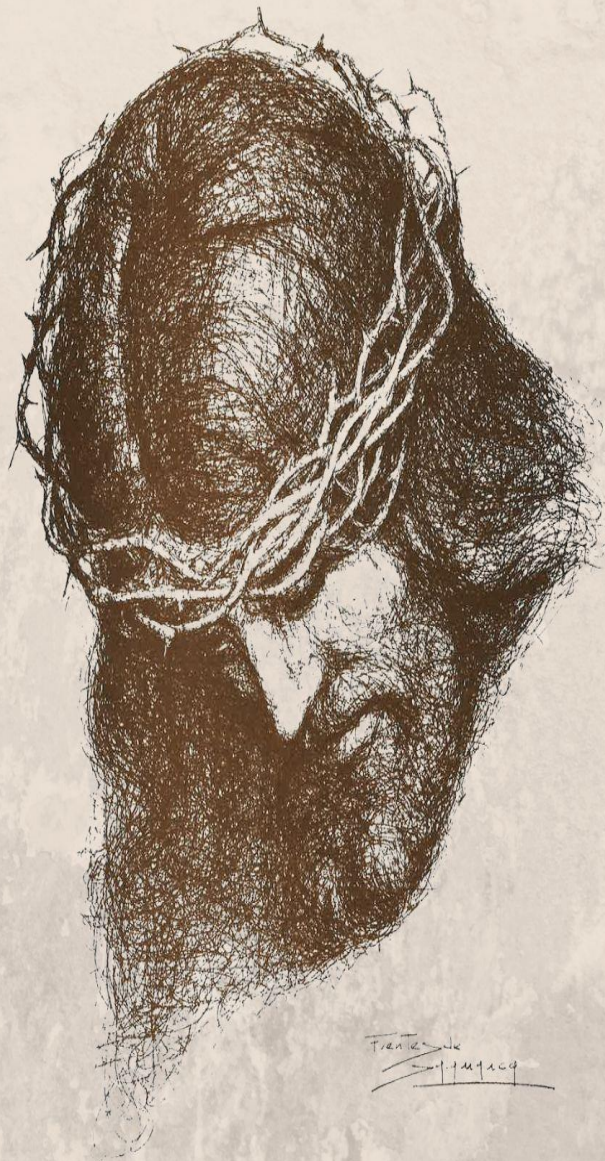


# JOURNEY THROUGH LENT



GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SPENCER, IOWA  
2024

## DEVOTIONAL LISTING

The Mark of the Cross, Linda Wittstruck.....Grateful, Linda O'Clair  
Lenten Prayer, Darline Hughes.....Stay Positive, Jane Ingledue  
Use Me, Craig Cadman.....Servant Leadership, John Cotton  
God's Creation, Jan Watson.....God's Promise of Peace, Judith Olson  
We are God's Field, Dorothy DeGroot.....Affirmation Station, Brownie Small  
The Good Shepherd, Lisa Elliott.....Being Kind, Everette Handy  
The Wife of Noble Character, Kristin Schwenneker  
Christ Working through Us, Sue Hitchcock.....Aging Parent, Roger Ingledue  
Cherry Pickers, William McAlpine.....Love Is, Jenn Pullen-Ingledue  
Judging Others, Donna Todd .....I Am Enough, Alison Herman  
Trust, Faith & Grace, Brad Johnson.....My Little Princess, Marietta Johnson  
Why Do We Pray, Pastor Barrie Tritle  
The Right Answer, Sheryl Larson.       The Way, the Truth, the Life, Thorne Wittstruck  
Onward Christians Soldiers, Bri Pullen.....Holy Week Lament, Larry Oswald  
Change of Times, Nancy Hoffman.....Letting Go, Crystal Handy  
Longing for God, Shirley Oswald.....We Shall Overcome, Shurmaine McAlpine  
Press On, Linda Wittstruck.....Methodist Hymns, Thorne Wittstruck  
God, the Navigator, Kevin Tlam  
Teach Us to Live, Vada Calhoon  
Walk in Faith, Bailey Swanson  
God is Able to Do What God Promises, Kae Tritle  
Don't Take Your Focus Off of Jesus, Anita Edwards  
Just Trust, Mike/Darlene Carlson  
Promise to Peace to Hope, Cyndi O'Hara  
Are You Living a Cautious Life?, Sandy Heerdt  
The Ties that Bind in these Changing Times, L. Elaine Orthmann  
What Can I Do, Lord, Becky Prentice  
Much Has Been Given, Bonnie Foust

