



Simplify.

Community United Methodist Church
Lent 2024
Daily Devotionals

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SIMPLIFY:
2024 CUMC LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
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Thank you to everyone who made the bold choice to share their faith by contributing to this year's Lenten devotional booklet. You are a blessing to this community.

May these devotions be a daily source of inspiration and reflection for us throughout this holy season of Lent.

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Ash Wednesday: So It Begins

Joey Hargrove

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. - Colossians 3:17

As we begin this Lenten journey together, I hope we can all be intentional about what it is we want to accomplish during it. Reading through all the devotions collected in this booklet, it's obvious that most of us feel a connection to the theme SIMPLIFY. Most of us would love to simplify our lives and our faith. We want less stuff, we want less worries, we want more feeling of connection to God.

I believe there is no greater time than Lent to take these desires and put them into action. Perhaps you can practice a Lenten discipline for the next 47 days. The main purpose of a Lenten discipline is to mark these weeks as holy. To set them aside as special and provide a daily reminder that this is the season of Lent -- the time that we prepare our hearts for the promised miracle of Easter. Maybe that means cleaning out your closets, cabinets, or garage. Maybe it means being more aware of when your mind drifts to worries and shifting your focus to gratitude instead. Maybe that means marking ten minutes each morning to read the daily devotion included here and reflecting and praying. Or maybe it's giving up chocolate! Or doing yoga every night. Or volunteering at a pet shelter.

The action we choose is less important than our intentions. So whatever you choose to do (or not do) during Lent, may you do it all *in the name of the Lord Jesus – giving thanks!* So that this season of Lent is meaningful and not just another item on your to-do list.

Prayer: Lord, may we take a moment today to think about what we'd like to gain from this season of Lent. To find a small change we can make to grow closer to you or just remind us that you are always there, patiently waiting for us to notice. Help us to let go of the things in our lives that are no longer serving us. Let this season of Lent be holy and a time of spiritual growth. Amen.

Thursday, February 15, 2024

Give Thanks

Ruth Dewar

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God. - 1 Thessalonians 5:18
(NRSV)

Years ago my mom heard at church the suggestion to make a list of things one is thankful for and to add something to the list each day. I was visiting her/them in Tennessee a good while later and noticed next to her desk a long list of things she was thankful for, some profound, some minor. My personal favorite is, "I stepped on my glasses, but I did not break them."

Prayer: Let us be thankful for small things. Amen.

Friday, February 16, 2024

Serving Others

Christine Odionu

For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. – Galatians 5:13-14

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45

I chose these particular scriptures because of my daily routine with my neighbor. Helping with the dog and cat and running errands for her and her household and just listening to when she is overwhelmed and stressed over things. I love my neighbors Helen and her mom Eleanor dearly; they are my second family.

By serving my neighbors I am imitating Jesus's love and my faith grows stronger.

It is a sacrifice for me but I am truly humbled to serve them.

Prayer: Great God and Loving Savior, thank you for showing me how to be a servant. Amen.

Saturday, February 17, 2024

Living a Simple Life

Vicki Borland

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. - 1 Timothy 6:6-7

Lately it seems more and more there has been an emphasis on ways to declutter our homes. This is something that makes sense for us all to do occasionally and simplifying can create a feeling of freedom. But is clearing out unneeded possessions in our homes enough? There are more ways our lives can become cluttered than just with material items. So what other ways do our lives become cluttered and take up too much of our time?

Overcommitting our available time which is exhausting and unhealthy

Worry which creates stress and uses up our valuable time

Difficult relationships that can never be resolved and need to be let go **Looking back** and **looking forward** too much - it's time to live one day at a time

"Be as simple as you can be; you will be astonished to see how uncomplicated and happy your life can become." (Paramahansa Yogananda)

Prayer: Dear God, life is wonderful and there is so much to be grateful for and enjoyed. But there are also times that life can be complicated and exhausting. We pray for the ability to live simple, uncluttered lives while knowing that you are guiding us through each day. Amen

Sunday, February 18, 2024

Things

Mary Sue Hart

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. - Matthew 6: 19-21

As a young woman there were so many things I thought I needed. Gradually, I realized that those 'things' were not what I valued most; I would have to curtail spending if I wanted to simplify my life.

Now that I am older I find that I need to simplify the way I am spending my time and energy. I need more discipline in this area than I did to reduce spending on 'things'.

Certainly, I am grateful for the creature comforts I enjoy; but the most precious 'things' aren't things at all. Over the years God has restored my health, protected me and my family and shown us a path in life that brings us happiness and gives joy to others.

Prayer: Lord, lift us up to follow your example of service to others, in our church congregation and in the community. Amen.

Monday, February 19, 2024

Learning How to Ask

Barbara Schaffer

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! - Matthew 7:9-11

When I was about 3 or 4 years old and my sister was 5 or 6, we were playing in the backyard of our apartment building one summer afternoon when an ice-cream vendor pulled into the nearby parking lot and asked if we wanted to buy anything. There were no other children around, just us. We wanted a popsicle to split, but we didn't have any money to pay for it. So my sister told me to go ask our mother for the dime (yes, it only cost 10 cents back then!).

As I ran back into our apartment building, I started worrying. *What if my mother wouldn't give me the dime for the popsicle? What if I had to go back and tell my sister that; would she be angry with me? What if my mother was upset with me for asking for the dime?* We didn't have a lot of money to pay for extra treats in those early years. *What if my mother really wanted to buy us the popsicle but we couldn't afford it; would she feel bad?* So many worrisome scenarios filled my head that I stopped in front of our apartment door. I just couldn't go in not knowing what would happen. But while I had a very active imagination when it came to seeing how many ways this interaction could go wrong, I wasn't very good at figuring out a good way to avoid any of these potential tragedies.

So what I ended up doing was to engage in a little "magical thinking," and — determined to put off dealing with an unfortunate outcome as long as possible and, who knows, maybe avoid a bad outcome completely — I made sure I was inside the apartment building long enough that it would *seem* like I'd talked to our mother. Then I went out the building's door and walked back to where my sister and the ice cream man waited.

"Well, did you get the dime?" my sister asked.

"Mom went to get her purse and said she'll be right out."

That seemed to satisfy them. So we waited.

But as the minutes went by my sister and the ice cream man clearly became impatient. Finally my sister said, "I'm going to see what's taking so long. You wait here," she told me. *Uh-oh. Now she would find out that I never really asked our mother for the dime, never even went back inside our apartment. Well, that trick sure didn't last very long.*

And now I have to wait out here all alone with this strange man. I hope he isn't going to try to talk to me. I stood far away from him and didn't make eye contact.

