenty of ways to think more clearly about just why we are here...and it is not to make life sweet just for us. It's a struggle to put my self-interest behind me and pursue God's true purposes for my life. I have to keep at it, every day.

Prayer: Lord, lead me to pursue your purposes, for (from our familiar Good Friday hymn): *“Were the whole realm of heaven mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.”*

17th Day of Lent 3/25

Alisa Bair

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6

My family and I were flying home from Wyoming, some 30,000 feet over the Rockies. Rob and our two daughters were playing cards on a tray table, unfazed by the slight turbulence. But I was white-knuckling it, plastered to my seat.

The trip, a gift from our parents, was intended to be a time of refreshment after the death of our youngest daughter. And it was, except for her profound absence which had stung sharply during every family photo.

As the plane skittered along the wind currents, I tried to focus on the stunning beauty of the snow-capped mountain ranges, but all I could think about was the plane hurtling into one of them. It made a sharp dip, and the real problem I had not let myself name before rushed to the surface: *Can I trust You with my physical safety?*

Kelly's death had put me in touch with a side of God I hadn't experienced before. I rifled through scriptures I knew, as if to prove I'd been misled all along: *If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you* (Ps. 91:9-10a). *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe* (Prov. 18:10). Were these, all along, only talking about the protection of our souls? Did God have no regard for our physical beings?

It was the same question we had to answer for Kelly during her illness. We had assured her again and again that God loved her deeply, that even if he were to take her from us, she would never be separated from him. She had had the childlike faith to accept it, and now God was challenging me to have the same.

Trust that had disclaimers wasn't trust at all.

Prayer: Holy God, help me to trust You with all my heart, and to lean not on my own understanding. I choose to acknowledge You in all my ways, not just some of them. Amen.

Sarah Sgro

3/26 18th Day of Lent

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5; Mark 9:38-40

On my walks to Central Market in downtown Lancaster, I often encounter Christians standing at the corner of King and Queen Street holding signs and shouting loud warnings that Jesus is coming back, and sinners had better beware or they will be thrown into Hell.

Recently, as I walked past this group, I happened to be on the phone with my husband. “Ugh, I *hate* these guys” I growled, “They make me so mad! They’re *never* going to get people to follow Jesus that way!” My husband’s response caught me off guard: “*I wonder what people thought of John the Baptist when he first preached? I imagine he probably spoke and acted a lot like those guys are acting right now.*”

I felt a pang of conviction wash over me. I was missing the point. The easy thing was to judge and dismiss these Christians. It was much harder to accept that God was presenting an opportunity to examine my own heart: *Since when do I get to decide who can and cannot proclaim the Kingdom of God, and how they should do it? When was the last time I spoke boldly and openly about Jesus to someone else? When was the last time I publicly shared what I believe, even if it was unpopular? Could I do what these folks are doing? Would I?*

This side of the Kingdom, I’m still not sure I will see eye-to-eye with the strategy of these Christians. But I do know that as I pass by them week after week, I need to: swallow my judgment, acknowledge them as my brothers and sisters in Christ, and pray that their ministry will cause people to come to know the great love of Jesus Christ and that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Because in the end, *that’s* the whole point, right?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to surrender the judgmental attitudes of my heart. Guide me toward pure motives today, and teach me to be at peace with my brothers and sisters in Christ, even when we disagree. Amen.

19th Day of Lent 3/27

Rev. Dick Foster, Parish Associate

Question: Why do Christians experience bad situations?

Scripture: Romans 8:28

If we believe in Jesus as our Savior and trust that He is guiding our life, why do we experience difficult situations – sickness, bad accidents, loss of jobs, etc.?

In my personal Bible studies I read Romans 8:28: *“and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”* Notice that it does not say all things are good. It does say that all things “work together” for good to them who love Him and who are called to do His purpose for their lives. Reading this verse caused me to think about some of the bad situations I have experienced. A Christian friend had a serious car accident. I was able to provide transportation until they got another car. I know what to do because I had a similar accident a year before.

A Christian church member was sick and didn't have enough money to buy the medicine the doctor told her she needed. I was able to pay her bill. In both cases I prayed with them and reassured them of God's presence through Jesus Christ.

Last year I celebrated my 80th birthday. I'm slowing down because of my age and know that someday I will die. Then I remember the Bible verse John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that who whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Therefore when I leave this life, I do not go out of existence. I go to live with Jesus at a better place forever. THAT'S THE BEST!