## **An Invitation to Lenten Disciplines to Grow in Grace**

Lent is a season of preparation for Easter. It is a Season of 40 days starting on Ash Wednesday. What can we do for 40 days that will intentionally put ourselves in a position so that God can work on our lives with Grace? What spiritual disciplines can we do that will open us up to God's Grace, heal our souls, challenge us to growth, and give us depth of learning?

In reading the Gospel of Matthew in Chapter 6, we find directions about practicing our good deeds, our prayer life, and our fasting. These three things are at the heart of most people's disciplines during Lent. Fasting from something so that you may give more to help those in need and can spend more time with God in prayer.

The whole goal is to transform our lives by growing in grace. Ruth Haley Barton puts it this way in her book Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership:

“Spiritual Transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives and for the sake of others.”

I invite you to this journey. I am delighted that members of our Congregation have provided you a daily devotion to help you Grow in Grace. May you be blessed as you read, meditate, and pray. May you also find ways during Lent to reorder your time to carve out specific time for God so you can Grow in Grace. This may mean giving up something so you have time for God; it may mean volunteering to help others during Lent so you can serve God; it may mean finding a way to give of your resources to others in the name of God. Whatever you can do, bless and help you Grow in Grace.

Blessings

Pastor Barrie Tritle



help  
God will

## **FEBRUARY 14 – ASH WEDNESDAY**

### **The Mark of the Cross**

*“Then Jesus told his disciples, If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* Matthew 16:24

A story that my family loved to share about my sister, who was a United Methodist minister, reminds us every year about the significance of Ash Wednesday. She was preparing for an Ash Wednesday service where she always marked each congregant with the sign of the cross on their forehead. This one year she decided to use oil instead of ashes, choosing cinnamon oil. After prayers and hymns, one by one each person came forward to receive the sign of the cross on their forehead and then kneel at the railing. A young boy received the oil on his forehead; and within a few seconds, he started rubbing his forehead. Others seemed to be concerned about their marks as well. As they took their seats, the people could see that the oil had left a red cross on each of them, leaving them wondering how long the cross on their forehead would last. When my sister realized that the oil she had used was too strong, she apologized profusely, and there were some chuckles around the church.

This story turned into a teachable moment for my sister, for us, and for the congregation. The cross is a sign that Jesus died for each of us. How does that impact our lives? We don't always realize that the cross that we are marked with has changed our lives forever. It is not always easy to bear the cross of Christ. Let us try to live our lives with courage and conviction in the knowledge that Jesus died for each of us.

One of my favorite hymns is on Page 159 of the United Methodist Hymnal: Lift High the Cross.

“Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore His sacred name.”

Linda Wittstruck

## **FEBRUARY 15**

### **Lenten Prayer – What to Give Up for Lent**

What should I give up for Lent, Dear Lord?

My dear child, He answers, give yourself to Me

And I will help you find the answer.

Give up your greed for money and things,

So you are willing to pledge and tithe.

Give up time spent on useless endeavors,

Instead give time to the lonely and poor in spirit.

Give up misunderstanding and hatred.

Give love and compassion to sisters and brothers.

Give up gossip and ill will, but give words of praise and cheer.

Give up a forbidding countenance but give smiles so others will smile.

Give up apathy and claim empathy and give care and healing.

Give up running from me, says the Lord, but draw near to me.

Amen.

Written by Darline A. Hughes

Submitted by her daughter, Cyndi O'Hara

## **FEBRUARY 16**

### **USE ME**

“Here I am Lord; do with me whatever you wish”. A quote mostly attributed to John Wesley and a part of many prayers and a song or two which might be going through your head as you read this (you’re welcome for that ear worm!).