Finally, my sister came running out with my mother behind her. *Oh no. What will my mother say? What will she do?*

When my mother got to us, she smiled at the ice cream man and graciously said, "I'm very sorry you had to wait so long for me!" With that my mother handed the man a dime and he asked which flavor we wanted (I think we agreed on root beer) and we went back to our apartment where my mother split the popsicle for us.

Not all parents would have reacted so lovingly, but we can be sure that God will. When I first read the verse above, about parents knowing how to give good gifts to their children, it reminded me of how I had made a situation that should have been easy such a difficult one. I still sometimes hesitate before praying for something, not sure if it's important enough or the right thing to ask for. But I take consolation in knowing that God *will* answer our prayers, maybe not always giving us what we want, but always giving us what we *need*.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being a perfect parent to us, hearing us with loving ears and then in your wisdom giving us what we *should* be asking for. Help us to overcome the fears we have and to approach you as your trusting child. Amen.

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Everyday Miracles

Ross Chitwood

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. - Psalm 103:1-5 (NIV)

In the hustle and bustle of life, it's easy to overlook the everyday miracles and blessings that surround us. Yet, Psalm 103 invites us to pause and reflect on the ways God continually shows His love and faithfulness to us. It's a call to simplify our perspective, to shift our focus from what's lacking to what's abundant in our lives.

As we move through our lives, may we make a conscious effort to recognize God's hand at work in the simple moments—the sunrise that paints the sky with hues of orange and pink, the laughter of children that fills the air with joy, the comforting presence of a loved one in times of need. These are the moments that remind us of God's unfailing love and goodness.

Prayer: Gracious God, Open our eyes to see your blessings in the everyday moments of life. Help us to simplify our perspective and recognize your hand at work in all things. Fill our hearts with gratitude for your abundant love and faithfulness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

A Life of Simplicity

Christine Borland

A devout life does not bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough. - 1 Timothy 6:6-8 (MSG version)

Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. - 1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NLT version)

We know life is not simple, but there are steps to take in order to live a life of simplicity. These are the basics: have faith in God, pray often and love always. Do not allow pressures or items to control you. As this verse so clearly puts it things are not what matters.

We spend so much time in search of objects we hope will fulfill us, when seeking fulfillment from faith, family, service and prayer comes with a far greater reward. Every time there is an urge to buy something unnecessary, think of a way that money you were going to spend could better serve someone in need. We should fill our days with reflection on faith and pray often, substitute time spent in frivolous mindless watching tv or going on social media with mindful activities such as meditation.

I have been feeling overwhelmed lately with all the excess clutter I have accumulated. It sneaks up and suddenly I realized it is time to address it. I saw a really useful tip today, which will be especially helpful for anyone that orders too much; for every box that you get delivered, once emptied fill the box with donations to leave your house. This will assure that any items that come into the house will have counterparts leaving as well.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray to learn to live simpler lives filled with love and prayer as you have taught us. Help us to understand that we have have enough and that all the excess is separating us from what truly matters. Help us to use what we are so fortunate to have to help that in need and to always spread your love and light as that is what truly matters. Amen.

Thursday, February 22, 2024

The Good Yield

DeAnn Healy

But as for what was grown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields...- Matthew 13:23

I have been watching The Chosen on Amazon Prime of late. It is a reenactment of the life of Jesus Christ, starting in the early days of his adult life as he begins to follow the call to teach. I am struck by the idea that in so many ways, simplicity is a basic foundation of all of his teachings. He tells us not to get caught in the myriad rules that can define and limit our actions. Just do what is right and good. He not only preaches it through his many parables, he lives it. His followers and his detractors both challenge him time and again. Yet he always boils it down to a simple act of love and belief in his Father.

In our ever evolving world, that seems like an impossible idea. There are so many demands coming from every direction. Technology has made so much of our lives almost instantaneous. Computers, cell phones and the like make us feel as though we are constantly on and available. Life seems far from simple. Or do we just allow ourselves to be sucked into all the expectations? Can we challenge ourselves to step back and simply ask what is right and good? And, strive to do that.

As Patrick and I relocate to Northern California, it is a practice I hope to explore more. The rural area to which we are moving should allow for a more relaxed lifestyle. But that is still a choice we will need to make. I hope to simplify our day to day routines, but also reflect and find ways to be of service- to do what is right and good. Simple, but not lacking!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me find a simpler path, based on love and service. Help me weed out words and actions that do not serve me or those around me. Help me seek connection and engagement. Let me simplify my life, cast my seeds on good soil and harvest love. Amen.

Friday, February 23, 2024

Easter
Clarisse Grusky

For God is not a God of confusion, but a God of peace. - 1 Corinthians 14:33

This scripture reminds me of simplicity and Easter because it's a time to remember that Jesus rises again and always keeps his promises. His love and greatness are more grand than we could ever imagine, and although our minds can't comprehend it, we know how good He is. At the same time there is also a simplicity and peace to His love.

Easter is the perfect time to reflect on this as we celebrate Jesus rising from the dead and giving us new life while new life emerges around us during the season of Spring.



Saturday, February 24, 2024

Remember God's Blessings

Annette Rossilli

I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. - Psalm 27:13-14

For many years when I awoke early in the morning, I would “pray without ceasing,” as I learned from Paul’s Overcomer’s Prayer, before getting out of bed, and thinking of the priorities for the day. About ten years ago, I was given a very meaningful devotional which I have read first thing every morning. Each day the message has a point of purpose and I work to marry this thought with my asking the Lord to do *his* will and not what *I* think should be done.

Then during the day, I stay in the present as much as possible and recite either The Lord’s Prayer or the 23rd Psalm – both memorized in childhood and my favorites. If I am in my bedroom, I re-read the devotional from the day and rethink what it means. As the day unfolds with phone calls or visitors. I take the steps of faith not to make the decisions. The answers to my prayers constantly come and are reaffirming to continue day by day. I love Psalm 27 about taking heart and seeing God’s goodness in the land of the living. Take courage and wait for the Lord.

Prayer: May we take time today to remember our many blessings and be thankful.
Amen.

Sunday, February 25, 2024

Simply Trust and Believe

Gloria Young

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths. - Proverbs 3:5-6

So often we try to make sense of what or why things happen the way they do. We worry and ponder the what and why of events occurring within and outside our everyday lives. We try to “figure out” reasons and try to understand what’s happening. And we worry.