Prayer: I thank you Lord for your love for me and your continual presence with me through Jesus. I thank you that He gave his life on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins. I thank you for His gift of everlasting life through His resurrection. I want

Question: Who Am I? **Read:** Matthew 5:13-17

A colleague of mine remembers that every time he left home, his mother would give him this benediction: “*Always remember who you are!*” Jesus is pretty clear about who we are in our text for today. He says: YOU ARE. He didn't speak in the future tense—*you will be*. He didn't speak in the past tense—*you were*. He speaks in the present tense—*you are*. You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. At his baptism Jesus received his identity from God: “*You are my beloved son*” (Matthew 3, Luke 3). Jesus knew who he was, and his God given identity laid the foundation for his ministry. Now, at the beginning of his ministry, he returns from his sojourn in the desert where he has been tested by the devil, and he lays the foundation of identity and ministry for those who want to be his disciples with two words: *You are!*

Thomas Merton knew what it meant to have this kind of identity. He wrote fifteen lines that have become known as “The Merton Prayer”: *My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will 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 you will never leave me to face my perils alone.* [Source: Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), p. 79]

Our identity is given to us by Christ himself: YOU ARE!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the prayer of Thomas Merton is my prayer, too. Help me to find my identity in you. Amen.

21st Day of Lent 3/29

Gerry Hoffman

Question: How is our body the temple of the Holy Spirit?

As we ponder on this question, we are told that Jesus promised to never leave us alone or comfortless, so He sent the Holy Spirit as a Guide to help us in our everyday life. No matter what situation or problem occurs in the life of the believer, we can pray "Holy Spirit help me in this situation." Jesus will be right there to guide us as we follow His will.

As we contemplate and approach this Holy Season as we think of Him coming to Jerusalem and was hailed as King and little children waving palm branches in His honor, shouting "Hosanna, Hosanna" which means "save now." Let us take a moment in this devotional to remember the following titles for our Blessed Savior: *The Bread of Life* (John 6), *Living Water* (John 4), *Miracle Worker* (John 2), *Good Shepherd* (John 10), *Foot Washer* (John 13), *The King* (John 12), *The Lamb* (Isaiah 52), *The Resurrection and the Life* (John 11), *The Alpha and Omega* (Revelation 1), *Light of the World* (John 8).

As we recall our Lord's death on the cruel cross, we can rejoice as we share the hymns of Easter. There may be many others but I have listed the following titles: "Were You There?" - "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" - "The Strife is Over" - "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" - "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" - "In the Garden" - "Halleluiahs Chorus."

Let us, as His followers, show our gratitude to God for sending His Son Jesus to rescue us from our sins and gives us assurance of forgiveness. By breaking the chains of the tomb, this was a pledge of God that you and I as believers in Christ are going to live forever in Heaven. Every doubt concerning our own eternity or obstacle concerning our eternity is risen because Christ is risen. He is alive, we too shall live.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for the Holy Spirit. When we are troubled, look to God Himself, as David in Psalm 121:1-2: "*my help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*"

Come and See

Scripture: John 3:3-9 - *"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'"*

You, like Nicodemus, may be full of questions. What is God really like? Is Jesus really who he said he was? Can the Holy Spirit of God actually live in my life and do holy work in me? To this Jesus says, come and see. Come and taste and determine for yourself if it is good. Nicodemus must have continued to listen to Jesus and thought deeply about what he saw and heard. In John 7, the Sanhedrin was engaged in a hot discussion about how to get rid of Jesus, and it records this: ⁴⁶⁰*Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked,* ⁵¹*'Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?'* ⁵²*They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee'"*

Prayer: Jesus, I have lots of questions. Can I bring them to you? Show me how to see today as I go through my day. Let me see you at work in me and the people around me. I want to follow you more closely, even with my questions. Amen.

23rd Day of Lent

3/31

Judy Kruse

Taking out the trash

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

We all know the weekly drill: separate newspapers, glass, plastic, and metal and place them in the green bin to be toted to the sidewalk. The remainder, encased in trash can or trash bags, joins the lineup and they all disappear the next day. Such a familiar routine, and hardly worth a second's thought.

But as I was gathering our refuse to be offered up to the trash monster, I began to wonder why it is so easy to remove our household garbage and so very difficult to clean up the dumpster that resides in our souls. I've got gobs of trash: hurt, anger, resentment, prejudice, selfishness, arrogance, to list just a few. Why then do I cling to them when their stench is far worse than last week's fish wrapper? What reeks in my soul wreaks havoc in my soul. It needs to go!

So I came up with a plan: As I carried out the trash I offered up to God just one thing in my soul that was just as offensive as the used kitty litter contained in the bag. Take it Lord! I don't like it! I don't need it. I don't want it. Forgive me for clinging to that snub or that smack all these years. They're tainting my soul. Take them so I can replace them with something better. Recycle a painful memory into a clearer awareness of the needs of others. Turn resentment into insight, replace the chip on my shoulder with more kindness to others.