As we move through the season of Lent, we are challenged to reflect and, I dare say, act on our reflections on how to best become followers of Christ. I believe that we are here to do good, to help others, to share our time and talents with others, for others. “Do with us whatever you wish” I hope pushes us to reach out of ourselves, out of our comfort zone to help others. Being in a church, in a group of like-minded people who love and support each other, gives us a safe space to reach out and use our time and talents in the support of others. I am reminded that what we have is not ours; it belongs to the world.

I have had the great experience of working at a children’s camp for nearly 40 years. I was a somewhat unsure kid, unsure of what I was doing in life and where I was going. Through some encouragement and luck, I ended up working at Camp Laurel, a private, non-denominational recreational co-ed camp. The directors saw something in me and gave me a safe place, the tools, and the encouragement to be successful leading large meetings and to manage a large dining hall. These were talents that I apparently had but hadn’t recognized. They nurtured my joy and passion of working with children, being comfortable playing my ukulele and singing in front of church and sharing my time and talent with others hopefully for their enjoyment and inspiration. “Here I am Lord; do with me whatever you wish”.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe you can make a difference in the world so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to use your talents to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Amen.

Craig Cadman



## FEBRUARY 17

### God's Creation

*"The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."* Psalm 19:1

I grew up in a time when memorization was common. At school we memorized poetry, songs, the multiplication tables, and other items someone thought we should remember. In Girl Scouts we memorized the Promise and the Laws. In Sunday School and VBS, we memorized Bible verses and songs. One Bible verse that I memorized is the first verse of Psalm 19, a declaration of God's glory in creation. And I'm glad I still remember that verse.

As children, our first awareness of God and God as Creator comes as we notice and study the world around us. I loved sitting in the swing on my grandparents' farm because there I could hear the bees and flies, see butterflies and birds, smell the cattle and hogs, hear the roosters and hens. Sometimes one could sense crops growing. The whole cycle of life was visible on that farm. I saw kittens grow and become mother cats. I saw baby chicks grow so they could lay eggs for us and eventually become our dinner. On family trips across Nebraska, to the Rockies, to Yellowstone, to California, we soaked up the many and varied ways God's glory in creation is revealed to us. Fourteen billion years ago, the Creator brought all of this into being. And our awe and wonder never wanes. We gaze in delight at a single snowflake, a leaf, a bird, and the grandeur of a canyon, the view from a mountain top, or the endless prairie and stars in the skies. The challenge is to not take all of this for granted. Awe and glory are not simply for children.



**Prayer:** God of all, help us to appreciate and marvel at the majesty of your Creation. We thank and praise you for the mystery and beauty that surrounds us. Amen.

Jan Watson

## **FEBRUARY 18 – FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT**

### **DAY BY DAY**

Day by day, O dear Lord, these things I Pray:

To see thee more clearly,

Love thee more dearly,

Follow thee more nearly,

Day by day, by day, by day.

Music is an important part of worship. Hymns are rich sources for prayer. The musical, Godspell, uses an old \*prayer that is put to music.

\*by Saint Richard Chichester who died in 1255.

Say or sing these words out loud as you think about what it means to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly.

Thorne Wittstruck



**FEBRUARY 19**

**We Are God's Field**

1 Corinthians 3:9

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he says, "*For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building.*" As I read this verse, I ask, how does Paul's message relate to my life? How am I "God's field"?

I grew up on a farm and am familiar with the cyclical nature of planting corn and beans. You cultivate the land to prepare it for planting. You plant using superior quality seed. You control the weeds. Harvest comes after the crops have grown, and time and weather have matured them. All these steps occur in an appropriate order and timeframe. How do I cultivate my "land" – my mind and spirit? I attend church; I participate in small groups; I read the Bible; all help me grow closer to God.