We need to trust that the all-knowing God is at our side and lovingly looking after us. I read somewhere that God laughs when we try to tell him our plans. We grow up being responsible and managing our own lives. Too often we forget that God is in charge of our lives.

Simply trust and leave our future in His hands.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust and believe you are in charge of our lives. And we thank you for that. Amen

Monday, February 26, 2024

Love
Treasure Island Kids

Love your neighbor as yourself. – Mark 12: 31

Our Preschool Treasure Island (ages 3-5) kids' thoughts on this verse.

- Warner - to help them
- Gemma - I go to my neighbors' house and help them sometimes
- Annabelle - I have lots of friends in my neighborhood. And I love my mama
- Hudson - I love my neighbor and he loves me.
- Matteo - it means that you love someone. I love my mom and my dad and everyone else I know.
- Ozzy - I love Hudson and I do nice things for her.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- Ephesians 4:2

Our Treasure Island (grades K-5) kids' thoughts on this verse.

- Theo - Be nice, don't brag and be humble. I can open the door for people, help people across the street and be nice.
- Jack - Be kind to everyone and be loving.
- Vivian - That means don't be frustrated, be nice, keep your chill. Be nice to people who come along, not like the first two people in the Good Samaritan story.
- Sofia - Always be nice to each other.
- Clarisse - I think it means that you should love your neighbor and treat them with respect because you want the best for them even when they're giving you a hard time.

Prayer: May we live a life of love and kindness to everyone around us. Amen.

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

A Celebration of Life and Forgiveness

Christine Rosander

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. - Ephesians 2:14-16

This past weekend I had the honor of singing at the beautiful memorial service and celebration of life of Herb Luke. Herb went to be with the Lord at the age of 93 leaving a very meaningful, impactful legacy.

At 78, he took up singing with me! He got so good he would sing at weddings, recitals and the national anthem at his granddaughter's basketball games at Harvard-Westlake and Princeton University. This, along with attending his grandchildren's events gave him meaning and purpose.

But Herb's biggest achievement in life was spreading faith in the Lord. He witnessed in a Bible Study, served on the prayer team at his church, made several long-term trips to China as a missionary and prayed to heal people! He was a prayer warrior.

In fact, Herb, and his daughter Cyndi, prayed over me, anointing me with water from the holy land. I was going through a devastating divorce and the passing of my mom at the time and these prayers were so powerful and healing.

Herb came to know the Lord in mid-life at a difficult and broken time in his life. He had lost his business and marriage, and his furniture was being repossessed around him. Exhausted, he fell into a deep sleep and when he woke up his eyes landed on an old and dusty bible on a shelf. He pulled it off the shelf, started reading and accepted the Lord that very day!

Herb often spoke of the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation and the verses from Ephesians 2 were read at his service.

Herb and his former wife were able to forgive each other and have a miraculous healing of past bitterness and animosity. This forgiveness allowed the entire family to heal and allowed Herb to be an integral part of his daughter's and 4 grandchildren's lives. He helped raise them and bring them all to the Lord.

Herb was a remarkable man, and I will miss him. This is a case truly of student teaching teacher. I feel so grateful and blessed for knowing him and his family.

Prayer: Thank you, Father for Herb, and his inspiring life. Thank you for the power of forgiveness. Thank you for the prayer warriors. We ask you to lift our spirits today and allow us to feel your love surrounding us. Amen.

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Trust in the Lord

Sam Nichols

Trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. - Proverbs 3 5-6

Recently I went skiing in Colorado. One of the places we try to go each year is Winter Park. In order to get to Winter Park, one of the routes is over Berthoud Pass, which has an elevation of 11,307 feet. There is a continental divide marker at the top and the weather can be completely different from what you just experienced 2,000 feet below, on the drive up to the pass. The roads on the pass are filled with switch backs, several advisory speed curves and a brake check station at the top before the descent. On a recent trip, as we crested the pass, the car I was driving started to fishtail. My daughter, feeling the car sliding said in a concerned voice, *Dad...Dad*. Out of instinct, from my many years driving in the Midwest, quickly steered into the slide and we continued on our way. Just one week later, I read in the news that several cars going over the same pass were caught in an avalanche. The cars were buried, and the occupants had to be rescued. While we may think we know the path we are traveling, it may be filled with unexpected challenges. God is watching over you and has prepared you for what lies ahead. Trust in him to show you the way.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Please open my eyes to the path you have set for me. Give me the strength and courage to persevere through the challenges I will face. Walk with me on my journey. Amen

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Simplicity
Alison Latimer

“The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me” - Psalm_116:6

The world is so loud. Life is so loud. It is so hard to hear God in all the noise. There have been times in the last few years, when everything was overwhelming - changing relationships, stressful work environments, financial challenges, family dynamics...in these moments, when you feel alone, at bottom, it's so hard to hear God's word, to feel Jesus' love and forgive yourself. Somehow, I always find my way to a place where the noise falls away and God pulls me close. A place with no trappings, no fanfare - usually a hike, a walk, working in the yard - a place of simplicity that quiets my head and heart and lets God in.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the sanctuary of simplicity, where Your voice rings clearest, especially when we need it most. Grant me the wisdom to seek space and simplicity, to listen with open heart all days, not just in times of need. Help us guide others to these spaces of clarity and calm, that they too may hear Your call and find solace in Your love. Amen.

Friday, March 1, 2024

Patience
Bryce Swanson

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - Peter 5:6-7

As we find ourselves bombarded by news of disease, war, crime, religious division, homelessness, etc., it is important to not become overwhelmed by worry about the things that are out of our control. We can take some comfort in the knowledge that we are making a difference when addressing issues that are within our control, such as the giving of our time &/or money to charitable organizations.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to discover what we can and cannot control in our lives. May we place our faith in you to provide guidance in our times of need. Amen.

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Already a Winner
Carli Wright

“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” –
Proverbs 21:31

I don't know about you, but fate has been a harrowing concept for me. When I was younger, I often used it as an excuse to be lazy since everything was already technically mapped out, whether by the powers that be or even just in blind trust in the Lord with my limited knowledge of how the world worked. School year after school year would follow in comforting lockstep, bleeding into the next without much for me to do to change that flow.

I felt a shift when I joined the workforce that so much of my fate depended on how hard I worked or what I did. I took on crazy schedules, did all of the overtime, found myself taking on countless projects (never quite noticing if they were being done well or sometimes even at all). I overexerted myself in the name of making a name for myself. All that running around did was wear me out.

The funny thing about time, beyond my regular joke about it being a construct, is it gives us the gift of perspective. I now see neither extreme was the point of how to approach life. The concept of fate is to give us the reassurance that things all work out in the end.