I will not live long enough to completely empty my soul of all the trash that resides there. Just one thing a week is about all I can manage but I am working at it.

Prayer:

Take my will and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne. (Frances Havergal)

4/1 24th Day of Lent

Rose Ellen Haggerty

Question: Why does our benevolent God allow negativity into our lives? Why do we suffer when Jesus died, so that we would not have to? **Scripture:** Joel: 2:1-2; 12-17

I liken my life to a kaleidoscope and an elevator. An elevator goes up and down, as does my life, and by the time I reach the end of my life, all of the good and all of the bad/hardship will actually come out evenly. The kaleidoscope is up to me, because just as one looks through the lens, the crystals appear in a certain manner, but with the most minute flick of the wrist, the crystals form a new pattern. One's attitude towards the events in one's life makes all of the difference. If we try to follow God's path each day, we will be fine. All we truly need is enough for each day, and He will meet that need. We must remember to give thanks. We are more fortunate than most, and for that we are truly blessed. It has to do with the kaleidoscope again, even when our elevator is down at the ground floor. It has to do with our perspective, our attitude, and the more time we spend with God, the less we complain, the more appreciative we are, until we realize we just need enough for right now, and God will provide.

We must do unto others as we would have others do to us. Follow the teachings of Jesus, follow His path, and we will never be alone or lonely.

God will not forsake us. All He wants us to do is to talk with Him each day. Make a time in our busy day for Him. He is more important than any other task on any other list, because He is a blessing. He is The Blessing. Go to sleep with The Lord, and wake up with The Lord. He is always with us. All He expects us to do is follow His chosen path. He will even light the way. He will not allow us to be lost. He loves us. We must honor Him.

Prayer: *"There is no place where God is not, wherever I go, there God is. Now and always he upholds me with his power and keeps me safe in his love."* (Anonymous - A Year With God)

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (Numbers 6:22-27)

25th Day of Lent 4/2

Rev. Alicia Conklin-Wood, Parish Associate

Question: Where is God?

Scripture: Matthew 25:40

This question often comes to me, but one day the answer seemed for a few minutes to be clear. I was in the Philadelphia airport biding my time in one more of a series of delays on my trip home. It was dinner time and I had just sat down in the food court with my Chinese food. One of those low-paid workers was nearby, sweeping up the stuff left behind on the floor, cleaning off or wiping tables, and pushing the chairs up to them again -- generally making the area look neater.

Then she paused, and laid the handle of her broom against the table in front of me. She went down the aisle, returning with the tray of an elderly man who had been limping along very slowly. After his tray was placed, she then hovered nearby while he slowly went back to the counter to retrieve his travel bag and briefcase, and returned equally slowly. No words seemed to pass between them, and as soon as he was sitting at his table, the cleaning woman picked up her things and continued on. I couldn't help but tell her what a kind thing she had done for that man.

"Even as you have done it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Where is God? That evening, I believe God was in the care and concern of a low-paid cleaning woman.

Prayer: God, for all those who show me your face each day, thank you. Open my heart to see you in the face of those we call the "least," and treat them with the honor I would give to you.

Rev. Gary H. Meier, Parish Associate

4/3

26th Day of Lent

Scripture: Psalm 89:48 – “Who can live and never see death?”

In this matter of life and death I have written the following:

DIE LIVING

Rev. Gary H. Meier

I don't want to die before I die. I wish to die living!

...To die with a bookmark in a novel, and with garden-earth beneath my nails.

...To die with a water color in progress, and with bird feeders full.

...To die with a fresh sermon unpreached, and with calendared events yet ahead.

I wish to live before I die!

...To die with a planned vacation still to come, and with a visit to Longwood Gardens fresh in my mind.

...To die with worn hiking boots upon my feet, and with the kisses of grandchildren still moist upon my cheek.

...To die with a life-time of trumpets and of gloom, regretful moments and honest pride...all of which have made me ready for that day of passing into death's life.

Prayer: O God, teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart (Psalm 90:12). Amen.

27th Day of Lent

4/4

A. Bryer Helmer

Scripture: Romans 8:28 - *“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.”*

One of my favorite scriptures has always been Romans 8:28. I have always stood on the promise throughout many years, but have also wondered: “Do ALL things REALLY work together for good to those who love God?”