How about the rocks found each year in the fields that can damage equipment? Removing the rocks is a continual process. What are spiritual "rocks" that I carry with me? How can I dig out those thoughts and experiences that interfere with my spirit and growing closer to God? What about the weeds? Are there habits and activities that interfere with my desire to improve my spiritual life? Pull them out!

Just as God provides the rain and the sun necessary to grow crops, I must turn to God for my "nutrients" to become a mature Christian. To test your spiritual soil, ask these questions: Am I holding on to sin that I need to let go? Have I allowed bitterness to take root in my life? Finally, what about the winter months when a field lies fallow to restore its health and usefulness? In the same way, I wait expectantly but patiently. It is in God's timing.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help me to be a good farmer in my own field. I want to grow a strong spiritual "crop" for God. Amen.

Dorothy DeGroot

## FEBRUARY 20

### The Good Shepherd

Read John 10:1-16

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me."* John 10:14

In Jesus' ministry He describes His care for us as being the good shepherd. He is the gatekeeper for the sheep, and they follow Him after He calls them by name. The sheep recognize His voice and come to Him; they follow by knowing His voice.

Sheep are capable of knowing their name, responding to calls to be fed, and crave attention. They were among the first animals to be domesticated, being naturally gentle. Studies have been done with face recognition showing that sheep remember up to fifty different humans and other sheep. They are also capable of having emotions like feeling afraid, angry, bored, sad and happy. These intelligent creatures form lasting bonds with each other and may grieve the loss of a flock member.

When life feels as if there is no calm or peace, I try to place the image of Jesus as the good shepherd and all He does for me in my thoughts. As the oldest in a family raising sheep, the image of the shepherd is very relatable to me. Through all the hard work as well as the fun times of shearing day, lambing time, bottle feeding, and fair shows, I have seen firsthand the bond sheep can have with their shepherd.

Jesus said, *"I know my own sheep and they know me...so I sacrifice my life for the sheep. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."* The image of the shepherd in a quiet pasture, perhaps holding a lamb, helps me. Jesus, my shepherd, knows my name and is always with me. His care and love for me is real. Sometimes I need to be quiet and listen for His voice. He will lead me away from harm and through the correct gate, if I follow Him.

**Prayer:** Loving Father, thank you for sending us your only son to teach us your love and care like a loving shepherd. Help me to remember I am never alone. Amen.

Lisa Elliott

## FEBRUARY 21

### The Wife of Noble Character

Read Proverbs 31:10-31

*“She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life...She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants...She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy...She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness...a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”*

Selected Verses

Applying Proverbs 31 to Your Life Today-----

- *Commit your life to Christ*
- *Pray and Study God’s Word*
- *Keep His Commandments and ask God to show you how to implement them in your life*
- *Accept God’s grace in your life and let His love shine through you*

I fully believe that I try to honor the LORD in being the person he wants me to be and to provide for my family through many areas, not only in financial abilities but also in guidance and example. I am a sinner, and I show how I ask for forgiveness when I am led astray. I try to remember those in need and put them before myself, but it is always hard; I continually ask for guidance with this. I am not perfect, but I know I try and have given my heart to the LORD.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for giving me an example of a virtuous woman and for allowing me to see that it is not about my deeds but my character. Help me show this character through works, not words, and to teach my children to also follow this example. I pray this in your name. Amen.

Kristin Schwenneker

## FEBRUARY 22

### Christ Working through Us

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* Ephesians 2:10

A few years ago, I remember a member of our congregation giving a testimonial during the church service stating that he had had been a casual Christian. I don't recall all that he said, but I thought about it and realized that I had been a very casual Christian. Sure, I have attended church regularly and have done a few helpful things here and there.

In recent months, wanting to step up and help keep our church strong, I have become stronger in my faith and have found ways to get involved in the work of the church. I have had great role models among our congregation who have welcomed and encouraged me to become more fruitful.

John Wesley told us: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can”. So many of our congregation exemplify those words every day. I consider myself a work in progress, being inspired by those who surround me here at Grace.