I flipped open to this verse randomly today. Could we call that fate? Or is my choosing this verse from where I opened the Word a reflection of what my heart has been combing over a lot lately? I've wondered just how responsible any of us can really be in the grand scheme of things.

Reflecting on this verse showed me the answer lies in including both sides. “The horse is made ready for the day of battle” indicates that we are responsible to do our part in preparing the way for the Lord in our lives. If He has placed abilities or desires in our hearts, we are to honor Him by doing our part as His vessels to walk them out. However, “...but victory rests with the Lord” carries both that God is glorified in our success when we pursue things and the trust that if and when we fail along the way He's paved for us, continuing to trust and work will show us His glory.

What's in store for you? Victory in the Lord no matter what you face.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to rest in your victory as we approach situations in our lives, from the mundane to the magnificent and everything in between. Help us reflect your glory and inspire others to see the peace that surpasses all understanding that comes from walking with You. Amen.

Sunday, March 3, 2024

Simplify
Marjory Grusky

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. - 1 Timothy 6: 6-7

Now that Clarisse is 13, she is interested in watching movies with more developed plots. We recently watched the movie "Ghost" which has some wonderful spiritual messages. I was really impressed with one of Patrick Swayze's last lines spoken as his spirit is lifted off into heaven, "It's amazing Molly. The love inside, you take it with you." That resonated with me as being true. We are not able to take up any possessions, but we can take up the love we have for others.

As my chosen scripture states, striving for godliness and contentment brings joy to God and others. That is one way I try to simplify. Prioritizing people over things. When I think about it all we leave behind are memories with our loved ones. The material "stuff" we thought was so special to us often won't matter to anyone else. I am trying to consciously slow down, be present for others and simplify my goals and expectations. I heard it said that no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. I hope I can be remembered for caring and bringing joy to others.

It is easier for me to declutter and simplify my home when I remember what the end goal is. For me the end goal is having a tidy, peaceful home where I can offer hospitality to friends who want to play and sing hymns on the ukulele with me. My friends tell me how much it uplifts them. This helps me so much when it comes to letting go of stuff I don't need anymore. I want to have room for the new direction I am going in and the new ways I want to serve God. I believe singing hymns serves God and the forces of good. I am grateful for Lipyeow Lim and Dylan Laine on YouTube. They present tutorials for classic Christian hymns on ukulele that I can use with my friends. (Just in case anyone is interested)

Another way I have found to serve God that is simple is to sponsor a child through Compassion International. With a small monthly fee, I can write to a very sweet girl in Ethiopia named Melat. I can write encouraging letters at my convenience but the payoff is huge. Last Christmas I sent a little extra money and they sent back a picture of her with a goat her family bought. They put a bow around its hoof. It was the best money I have ever spent. It was simple for me to do on my part but felt priceless. That is one of the best choices I ever made.

Prayer: Dear God, please guide us to simplify our lives so we have time and peace of mind to serve you well and relish in the joys and beauty of your creations. Amen

Monday, March 4, 2024

Rest in the Midst of Struggles

Andrew Grove

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. - Matthew 11:28-30

Life's burdens can be heavy, and as we navigate through the difficulties, we are reminded that we don't have to carry them alone. Jesus extends his loving invitation to find rest in him. His promise is not a removal of the challenges, but a sharing of the load, a partnership where His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

As we navigate through life's challenges, let us take a moment in prayer to come to Jesus with the weariness and burdens we carry. In this sacred space, lay them at his feet and open your heart to his comforting presence.

Consciously take on the yoke of Jesus, recognizing it as an invitation to a shared journey where we can find guidance and strength in his teachings.

Reflect on the gentleness and humility of Jesus, understanding that in the midst of our struggles, He is not a distant and harsh taskmaster but a compassionate and understanding companion on the journey.

As we embrace this Lenten season, allow Jesus to bring rest to your soul. In times of difficulty, find solace in his presence and the assurance that you are not alone on this path.

Prayer: Gracious God, we come to you with our weariness and burdens. In the midst of our struggles, help us to take on the yoke of Jesus, finding rest for our souls. May we learn from his gentleness and humility, trusting that his burden is light. Amen.

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Two Things

Chris Walters

Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"
Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments. - Matthew 22:36-40

The Bible is full of laws, commandments, strong suggestions and wise advice. Just in the Old Testament, there are 613 Jewish commandments, which feels pretty overwhelming. I have no idea how you could remember what they all are, much less get anywhere close to following them all.

Jesus definitely did us a favor by narrowing the important things to remember down to just two. Love God completely. And love everybody else too. So simple! And yet somehow we as humans work hard to make things very complicated for ourselves every day.

For Lent this year, I hope that we can each bring ourselves back to the most important and simple things that Jesus asked us to do. Work to bring ourselves closer to the God who loves us and share that love God gives us with our neighbors near and far.

Prayer: Thank you God for the gift of your unconditional love that you show us every day. We pray that you not only help us to heal our own brokenness, but that you will give us the courage to share your love to heal others as well.

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Gratitude
Helen Christie

Give us this day our daily bread. - Luke 11: 2-4

That request is included in the Lord's prayer which Jesus taught his disciples. Recently I have been thinking about how graciously it has been fulfilled for me.

As I grow older, and spend more time alone at home, I am aware of how important meal times have become for me as part of my daily routine. I enjoy such a variety of tasty, nourishing food – and I don't always remember to offer God a prayer of gratitude.

Thinking of this, I recalled a visit, many years ago, to a Methodist Preschool class.

When it was snack time, the children all sat around the table, hands in lap, while the teacher placed a snack in front of each one. Then she led them in a short prayer: "God is great; God is good. Let us thank him for our food."

I know it is a little bit late for a New Year's Resolution, but from now on I am going to try to say a short prayer of gratitude each time I sit down for a meal.

Prayer: Thank you for the food I will eat or have eaten today, Lord. Amen.

Thursday, March 7, 2023

Keep It Simple

Sylvia Grieb

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. - Matthew 6:34

How often we build scenarios about what may happen tomorrow. Worrying about tomorrow detracts from living today.

My favorite acronym is KISS.... Keep it simple, stupid! I learned about that in studying genetics. Scientists were trying to figure out this complicated structure and mechanism of inheritance and it turned out to be simple. If it is complicated, it is probably wrong....

My daughter often calls me about some concern and wonders about her choices and the decisions to be made. I often say to her “You don’t have enough information yet – wait, don’t worry.” That is the hardest thing to do is **wait** and have faith that when the time comes you will know what the decision should be.