I am now at a time in my life when I can look back over many years and confirm the validity of the statement. One issue immediately comes to mind: For umpteen years (I won't say how many) I have asked God to grant me my deepest heart's desire. I have begged and pleaded and been just as persistent as the woman who wore out the judge. To this writing, the gift has not been given in the way I had hoped and envisioned. But, what has been given is far broader and deeper than I could have imagined. The Lord has changed me. I've grown in perspective, understanding, and the grace to love what is, rather than pining away for what isn't. I've learned a lot about process and the fact that some things cannot be rushed no matter how hard we pray.

The Love of God, which is a radiant, powerful, life-giving force is always at work within, weaving the tapestry of our lives. If we could see it, I think we'd notice how all the dark colors i.e. hard times, broken hearts, and frustrated dreams etc.etc. are important components of the full picture. All things work together; all things are connected and *“the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new’”* (Rev. 21:5).

Prayer: Oh, Lord help us to “see” beyond our present reality and to trust the goodness of Your Divine Plan for us all. Amen.

Mary Louise Toews

4/5 28th Day of Lent

Question: Feeling Stuck? **Scripture:** Psalm 121:1-2

On November 13, 2010, I had the unique experience in Israel of floating on the Dead Sea. And on January 14, 2011, I had the realization that the mud of that sea, which could also be described as “muck”, was a corollary to what I was experiencing in my spiritual life.

You cannot drown in the Dead Sea- that is, as long as your head is facing toward the sky! I knew that the Lord promises that he is with me always - even while I feel stuck in the muck of my personal cares. Surprisingly, it can be hard to keep ones balance in that salty water because of the muddy bottom and the effort it takes to move forward. That was how I was feeling – not centered, as well as spiritually unbalanced. I had to remind myself that I needed to look upward, as I had in the water, and keep my focus on Jesus' realm and then trust that He was with me and was buoying my spirit.

I also learned that **nothing grows** in the Dead Sea. When caught in that hostile environment, **nothing flourishes**. I saw that my mind, body, and spirit were also becoming unable to grow and to flourish during these struggles with the management of my time and energy. A change was needed.

While reflecting, I recalled the scripture, “*where cometh my strength?*” and the proclamation, “*My help (strength) cometh (comes) from the Lord, who made heaven and earth!*” (Psalm 121:1, 2). So, I knew that as long as I continued to believe that this **spiritual muck could not overpower His strength and help** because of His love and care for me, I'd be able to move back toward the shore line and onto solid ground. That was his promise to me that cold January morning and my heart then responded, “Thanks be to God!”

I like this quote from J. I. Packer who writes in his book *Your Father Loves You*, “*God....guides our minds as we think things out in His presence.*”

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your promise that you will be with us always, even until the end of time and that nothing that we can experience in this life can separate us from your love (Romans 8:37,38). Hold us in the palm of your hand and steady us as we learn to trust you in all things – both big and small. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.

29th Day of Lent 4/6

Eddie Early

Question: Who is Jesus?

Scripture: John 14:1 – *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.”*

I have never doubted that God is. When I was growing up it always seemed to me that there was enough visible evidence in the universe to witness to a cosmic creative MIND that was worthy of worship, but remote. I was sure of God, but not all that sure about Jesus.

Many years ago I was in a play presented by the Women's Association (now Presbyterian Women) here at First Presbyterian. I have forgotten the theme of the play, but the words of one of the characters are engraved indelibly in my mind and heart. Those words were, *“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me.”* It was a moment when I realized an answer to the question I had not asked. In that moment I began to take Jesus as seriously as I had God. The New Testament, which had been presented as an historical document in Religion 101 became for me a present-day witness to who Jesus is. I like Paul's explanation best. In the Letter to the Colossians he writes *“He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for this world you have created. Thank you for the gift of your Son who showed us how to live in it. Thank you for the gift of the Spirit, who helps us find joy when life is hard, and peace in the midst of conflict or suffering.

Jack Miller

4/7 30th Day of Lent

Question: How can God use bad things to make good?

Scripture: Romans 8:28 - *"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*

During Lent, we spend a lot of time focusing on sacrifice and loss. For many people, the sting of personal loss is too fresh, and we may struggle to find meaning in what seems like senseless tragedy. We all experience seasons of loss. Just as Lent is a regular part of our church calendar and Christian experience, our own seasons of grief, pain, and sacrifice can occur with similar frequency.

Lent is a time for us to turn our minds to a suffering and dying Christ – God's only son who, as a human being, faced his own mortality. He knew he was going to die, and he struggled with this knowledge. He prayed that God would remove the cup from which he was about to drink. As difficult as this was for Jesus, I cannot help but wonder how much more difficult it was for his family and friends. They watched helplessly as their beloved teacher and friend was tortured and murdered, and while Jesus had promised to return to them, they didn't grasp what he meant. In the darkest hour of their grief, they could not possibly comprehend the new life that awaited them in Christ's resurrection.