Being on the Missions Committee has provided numerous opportunities to make a difference in our community and the world. Look at the things we have done as a congregation: building the ark, providing meals, coats, mittens, hats, and socks for HeadStart children, making the sleep mats, Wednesday night meals, serving at the Banquet in Sioux Falls, Dinner Church, Bible School, Kids Without Parents, to mention a few.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help all of us to continue to find ways to glorify you by being the hands and feet of Jesus. Help us to do good works in Christ's name. Amen.

Sue Hitchcock

**FEBRUARY 23**

## **Cherry Pickers**

Read Matthew 7:3-5

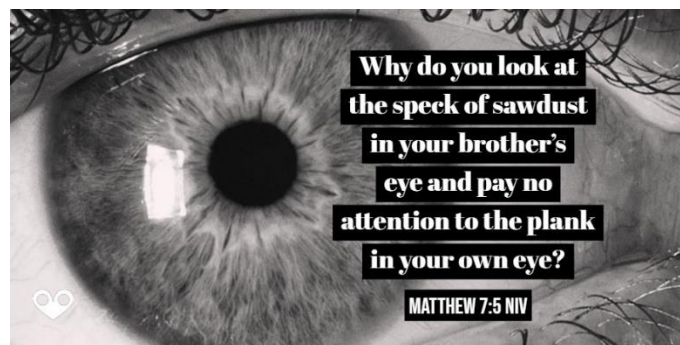
*“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” Matthew 7:3*

Cherries are good for making pie but not for cherry picking scripture. We find that we pick scripture to attack a person rather than to build them in the faith. We want to show how we are the better Christian because we do not do certain things. The scripture from Matthew 7 talks about the plank in our own eye compared to the speck in our neighbor’s eye.

We are not called to judge but to live in love. Pastor Barrie asked us to pick a word to guide us through the year. I pick the word ‘**study**’. I want to study to help me not judge others but to replace judgment with love.

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, I offer a prayer today for good judgment on all who read this devotion. As we live our lives, help us to be more thoughtful and kind to one another. May we add respect rather than judgment to our daily life. Amen.

William McAlpine



## FEBRUARY 24

### Judging Others

*“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at how handsome he is or how tall he is because I have not chosen him. God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart’”. 1 Samuel 16:7*

When I was twelve years old, I was diagnosed with Type 1, Diabetes Mellitus. The doctor that discovered I had this illness was a caring and compassionate man who in my eyes stood ten feet tall. But this man suffered from an ailment that left his entire body completely covered with boils or blister-type lesions. To a person looking at him for the first time, he was scary, almost grotesque looking.

After I got used to his appearance, I didn't seem to notice it. What I noticed about this doctor was his wonderful bedside manner and personality. That was the important thing to me about this man.

When he told me I had diabetes, he took me into his office and sat me across from his huge oak desk and swivel chair. He said, “Donna, when people look at you, they won't see that you have a problem. But look at what they see when they look at me”. That comment left quite an impression on me.

Am I wrong or is this what God wants us to do? To look at the kindness and goodness coming from a person's heart and not judge or be blinded by the person's outward appearance?

**Prayer:** Our Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for all the ways you bless us. Help us not to judge others, but instead, focus on our lives and help us live them in a way that is pleasing to you. Amen

Donna Todd

## FEBRUARY 25 - SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

### Were You There

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

UM Hymnal Page 288

Were You There is an African-American spiritual that has its origin in the experiences of the black slaves in early America. Out of their suffering, trials, and tribulations in an unfriendly world, they felt a connection with the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. When we draw close to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we likewise feel that same trembling.

Thorne Wittstruck





## FEBRUARY 26

### Trust, Faith & Grace

Read Romans 3:21-28

*“We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all will be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.”* Romans 3:2 (LASB)

The above words were very hard for me to believe and trust for years. Finally, during the pandemic, I took the time to take my Bible reading and devotions seriously. I now use the Upper Room, Daily Bread, and HomeTouch each day. Each devotion has given me some insight on a problem that is bothering me, and some days they all have answers to my questions. The HomeTouch has a list of Bible readings to read the whole Bible in a year. I am now working on reading the complete Bible for the fifth time. A year ago we were unable to get HomeTouch for about four months, and I found that I missed it tremendously.