When the time was right, I made the decision to sell my house and buy a condo. There **were** concerns about finding the right place and the timing of moving out. There was time needed to go through everything in the house and to decide what I really needed to keep. That was really a case of KISS.... We don’t need more... we need to simplify our lives by not accumulating stuff we don’t need or creating worries about tomorrow. Needless to say, I found the right place and I say thank you every day. It has reinforced my faith that things will take care of themselves if we are patient and prepare. The secret is to simply enjoy today. Take a walk, look at the flowers and watch the birds and appreciate the gifts we have been given.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to be patient and to keep our lives and thoughts simple. Help us to not over complicate things by worry. Strengthen our faith and help us appreciate what we have. Amen.

Friday, March 8, 2024

All We Need is Each Other

Tricia Taper

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. - Luke 12:15

We are making the big move to South Carolina this summer for a one year trial to be closer to our family and so many emotions are coming up. Packing up the house seems so daunting, but this scripture really strikes a chord with me. I'm very guilty of wanting more and the next best thing and as I go through our home looking at what to take with us or to give away really has me thinking on the theme to simplify. Making this move we are all going to be simplifying our lives by slowing down and being surrounded with what really matters... being with each other, family and God. That's what truly really makes a home anyways.

Prayer: Help us to shift our focus from our possessions to the more important things – like each other and You. Amen.

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Giving

Pastor Wayne Walters

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” - Matthew 6:1-4

I find this passage directive and powerful. This is part of a larger passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus is telling his followers to give a lot of what they have to those who are poor and suffering. At the time there were several people in synagogues who when they gave money or food to someone or a group got the attention of others with a trumpet and reported what they had given.

Matthew is telling us that God already knows what we have given. The key is giving to others and not getting lots of attention and affirmation from others for doing so.

Do we ever give to others without telling someone or a number of people what we did?

Prayer: Help us to give more freely with a grateful heart. Amen.

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Rest

Cari Wright

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. - Psalm 91:1-2

The idea seems so simple, to rest as we dwell in God's shelter. We can trust that He will rescue us in times of trouble, rejoice with us in times of success, and encourage us to relax in His care. But we don't always find it to be that simple. We are stressed out, rushing around, and checking our phones. Social media is stealing our time and ideas, making us think we are doing something when we aren't. Instead of going inward and finding peace, we're escaping that place God wants us to go and filling the void with distraction.

We think that we need to be going and doing something all day, and God wants us to stop, rest, and reflect on His love and protection. We can trust that He is in control, and He is a place to go that no phone will ever take us. His loving arms are outstretched all day long. We just have to run to Him and rest.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to reach out to You instead of our phones and help us to know that we will find the rest and peace that we need to face the days that you give us. Help us to resist escaping this wonderful life you have given us and show us how to lean into You and Your promises as we dwell in your shelter and rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Amen.

Monday, March 11, 2024

Paul
Michael Graves

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Paul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. - Acts 9:1-9

When I was a child, my family vacations were spent camping at one of the local north Texas lakes. My mom and dad had made the tent we used. It was an ugly box-shaped thing with a hand painted roof for water proofing. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was a little Jewish guy who made his living as a tent maker. I wonder what he would have thought of my family's camping tent. More importantly, his tent making profession would have acquainted him with people from all around the known world (the Roman empire at that time). After his conversion experience he spent the rest of his life nurturing the new churches around the Mediterranean world. Although he was a devout practicing Jew, he felt he needed to extend his faith to include non-Jewish people as well. This led to the whole Roman empire eventually becoming the Church, with all the influence it would exert over Europe and western civilization up to the present. Thus, historians argue that Paul is the most important individual in the history of western civilization.

We may never have a "Damascus Road Experience" like the one Paul had, but I believe that God still stops us in subtle ways as we rush through our daily lives. Maybe to tell us we need to change the directions in our lives. Maybe to simplify our lives and concentrate on what is really important.

Prayer: Help us to concentrate on what is really important today and every day. Amen.

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Our True Beauty is Inside of Us

Kari Hanson

Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, but rather what is inside the heart – the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight. - 1 Peter 3:3-4

One's character is that which has true value! In this passage we are reminded of the timeless truth that true beauty transcends the outward appearance. As we journey through this season of Lent, let us reflect on the deeper meaning of beauty. In a world that often places great emphasis on physical appearance, Peter challenges us to redefine our understanding of beauty and reminds us that true beauty emanates from the inner qualities of the heart and spirit.

During Lent, as we engage in fasting, prayer and self-reflection, we should disregard the layers of superficiality and cultivate our inner virtues that reflect the character of Christ. So as we seek to simplify our lives during this season of Lent, let us simplify our understanding of beauty, shifting our focus on external perfection to the cultivation of our inner qualities, such as kindness, humility and compassion. These are the qualities that truly reflect the image of God within us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we ask for Your grace on this day to help us redefine our understanding of beauty and help us see beyond the outward appearances and cultivate the inner qualities that reflect Your character. May our lives be a reflection of Your beauty and grace. Amen.

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Simplicity of Heart

Howard Milligan

Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth: think of the Lord with a good (heart,) and in simplicity of heart seek him. - Wisdom of Solomon 1:1

What is simplicity of heart? I feel that "simplicity of heart" is the basic innocence and purity we are all born with as human beings. As we grow, life becomes complex, we learn to doubt, we second guess ourselves, and at times we may even question God's plan. Sometimes we need a mental and spiritual reset, and to seek out God, outside of the complexity of the world around us.

Prayer: Dear God, Please help us let go of the troubles we carry with us every day. Please help us to live, and love and worship without the distractions the world puts in front of us. Amen.

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Paths

Adriana Ruhman

Then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. - Psalm 91:10-11

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. - Proverbs 16:9

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. - Psalm 19:105

One of the things that I love to do the most is backpacking. I love thinking about where to go, when to go, what gear to take, what to wear, which dehydrated food and snacks will suffice on a 3-7 day trek. For me the planning and anticipation of the trip is almost as much fun as the actual journey. Nature is inherently wild and stepping into a wilderness is a leap of faith. I am blessed with beautiful family and friends that hike mountain tops, walk through canyons, meander along desert sands and saunter the sierras with me. With them I feel strong and secure even though we are often far from transportation and at best have spotty cell service. Yet even with proper preparation and in the company of the best people, unfortunate things still happen. Only God can carry us through the unexpected, the difficult, the painful and the insurmountable. The scripture assures us that God will protect us and guide us. That though we make plans, we are in God's hands and he will guide us until our life journey is done and he welcomes us home.