This story became even more real for me following the death of my father when I was 11 years old. At that time, I could not see any good or any possibility of new life to come. And I shouldn't have – I needed time to grieve. However, with the passage of time, I began to see how God was bringing new life – resurrection – from the suffering and loss our family experienced. Our family grew and thrived, and God birthed new life and ministry that were not previously open to us.

Prayer: Dear God, it is so hard to go through the fallow, barren times in our lives. We pray for the strength and courage to wait through those times as we anticipate the promised hope of new life and resurrection that we receive through Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

31st Day of Lent

4/8

Alisa Bair

Scripture: Romans 8:28

Do *all* things truly work together for good? The answer came in a way I will never forget. Six of us were seated around a table in a five-star hotel, picking apart each others' manuscripts. We were winners of an inspirational magazine writers contest, and Leanne, a young widow from Wisconsin, was on the hot seat.

She had written a story about her inner conflict over when to remove her wedding band, a conflict which resolved two years after her husband's death. "As I knelt before his grave, a breeze rustled through the pines, and a black hawk flew overhead. It was then that I felt I had Denny's permission to move on," an editor read aloud. He looked up from his glasses. "In such a tender story, it's jolting to introduce such an ominous bird. Perhaps you could change it to a butterfly, or a dove."

She was crestfallen. "He was a pilot," she said. "A manly man. A dove or a butterfly just doesn't cut it."

"A pilot?" The editor had a personal interest. "What company did he fly for?"

"You probably never heard of it," she said, brushing off the question for the more pressing issue of veracity. "Black Hawk Airways."

As soon as she uttered the words, it was obvious that this synchronicity had not dawned on her before. Tears spilled down her cheeks. "I can't believe I missed that," she said.

We all had holy goose bumps. "I think we should put down our pencils and thank God," the editor said, closing his eyes and lifting his arms in worship. Through the window behind him, the late afternoon sun caused a few stray hairs on his bald head to glisten, as if to drive home even further the point that no detail escapes God: *And even the very hairs of your head are numbered* (Matt. 10:30).

Prayer: Like our bodies in the womb, O Lord, the details of our lives are fearfully and wonderfully wrought. Help me to see that the things that I don't welcome into my story may, in fact, be important threads in working out your loving purpose in my life. Amen.

Rev. Randy Riggs, Senior Pastor

4/9 32nd Day of Lent

Question: Can love really prevail? **Read:** Luke 6:27-36

The first words of Jesus on love in human conduct were not spoken as a matter of foreign policy, and in an age of terrorism it is hard for us to want to do good to those who hate us. However, Jesus calls those of us who claim to be his followers to adopt the ethic of love rather than the ethic of hate. In a world where our fears of the enemy are fanned, perhaps his message needs to be considered again.

According to a poll conducted in January, 2006, by the Terror Free Tomorrow organization, “doing good” is a very effective way to improve how Muslim countries view the United States of America.

In May of 2003, research indicated that only 15% of people in Indonesia—the world's most populous Muslim nation—had a favorable view of the U.S. However, in December of 2004, you may recall the tsunami which killed 250,000 people and devastated Indonesia. In the year that followed, humanitarian aid poured into the affected areas from the U.S. and other Western nations.

As a result, a January, 2006, poll showed that Indonesian people with a favorable view of the U.S. had nearly tripled, jumping to 44%. In addition, information from the well-respected Indonesian Survey Institute showed that “support for Bin Laden and terrorism has dropped to its lowest level since 9/11.” Finally, the ISI reported that Indonesians with a “very unfavorable” view of the U.S. had fallen to just 13%—down from 48% prior to the tsunami. [Source: Tom McCawley, “U.S. Tsunami Aid Still Reaps Goodwill,” Christian Science Monitor (2-28-06), p. 12]

The words of Jesus were not meant as foreign policy, but that doesn't mean they don't work. *“Do good to those who hate you.”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it is hard not to hate those who have done such hateful things. By my own strength, I cannot do it, but with your strength I shall try to overcome evil with good. Amen.

33rd Day of Lent

4/10

Anonymous

Question: How can we know Our Father's will?

Scripture: Romans 12:2 - *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

The psalmist says God knows us very well; Ps 139: ¹"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD."

Jesus said in Luke 16:15: "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight." If God knows us that well, and he has preferences for our actions, our words, even our thoughts, and if we are so inclined, how might we know His will?