With this reading, I finally realized a lot of people were finding help with prayers (I’m a slow learner!) As I got into praying more, more answers came with them. No, they are not all the answers I’m looking for; they prove to be the right way to do things. Now it is a lot easier to understand ‘thy will be done, not my will’.

What we went through in the last two and a half years has been very trying for all of us. Please all of you, keep praying because God’s will always wins out. Pray with **‘ENTHUSIASM!’**

**Prayer:** Lord, open our eyes so we can see, open our ears that we can hear, and open our hearts so we can love all of your children. Amen.

Brad Johnson

## **FEBRUARY 27**

### **Why Do We Pray?**

I was recently asked: Why do we pray?

For me, it is communication with God that lets God into my life and aligns my heart and mind with God. Unfortunately, we often wander from God in our daily lives; and only when we have a troubled time, do we turn to God.

Two examples for me: First, when I was in seminary training to be a pastor and was serving as a chaplain at a hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, I had three death calls in one day and was worn out and troubled by the events of the day. I sat down in the Chaplain's office and began talking to God and wondering if I was called to this work. I was guided to study the scriptures and found Hebrews 3:1-6. It spoke to me and reminded me that I do indeed share a heavenly calling, that I should keep my attention on Jesus, be faithful as he was faithful, and bear witness to God through my life.

The second was when my Grandma Irene Tritle died, and I was in grief. I attended my first five-day Academy for Spiritual Formation at the Cedar Falls American Martyrs retreat center. During this time, I came to grips with some of my emotions and felt the deep sense of abandonment because she was the one who raised me after my parents' death, and now all my grandparents were gone along with my parents. I went for a walk and sat down by a statue of Jesus being held by Mary. This caused me to have a conversation with God about my grief, loss, and abandonment. In that moment a lullaby came to me as a gift:

Sweet Little Baby  
Sweet Little Holy Child  
You're in the arms of Love.  
Peace, Peace be still!

This song has risen in my mind many times since this day to remind me of God's constant love even during tragedy and pain.

How would you answer the question: Why do we pray?

My rhythm of prayer has moved from only at difficult times to a more constant being in the presence of God. I use the rhythm of prayer called the **ACTS** of prayer. **A**doration for God and who God is, **C**onfession of how I have wandered from God, **T**hanksgiving for God's Grace, Healing and Hope, and **S**upplication for those who suffer and are in harm's way, seeking ways to be present with them with God's love.

May you be blessed in your prayer life and grow in grace.

**Prayer:** Eternal God, it is amazing how you reach out to us with your love. Help me by leading me so that I do not wander from your ways. Thank you for the gift of your constant abiding love! Be with all my loved ones who are struggling today and bring peace to our world. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Pastor Barrie Tritle

Prayer is the  
link that  
connects us  
with God.

*A. B. Simpson*

## FEBRUARY 28

### The Right Answer

Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and 16:9

*“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ”.* Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Most of us want the right answer, right now, whether it is concerning an important life decision or a child completing a school assignment. Many adults, myself included, pray for guidance when we have a significant decision to make. We beg God to just tell us what to do. After all, Philippians 4:6-7 instructs that we are to pray about everything. And sometimes people do get an answer that directs them to a certain path.

My personal experience is that there are rarely specific instructions. I prayed about taking my current job and moving to Spencer. I had never been to Spencer. I didn't hear God telling me to come here, but he certainly has taken care of me since I arrived. Perhaps God trusts me to prayerfully make a decision. Once a path is chosen, then God will guide my steps. The big decision itself might not be as important as having faith that God will fulfill his promises, no matter the direction I go.

**Prayer:** Ever Loving God, help us trust in you when there is an important decision to be made. May we have faith that you will guide and provide for us whichever path we choose. Amen.