Prayer: Almighty God, Thank you for all the paths we are compelled to follow. Sometimes we walk in awe of your creation relishing in our ability to enjoy the beauty around us and at other times we struggle with every step. Thank you for guiding us and protecting us along the way. We exist by your grace, by your will and we are at your service. In Christ our lord and savior's name we pray. Amen

Friday, March 15, 2024

Less is More

Dylan Price

For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. - 1 Timothy 6:7-8:

This scripture serves as a reminder to seek contentment in the simple things in life. It suggests that material possessions (aside from basic necessities) are fleeting and ultimately unfulfilling. Because of this, it is important to strive for a modest lifestyle, all the while maintaining a sense of satisfaction and gratitude. In doing so, we can focus more on our relationship with God and the enrichment of our spiritual lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please grant us the peace to be content with what we have and to lead a life of simplicity so that we may better focus on our connection with You and carrying out Your will.

Saturday, March 16, 2024

What a Wonderful World

Vicki Borland

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."
– Psalm 96:11-12

I see trees of green
Red roses too
I see them bloom
For me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

I see skies of blue
And clouds of white
The bright blessed day
The dark sacred night
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

The colors of the rainbow
So pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands
Saying "How do you do?"
They're really saying
I love you

I hear babies cry
I watch them grow
They'll learn much more
Than I'll ever know
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world
Yes, I think to myself
What a wonderful world

This beautiful song was a special favorite of my husband, Lynn. He, in fact, chose it for the father-daughter dance at our daughter, Angie's, wedding 25 years ago. It does such a great job of reminding us of blessings we sometimes take for granted in our often complicated daily lives. As we strive to simplify in the days ahead let's remember to be grateful for the many simple joys that are always with us.

Prayer: Dear God it can be difficult to slow the pace of our very busy lives. Please help us as we strive to learn to simplify and enjoy the many special blessings we are surrounded by daily. Amen

Sunday, March 17, 2024

Simple Gifts

Patrick Healy

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.

—Psalm 119:37 (NKJV)

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free

—Shaker Hymn

I've discovered Scripture has a lot to say about the virtues and rewards of simplicity, though you rarely find that specific word in any of the translations. But that's the word that comes to my mind when I read, for example, Psalm 119's 37th verse, as I imagine it did many centuries ago for the Society of Friends who came to be known as the Quakers, and their offshoot the Shakers. It's more than advice not to get distracted from what is truly important. It's a directive to take control of and focus our spiritual lives by pruning away what is unnecessary. In their Christian faith tradition—not all that different from ours as Methodists—Quakers came to believe that we come nearer to divinity by peeling off the outer layers of pretense and affectation. Simplify!

It's not a complete refutation of material things, but a commitment to keeping them in their place. And our lives will be better for it.

Years ago in New England, I visited a Shaker village, and came away profoundly moved by the joy the Shakers found in simple lives with simple things. They looked at an unadorned chair or table, and saw God's design. I knew that a Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*, had been the source of a soaringly powerful melody that composer Aaron Copland quoted for his *Appalachian Spring*. But for the first time, I heard and grasped the hymn's plain words, which describe the value of attaining "true simplicity":

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free

'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be.

And when we find ourselves in the place just right,

'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

Prayer: Lord, help us find the strength to pursue what is right and true. And to remember that simplifying our lives is not to seek deprivation, but to accept a gift. Amen.

Monday, March 18, 2024

Sea Monsters

Ruth Dewar

In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. - Psalm 18: 6-8 (NRSV)

So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves. - Genesis 1:21

Since religion seems to so often be presented very seriously, I particularly enjoy the image of God as a dragon breathing fire — very different from the images of Jesus dying on the cross.

I also enjoy reading that God created sea monsters as well as cute little bunnies. No doubt the author was referring to whales and sharks, but I enjoy the image of sea monsters, such as were drawn on old maps, representing God's creativity. We don't have to be serious ALL the time, eh?

Prayer: Help us find joy and amusement in your creations. Amen.

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Daily Focus

Mark Allen

"For we live by faith, not by sight." - Corinthians 5:7

It's easy to get distracted daily by the rabbit holes, the distractions, the viral videos, the breaking news, the latest pop star news. All is good fun and indeed entertaining, but we are reminded here that our daily focus that nourishes us, empowers us, cleanses us, and heals us is our faith, not the distractions that bombard us daily.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see through the daily distractions and to keep our hearts open to your guidance and your love. In sweet Jesus, we pray. Amen

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

God's Presence

Mary Sue Hart

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." Psalm 139:7-10

God seeks us—all of our lives! Those are some powerful words of assurance in this psalm.

In times of celebration, His presence and grace remind me of all I have to appreciate. In times of trouble, I am helped to develop the mindfulness to be aware of God's guidance and support. And when there is sadness, confusion or pain, the psalmist reminds me the sustaining presence of God is felt, sometimes through the words of comfort and help of friends and family.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for showing us again in this Easter season, through your sacrifice, that your love for us is always present. For all the good we hope for, the forgiveness we ask for and the healing we pray for, You are the source we seek. Amen.

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Wonderfully Made

Barbara Schaffer

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. - Psalm 139:13-14

I got my graduate degree in Molecular Biology from UCLA. Throughout my studies I became entranced with how incredible our bodies are, how they work on both the large scale and the smallest cellular and molecular scales. Here are two examples.

The process of cell division is one that occurs throughout our bodies so they can grow, also to replace old cells that die with new ones to keep our bodies functioning. But to create two new cells that are identical to the old one they come from requires our cell's genetic material, the DNA inside our dividing cell, to replicate first in a process called *mitosis* so that a complete set of DNA assort itself into each of the two new resulting cells. How does this complex task of creating two new sets of DNA from the original

one occur without error? There is a “proofreading” ability of an enzyme involved; if a mistake occurs, it can be recognized by that enzyme and corrected! Amazing!

On a larger scale, when I was working in Sudan for half a year with Doctors Without Borders, I arrived as the hot season was just beginning to get underway (in February) and was there through the rainy season that breaks the heatwave and drought, starting (that year) by the end of May. Two personal items that I was glad I brought with me were thermometers, one for the air temperature — which got up to 120° F every day of the hot season — and a thermometer to put under my tongue to check my body temperature.

We had no air conditioning in our thatched huts or offices, so we were in the heat constantly, which only got down to about 100° F by dawn, and then quickly shot up to 120° F for the rest of the day. On days that I felt particularly hot I worried that my core body temperature might be too high, so I’d check it with my oral thermometer, shaking it down before I put it in my mouth. *But each and every time I checked it as soon as I took it out of my mouth, the thermometer read exactly 98.6°!* I would never have believed how well my body’s cooling system worked if I hadn’t been able to check it myself!