I submit three ways: 1) Read/study the biblical account of His actions, His words, and His relationships with others who have come before us. 2) Look for His will to be known and revealed in the midst's of civil discourse, between men and women, who have differing opinions, yet are united with a common goal of showing forth freedom, justice and mercy, for all people, with the Love of Christ. 3) Ask Him for the help of His Spirit, to reveal His will to you personally. I expect on rare occasions you may hear His voice, audibly. On more frequent occasions you will "hear" His voice with your mind's ear. And most frequently of all you will likely have a sense of His inclinations, by subtle almost imperceptible promptings. Yet when you look back retrospectively you will know He was revealing to you, His love and His will.

Prayer: Father, may your "good, pleasing and perfect will" be done in our world, and may we be prompted to participate in the process, so you may be glorified by our thoughts and actions.

Bruce Wittmaier

4/11

34th Day of Lent

Question: Why? **Scripture:** I Corinthians 13 and Luke 23: 44-46

Why is a perfectly good word and a potentially dangerous question. We start "Why?" early in the game, to our parent's consternation. We continue to do so in school, often confounding our teachers. We ask ourselves "Why?" especially when we wish we had done differently. And we scream or sob or whisper "Why?" when the cruel blows of death, devastation or destruction strike us.

There are times we can find reasonable answers to the why questions. We can explain scientific answers to questions like "Why does water freeze?" We can discuss our motivation in response to: "Why did you do that?"

And then there are the dangerous whys, the ones that challenge us to explain how a loving God causes or allows the bad things to happen: the debilitating illness that strikes in the prime of life; the death that comes to one too young; the floods or earthquakes that destroy all in their path.

What makes these questions dangerous is that we are tempted to come up with an answer. The outcome is that we offend those who ask the questions and look foolish in the bargain because everyone knows the answers are beyond all of us. We are stumbling into territory where only God can speak.

It is hard for us to be silent. We want answers. We want to understand. We tremble in the face of the unknown.

On the cross, Jesus, the fully human, cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46). That is often our question as well. Jesus' final word on the cross came though there was no answer to his "Why?" question?: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Near the end of the great love chapter, I Corinthians 13, Paul writes: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." That is our hope, a hope born of the surpassing love God has for us. In that hope, our anguished "Whys?" vanish. We too can commend ourselves to God's mysterious, loving care.

Prayer: When we want answers, O God, comfort us and walk with us that we may come to know your perfect peace. Amen.

35th Day of Lent

4/12

Candee Buckbee

The Grace of God **Scripture:** Romans 5:1-2 – *“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.”*

It took a long time for me to understand grace. I suppose because most of us rarely give or get unconditional love. It is hard to believe a loving God would deliver favor and mercy on those who really do not deserve it. To know that you are accepted, loved, and valued by God, and deserving of this without question is hard to conceive. Of course, the tangible gift and proof of grace is Jesus himself. Grace is free, and we don't always acknowledge it, but one way to honor it is to help and serve others, passing your grace on.

Grace was “upon” Jesus, “upon” Stephen,” upon” Paul. Do you feel the grace upon you? Do you pass along your grace to others? Grace is giving and forgiving. It is seeing and realizing we are not on our own. It is giving ourselves away to others, to have strong relationships. It is sharing, caring, crying, rejoicing, and praying. It is paying it forward without strings attached. Being grateful is a practice where we can give grace back to God. Try writing or praying a “grateful” journal and you will find your spirit change.

According to psychologist Robert Emmons, research shows that the practice of gratitude can increase our happiness levels by almost 25%. Being grateful for God's grace makes us whole. Author Frederick Buechner puts it best, writing: *“The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too.”*

Prayer: Father, help us to believe in and understand your boundless love and pass it along to others. Amen.

Rev. Don Hackett, Associate Pastor

4/13

36th Day of Lent

Sticking Close to Jesus

Scripture: John 20:1-18 - *"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'"*

Mary came to follow Jesus after being healed by him. Her story is in Luke 8. Mary may have tried many cures and doctors to heal her sickness, but none worked. Mary was not healed until she encountered Jesus. She did not just hear about Jesus. Mary did not read about him in the *Jerusalem Times*. Mary brought her concerns, hurts, and questions to Jesus. Mary met Jesus face to face and in that experience Jesus healed her. Mary was transformed. She was cured of her illness and freed her to follow Jesus as one of his disciples. Mary Magdalene was a person who stuck close to Jesus.

Where are you today in your journey? What are your questions? Are you hurting? Jesus comes to meet us wherever we are on our journey. Jesus is here in this very moment ready to meet you at your point of need.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to meet me at my point of need. I need your help today with _____ . Fill me with your love, wisdom, healing, and hope today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

37th Day of Lent

4/14

Judy Kruse

Question: Who is the church?