Sheryl Larson



## FEBRUARY 29

### Onward Christian Soldiers

Read Ephesians 6:11, 14-18



*“Put on all the armor that God gives you.”*

Ephesians 6:11

As we go through life, many of us feel as if we’ve had to “stand down” and believe what we were told, not question authority, follow our leaders blindly. So we did. I learned slowly but figured it out in Basic Training from the USAF that sometimes you have to stand up for yourself. Still, I struggled with it as a norm. But in adult life, I still seemed to slip back into my old ways. Back down, don’t question, do what you’re told!

Then I entered parenthood where my fierceness finally came in. I was the best advocate for my children. It didn’t matter where or who it came from or what I was told, I advocated for what I believed in my heart was best for my children. When our church was being told what to believe by some in leadership, I found the strength and voice to advocate. I found my armor. I found my soldiers. We found our voices and stood up with the belt of truth, faith as our shield, and the strength of God.

**Prayer:** Lord, I pray that we are always able to use your armor, to “suit up” and stand up against the Devil’s tricks, to announce the Good News, and be at peace in the love you’ve given us, the guidance for our path, and the grace you’ve shown. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Bri Pullen

## MARCH 1

### Change of Times

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”.* Hebrews 13:8

We are continuously in a life of changing times, where we modify our lives, behaviors, and beliefs just to fit into the current world and the next best thing. We strive to take the easier and fastest route yet still end up wanting more, to the point where we are comparing ourselves to others. We are influenced every day by what is right and what is wrong, causing division throughout communities and our own families.

Through these changing times one could feel left behind, not included, alone and without a purpose. We push ourselves to the point where one can feel exhausted and lost, with no hope to keep up; we tend to forget the strength we have from our faith in God and in Jesus’ teachings. No matter what the change of times may bring next, Jesus’ love will always stay the same as yesterday. It leaves no one behind, and everyone is invited. When we focus on his teachings, together we can do God’s work to bring hope to those in need; together we are never alone.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us and teaching us. Thank you for providing us hope and strength when we fall short or feel overwhelmed with this fast-paced world. We can count on you and your words to guide us. We know that through you, we are saved and not alone. Amen.

Nancy Hoffman

## MARCH 2

### Longing for God

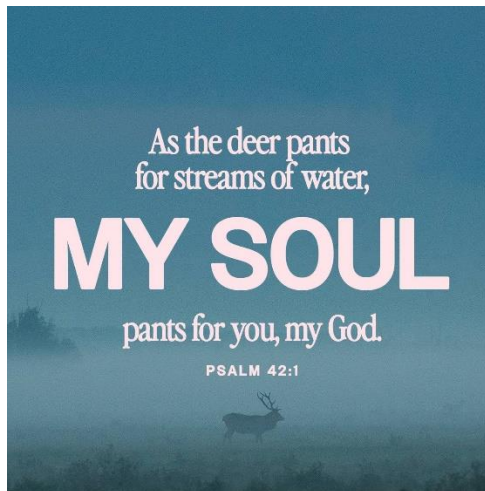
Read Psalm 42 and Psalm 63:1-8

Our search for the Living God will lead us onward and upward. God hears my cries, sees my longing heart, and assures me that “All Will Be Well”.

I am thankful for a Good God who desires a connection with humans, who walks beside me, forgives my wrongdoing, converses and even calls us friends. AMAZING! Only God can fill the deep desire of my soul. Indeed, when I search for God, “I Hear Music in the Air”.

**Prayer:** O God. You are my God, And I long for you. My whole being desires you, like a dry, worn out and waterless land. My soul is thirsty for you. Fill me to overflowing with your love. Amen. Psalm 31:1

Shirley Oswald





## MARCH 3 - THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

### Because He Lives

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus; He came to love, heal and forgive; he lived and died to buy my pardon, an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

And then one day I'll cross the river; I'll fight life's final war with pain; and then as death gives way to victory, I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know he reigns.

Refrain: Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.