All of these highly complex processes, from the sub-cellular level to the way our entire body can adjust to hot climates, are carried out automatically — without us having to think about them or even be aware of them. God has made it simple for us; all we have to do is live our lives. And with so much to be thankful for, I hope that we remember to live our lives with simple gratitude for all that God has given us.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the wonderful way that our bodies are made! Help us to live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to you. Amen.

Friday, March 22, 2024

Know that I am God

Christopher Breck

Stop fighting, and know that I am God - Psalm 46:10

I chose this because two years ago these words became real for me. I grew up with limited exposure to faith. I spent my life doing my best with the tools I had, and I made a beautiful mess of things until I was shown that my idea of 'best' wasn't what was required. Today, I follow a very simple set of guiding principles, and everything works out differently and better than I could have planned.

Since I was a child, I believed that I was supposed to fight and win. I did not want to fight against others, but my mindset was one of constant struggle. I believed that life was a series of uncomfortable events that I should 'deal with,' move on, and this would continue until I died. My life was not rooted in something sustainable, and this was evident to all my friends, who could see its expression in my mood and mental health. Ten years ago, mine was an outwardly 'successful' life. And in no way was it simple. I ran my own company on my own schedule, I engaged in athletics of all kinds, and I was very social, both with my friend group, and supporting their causes. I kept very busy. I had carefully, yet precariously, constructed what I thought was a worthy life, never realizing my foundations were made of clay. And when life swept away all support, my life was simplified for me. First my business, then my health, then my home were removed until all I was left with was the love of my friends, who were a constant source of support.

I know now that I was being given a gift. In 2015 I injured my spine, which led to seven years of injuries, surgeries, and recoveries. Much of that time was spent in the hospital or immobile at home. Little by little, as more and more metal rods and screws were added to my spine, my ability to 'fight' was taken from me. The day came when I could no longer find my own way forward, and I gave up.

This turned out to be the start of something beautiful. I looked inward, and I developed a practice of prayer and meditation, not just the 'sometimes' prayers and practices in which I had always engaged. Gradually, the battle in my head slowed, and then ceased. Everything became very quiet, and a way out of my predicament appeared. I'm not going to say it was easy. It was excruciating, and that has made it all the more rewarding.

Today, my new life bears little outward resemblance to the old. There is very little left that someone else might point to and say they want. It is what they can't see, what was sparked inside me, that is worth everything to me. Not only would I not trade my new life for the old, I would endure those seven years again to keep it.

P.S. That 'simple set of guiding principles' includes prayer, meditation, fasting, spending time alone in nature, and listening to others so I can understand their problems and perhaps help them in some way. Can you guess from whom I draw my inspiration?

Prayer: May we all stop fighting and know that you are God. Amen.

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Less is More
Michelle Achen

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice. - Proverbs 16:8

When thinking how to simplify our lives, minimalism comes to mind. In my house, filled with the love of Barbies, American Girl dolls, trucks and other assorted toys, not to mention too many collections of mine, I am still trying to figure that out!! And those of you who know The Achen family know what our garage looks like!! That said, I am hopeful that in the near future, we can make some changes! John and Irina buying their first Condo has inspired me, their purging and getting ready for the move made me realize I need to embrace "less is more"!

Another favorite verse is of mine is "*Choose to live simply and keep your eyes on Him. God gives us far more than we could even imagine*" Psalm 84:11. By focusing on the Lord and the Spirit, it will be easier to avoid the mindset of more is better and live a more simple life. Easy to fill our minds and life with "stuff" and forget that God wants us to have our hearts and minds fixed on all He has for us. Physical and "mind clutter" can be exhausting! I know! By simplifying your thinking and trusting the Lord, you can be open to new possibilities. Release distractions, believe in His word and regain a sense of peace within you. Spring is coming, a good time to start the process of cleaning out and simplifying our lives!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for showing me the way to "Let go" and "Let God". Help me to find "balanced living" and to trust in all you have for us. Let me focus on what is really important and less on " things". You've given us the power of prayer. Your blessings surround us every minute of every day. In His Name and in gratitude, Amen.

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Palm Sunday
Ross Chitwood

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!' - John 12:13 (NIV)

Palm Sunday stirs within us a mixture of joy and solemnity as we remember Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We join the crowd in shouting "Hosanna!" and waving palm branches, but we also sense the weight of the journey that lies ahead. In this moment, let's simplify our hearts and open them to Jesus, welcoming him not just as a triumphant king but as a friend who understands our struggles and walks with us through every trial.

As we wave our symbolic palm branches, let's reflect on the ways we can simplify our lives to better follow Jesus. Let's embrace his humility and selflessness, letting go of our own ambitions and desires. Let's invite him into the Jerusalem of our hearts, allowing his presence to bring peace and purpose to our lives.

May this holy week be a time of deepening our relationship with Jesus, of laying aside our burdens at his feet, and of experiencing the transformative power of his love. And as we journey towards Easter, may our souls resound with the cry of "Hosanna!", as we move our hearts closer to our King and Savior.

Prayer: Loving God, As we enter into this holy week, we invite you to simplify our hearts and draw us closer to you. Help us to embrace the humility and selflessness of Jesus, and to walk in his footsteps each day. May this journey towards Easter be a time of renewal and transformation in our lives. Amen.

Monday, March 25, 2024

Humility
Bryce Swanson

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- Philippians 2:3-4

Today we live in a world seemingly dominated by social media & due to the nature of that platform, humility seems to be on the decline. It is important to note that humility is still being practiced in our daily lives whenever we connect with others in meaningful & personal ways. So, we can take some comfort in knowing that we can make these types of connections at church. And as a reminder, everyone is welcome to attend our in-person church services, which occur every Sunday morning at 10:00!

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to be altruistic in all of our interactions with others. Amen.

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Simplify
Sunday School children

But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all things shall be added to you. - Matthew 6:33

When I asked the children in Sunday School what the word "simplify" meant to them in their lives, after some discussion about the meaning, there was 100% agreement. No homework, no school!! After a bit more discussion and reading a few Bible verses, they kind of brainstormed and chose this Bible verse as their favorite. Simple and to the point.

Here are some of their impressive ideas about "simplify":

Juliet: If a friend asks you to do something, and you don't want to do it, then do not do it. That will make life easier.

Claire: Do less Kumon math and have more time to play. God can help you with this.

Bella: Simplify by having more time to sleep. Don't worry and pray about what is hard for you.