Scripture: Matthew 5:8 – *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

I never saw her carry a Bible, never heard her quote from it, never heard her pray, never heard her preach or attempt to coerce anyone into her way of thinking, yet she spoke more to me of Christlike love than the loftiest sermons or the mightiest of choirs. She didn't just go to church. She WAS the church. She didn't just worship the Lord. She WAS Christ to me and to many others whose lives she touched. Her quiet strength, her gentle touch, her peaceful countenance, her twinkling blue eyes, spoke more of “the church” than any building ever could. She never tried to foist her faith upon me. She just simply lived it. She had something that I did not and I wanted it. Bad.

I had attended and joyfully participated in church since earliest childhood, but there was something missing. I went through the mechanics of worship, yet there was still a huge empty spot, until I met Doris. She didn't lecture me; she just lived a better way. She never pontificated; she just listened. She never scolded, rather showed me the strength that was within me, even when I didn't want to see it, for that would have meant accepting responsibility.

She was the church. She was the congregation of believers. She was indeed Christ's love on earth, and I weep now because she no longer walks upon it. But, far, far more I rejoice with the angels as they welcome her to the heavenly kingdom with the same manner of open arms as she held wide to me while on earth.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me live your LOVE.

Kay Phillips

4/15

38th Day of Lent

Scripture: Romans 8:29 – *“All things work together for good for those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose.”* Psalm 119:105 – *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path.”*

“Mom, I’ve been in a car accident. I’m ok, but it looks like the car is totaled. Can you come?” Except for the large bump on her forehead from hitting the windshield, she was indeed ok, and the car was totaled. As an isolated incident, it would have been stressful enough, but she was also working 2 part-time jobs, attending school full-time, and trying to figure out where she could move with her 2 dogs. Just weeks earlier she had ended a long relationship when she discovered her fiancé had been unfaithful to her.

As for our house, Doug and I were juggling the usual chaos of jobs and the schedule of a busy teenager, all while Doug was working his way through 7 weeks of radiation treatment for a recurrent cancer. In addition, it soon became evident that we would need to clear a bedroom and closet for our older daughter to move home, and be ready on a moment’s notice to make it happen when her schedule permitted (Thank you God for brothers with trucks and station wagons). We struggled with our intention to maintain as much normalcy as possible.

How do we proceed through this Lord? How will we get done what needs to be done? What do I do when there is nothing I can do?

During this time of uncertainty, I happened to be teaching a Sunday School class to elementary children, based on the words of the apostle Paul. To help children understand the concept of all things working together for good, several scenarios

continued from previous page

were presented that children could relate to...missing a season of sports due to a broken bone, having the family turn around to go home because you forgot to pack something important etc. Part of the lesson was that bad things do happen, but God will always be faithful to bring goodness out of brokenness. In one of the examples, the subject waited 20 years before being able to look back on his childhood and see how God had worked in it for his good. (Was God already working for my good months earlier when Janet Ressler initially asked me to help teach?)

That same day, we would sing the words of the Psalmist, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path." It reminded me of a favorite devotion in which the author points out that the verse does NOT promise a floodlight for the whole journey, only as much light as we need for the next step, for OUR path.

Though I know it is a lesson I will need over and over in my life, these verses gave me assurance to just look for and take the next step, being confident that God was at work in our lives.

Prayer: Thank you God for loving us in the midst of our messes, for your encouraging word revealed in scripture, and the promise that You are at work for our good. Amen.

The Rev. Kent E. Holmes, Parish Associate

4/16

39th Day of Lent

On Being A “Non-Anxious” Presence **Scripture:** Matthew 6:25-34

Anyone who has ever gone through the process of moving knows how “anxiety-producing” the enterprise can be! Are we going to be able to sell our house? Will we be able to find new one? What about schools for the kids? Will we be able to find the right church, doctor, dentist, veterinarian, market, cleaners, auto mechanic, etc., etc., etc.? Couple that with retirement and a new job, and “anxiety levels” can be off the charts!

Our family recently went through the process of relocation and retirement, and, believe me, it was an “anxiety-producing” event. But, you know what? We survived the move and we're now thriving in our new surroundings! A part of me knew that would be the case, but you couldn't have convinced me of it when we were in the middle of the whole process.

That's the way it is with many of the issues we face in life: we're “anxiety-prone.” We seem to thrive on worrying about things over which we have little or no control: our health; the state of the economy; politics; the fate of our children. You name it, we worry about it! At the end of the day, though, our worrying doesn't change one thing. It simply raises our anxiety levels.