Audrey: Do less and then you can spend more time with your cousins and friends. God loves you.

Miss Amanda: Simplify by taking a day at a time and believe God will work on your behalf.

Trust in the Lord. Keep Calm and simplify. All good ideas from our Sunday School!!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to realize God wants our lives to be less complicated. Let us focus on God's everlasting love and know we can turn anything over to Him. And of course a little less homework would be helpful! Amen.

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Lenten Devotion

Lisa McCord

Each of you should use whatever gifts you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. - 1 Peter 4: 10-11

To me, it is simple. Use your gifts that God has blessed you with to serve Him. In serving God, with all our strength we are praising Him and therefore, God will be glorified. I photograph to serve God and to serve the people in the communities that I'm a part of. It delights me to see other people use their gifts to serve God and others, whether it be the United Methodist Women, working for the bazaar, outreach, teaching, and children performing in the Christmas play. This makes our church a joyful place to be.

Prayer: Dear God, I am grateful for the gifts you have blessed me with to serve You and others. Please show me the ways to be of service, in the unique ways You created me to honor You in the world. Amen.

Thursday, March 28, 2024

The Beginning

Carli Wright

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. – Genesis 1:1

With the theme of Simplify running through my mind, I couldn't help but look at the first and arguably simplest verse in the Bible underpinning everything that comes next: life as we know it began at a word from God.

As a child, I never gave this sentence much thought. It was such a no brainer, I couldn't understand how there could be people in the world who didn't understand this. It's amazing how much we think we know when we're young. The older I got, the more I realized just how much I didn't know.

Such a simple sentence could have so many meanings! I never became more aware of that than when I got deeper into Linguistics in college. Is this as literal as it seems? Was this phrased a certain way in the source language that could have been interpreted differently by a reader of that time? What does "created" mean exactly when you put various scientific theories alongside this word?

It can be really easy to get off track, even with the simplest of things. I'm guilty of following a bunny trail scenic route ten times out of nine, even when the easiest path is clearly marked, would take half the time, and I'm in a rush.

So, in honor of our theme, what is the simple take away from this phrase? For me, it's that we can rest in knowing the parameters of our experience were set up by the Almighty. Yes, as we read on, we see the impact of sin on humanity, the establishment of laws that proceeded to be broken by even the strongest of believers, the gracious deliverance from the wages of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and a new covenant of loving God and each other to guide the rest of time should we open our hearts enough to accept it. While this all may feel far from easy most of the time, it really is simple. All we have to do when things get complicated is return to the simple things for reassurance.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when the chaos of day to day life gets the best of us, help us find joy and peace in the simplicity of Your love. No matter what we've said or done, You love us, purely and simply. Thank You for your kindness and grace, and help us to reflect that same kindness and grace to those around us. Amen

Friday, March 29, 2024

GOOD FRIDAY

Ross Chitwood

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. - Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)

As we journey through Lent, the theme of "Simplify" beckons us to strip away the unnecessary clutter in our lives and rediscover profound beauty, in the simplicity of Christ. In a world filled with noise, distractions, and endless demands, Lent offers us a sacred pause—a chance to breathe deeply and refocus our hearts on what truly matters.

There's a tender invitation in Jesus's words, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened." It's an invitation to come as we are, with all our weariness and troubles, and find rest in his presence. Lent urges us to accept this invitation, to lay down the weight of our worries and anxieties, and to simply be with Jesus.

Simplifying our lives isn't just about decluttering our physical spaces; it's about decluttering our hearts. It's about releasing the grip of material possessions, the allure of success, and the pressure of perfectionism, and instead, embracing the gentle rhythm of grace that Jesus offers. It's about creating space to hear whispers of the Holy Spirit amidst the chaos of our busy lives.

I hope that during this Lenten season, we've taken intentional steps to simplify our lives, and to carve out moments of stillness for prayer and reflection. Let's seek out opportunities to serve others with love and compassion and, together, cultivate a sense of gratitude for the simple blessings that surround us each day.

In the simplicity of Lent, may we find a deeper intimacy with God and a renewed sense of purpose in our journey of faith. Though it can sometimes feel like a struggle, may we be more like Mary, choosing the one thing that is necessary—sitting at the feet of Jesus and soaking in his presence.

Prayer: Loving God, In the midst of our busy lives, you call us to simplicity—to come as we are and find rest in your presence. Help us to heed your gentle invitation and declutter our hearts of all that distracts us from you. During this Lenten journey, may we be intentional in simplifying our lives, making space for prayer, service, and moments of quiet reflection. Renew our spirits and deepen our relationship with you, so that we may walk more closely with Jesus each day. We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus, who beckons us to simplicity and leads us on the path of abundant life. Amen.

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Enough

Chris Walters

That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? - Matthew 6:25-27

It's been almost exactly a year since we got the keys to our new home in Mammoth, where we will be moving to in July. The move process is a little tricky since I have been wanting to start setting up our new place, but much of what we will be taking with us is still here in the Palisades. We have at least bought some new furniture though, so we are able to spend some time there in the months before our move. I find it a little funny each time I go though because anyone who would visit would see that it's not exactly "complete" (e.g. we have a folding table and chairs for dining).

The last time I was there, I was struck that even though my kitchen cabinets and closets are only about 20% full, I really had no problem doing most anything I needed. Granted I have to wash dishes a lot more where there are only two plates. But it did make me think about how simple it was to manage with so much less "stuff" and wonder how much of what we possess, do we really need. And then I read scripture like this that basically says we need almost no possessions at all. I am hopeful that I can be reminded of this call to simplicity as we continue to prepare for our move.

Prayer: God, please help us to remember that we can trust you to care for what we truly need and that worry only takes our focus away from you. Allow us to find the joy and comfort in the simplicity you intend for our lives.

Sunday, March 31, 2024

Easter

Wayne Walters

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" - John 20:11-15a

This is the text we are going to use Easter morning. We likely will use more of it. But I think this captures a lot of the essence of Jesus being alive after his supposed death. And this section emphasizes how Mary Magdalene was caught up in her experience and belief of what happened to Jesus. Jesus was before her, but she didn't believe it was him.

I understand that she was very upset and believed that what happened was tragic and nothing could happen that would reverse it. We experience a lot of tragedies in our life and understandably are hit every time with them and sometimes may think that we are alone are the one suffering. And that may be. But Jesus and God are with us through all things in life and beyond life.

May we be reminded on Easter Sunday that Jesus and God are with us. And Jesus will continue to lead us and comfort us. May we follow him in all things, good and bad!