Jesus had something to say about worry: Don't! *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.”* Instead, he encouraged his hearers to be more concerned about the kingdom of God and God's righteousness than about the Dow. In the kingdom of God, said Jesus, the fate of our neighbor trumps the length of our hem. So, I invite you today to be a “non-anxious” presence. Try to keep your anxiety levels to a minimum, and focus instead on what it is you can do to further God's kingdom in our already “anxiety-filled” world.

Prayer: Dear God, help me this day to be the “non-anxious” presence you would have me be. Focus my thoughts and deeds on the needs of my neighbor rather than myself. Lift my anxiety and let me live into your love, for such is the nature of the kingdom of God. I pray this in the name of the one who gives us hope, Jesus Christ. Amen.

40th Day of Lent

Palm Sunday



April 17 [Holy Week Begins]

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

9am Early Service in the Sanctuary

10:30am Traditional Service in the Sanctuary

10:30am Cherry Street Service in Shirk Hall

10:30am Iglesia Presbiteriana Resurreccion

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

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Susan Ashbey Davis

4/18

41st Day of Lent

Scripture: Psalm 30:11-12 – *“You have turned my mourning into dancing...”*

I became a Nurse as a second career. I was in my mid 40's. By far the oldest in my class in suburban Philadelphia. I graduated with honors and for the first time in ages I congratulated myself. As I connected in the Nursing world, I became aware that working in a field that held my interest was also good for my psyche. I was finding a connection between myself and the patients I was working with. They came to see me with many questions and some fears about their recovery. I was able to impart to them information they had not had before.

As I moved to my next job, in Lancaster, and began to work, I was told that I had Breast Cancer!!! (2003) Now I was the patient. In this role, I had NO skills...fear began to take over. I was a mess. I luckily had family to be by my side. I also had God at my side. My prayer daily was to ask Him to hold me in His hands. With time, my accumulated support group of interdisciplinary members, and my faith in God brought me to the other side of my Cancer diagnosis.

Today, I try to give back as much as I can. My Nursing has been focused around other newly-diagnosed Cancer patients. What a rewarding and God-given opportunity. I feel as though I am now sharing my talents in a way that I was meant to do. If I had not had to walk the cancer walk, I would not be able to communicate with others they way I do. Making lemonade out of lemons is a powerful and wonderful feeling. I am a stronger person for doing so. I have fewer fears and know that I am never alone. The strength that I now have is Heaven-sent.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen me for the challenges I will face today. Help me to see the ways that you are transforming the difficult situations in my life into a testimony of your goodness and power. Amen.

42nd Day of Lent 4/20

Rev. Randy Riggs, Senior Pastor

Question: Do my questions mean I don't have enough faith?

Read: John 3:1-10

Nicodemus is one of those mysterious biblical figures about whom we have only snippets of information. We have this encounter in Jerusalem. Later, in John, we hear of Nicodemus defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-52). Finally, following the death of Jesus it is Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who claimed the body of Jesus for his burial (John 19:39-42). Other than these three stories, all in the Gospel of John, we know little about him.

Wm. Barclay says of Nicodemus, *"Nicodemus was a puzzled man with many honors and yet something was lacking in his life. He came to Jesus for a talk so that somehow, in the cover of darkness, he might find light."*

It is a shame that we have surrendered this passage to those in the church who feel that unless you have a dramatic conversion experience, you have not been saved. In the passage there is a classic method of inquiry; questions which were met with answers and followed up by other questions. Nicodemus wanted to know what it meant to live as a person of faith in the secular world. He was curious. He did not allow his reputation or his credentials to keep him from asking the important questions of faith: *How can this be?*

Where did we ever get the idea that to have questions as we travel the road of faith was to somehow be less than faithful? Questions are natural when we are dealing with things we don't fully understand, and asking our questions can be a way of deepening our faith if this is our goal. If our questions are simply to show others how bright we are, it is unlikely they will be of much use to us or anyone else.

There is a plaque of dedication in Speer Library on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary: *"Within these walls the light of learning may illumine the life of piety in the service of Jesus Christ, the Truth."*

The curiosity of Nicodemus invites us to be more curious about our own faith; to bring our questions to Jesus and trust that in dialogue with him we will find what we need to take the next step in the journey of faith.

Prayer: Lord, do not let my questions push you away. I want to know you, and I want to know more about you. Use those questions to deepen my faith. Amen.



Maundy Thursday

April 21

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

Good Friday

April 22



S E R V I C E S

NOON to 3:00pm 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.

Easter Sunday

April 24



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

Special service times
to be announced
Watch for April STP,
bulletin and website

www.fpcLIVE.org

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