UM Hymnal Page 364

Because He Lives was written by Bill and Gloria Gaither. As they tell the story, it was written in the midst of social upheaval, threats of war, and betrayals of national and personal trust. In the midst of this kind of uncertainty, the assurance of the Lordship of the risen Christ blew across our troubled minds like a cooling breeze in the parched desert. Holding their tiny son in their arms, they could sing “This child can face uncertain days because He lives”. Can we sing this same song? Because he lives, can we face tomorrow with this assurance?

Thorne Wittstruck

## MARCH 4

### Press On

*“Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus”.*

Philippians 3:13-14 (NRSV)

I’m writing this while I’m watching a buck eating the birdseed on the ground in our neighbor’s backyard. Finally, in the middle of January, we are snow-covered. While I can sit right here in my chair in the living room, it is a beautiful sight. The new year has just begun.

This last year has brought some unexpected challenges for me, and I’m sure for many of you as well. Our church experienced growing pains. As the scripture says, *“forgetting what is behind”*, I will try not to look backwards. We have as a community of believers worked together with prayer and incredible leadership to move forward. There are so many new joys.

Another unexpected challenge was the death of my dear sister. She is greatly missed. Grief is powerful and can hold me back at times. I will never forget, but I am pressing on. Also, as many of you know, our youngest daughter and son-in-law were hit in a head-on car accident last summer after they had come to visit us. After wonderful medical care and an incredible surgeon, they have come through it all very well. We are filled with gratitude.

**Prayer:** Let me start each day of this new year with gratitude for your goodness and love as we learn from the past and move forward. Help me look for you in each person I meet and in each new opportunity. Help me to live with anticipation and hope. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Linda Wittstruck

**MARCH 5**

**God, the Navigator**

Always think of God as your personal navigator. Every path, every road, every journey was perfectly mapped out for you by Him. It's no coincidence, only divine order. In those moments of doubt, when your faith is being tested, always remember, "I won't get anywhere God doesn't want me to be. And I won't be held back from anywhere God wants me to be". Always have faith in your Creator.

Kevin Tlam

**Teach Us to Live**

God of love—Forgive! Forgive! Teach us how to TRULY LIVE,  
Ask us not our race or creed, just take us in our hour of need,  
And let us know You love us, too, and that we are A PART OF YOU...  
And someday may man realize that all the earth, the seas and skies  
Belong to God who made us all, the rich, the poor, the great, the small,  
And in the Father's Holy Sight no man is yellow, black or white,  
And PEACE ON EARTH cannot be found until we MEET ON COMMON  
GROUND  
And every man becomes a BROTHER who worships God and loves each other.

Helen Steiner Rice

Submitted by Vada Calhoon

**MARCH 6**

**Walk By Faith**

*“For we walk by faith, not sight”.* 2 Corinthians 5:7

Even though this verse is short, this verse holds a big reminder to everyone. Sometimes God sends us through tough times or hardships that don't make any sense, and many of us wonder why. It makes sense though to want to know an answer and understand the purpose of why we have to go through these times. Sometimes the answer is blurry, and it isn't clear why we have to go down that path. However, sometimes the answer also shows that we had to go through some growth.

TRUST GOD EVEN  
WHEN YOU DON'T  
UNDERSTAND HIS  
PLAN.

2 Corinthians 5:7 reminds us that we should walk in faith, not by sight, meaning that we need to trust God's plan. We won't always get to see what will happen next or see a clear answer on why it is happening; but if we can trust through our faith, we know we are not alone. There is a reason for God's plan.

**Prayer:** Dear God, please remind me when I question why something is happening to me that I need to trust you to guide me to safety and peace. I know I won't always be able to understand your plans for me, but I put my trust and faith in you. Thank you for everything you have guided me through in the past and what you will lead me through in the future. Amen.

Bailey Swanson

## **OUR WESLEYAN HERITAGE**

### **Wesley's Covenant Prayer:**

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with who you will;

Put me to doing, put me to suffering;

Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

Exalted for you, or brought low for you;

Let me be full, let me be empty,

Let me have all things, let me have nothing;

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

You are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in Heaven. Amen.

### **Wesley's Mission Statement:**

“Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.”

John Wesley

## God Is Able To Do What God Promises

*‘Hoping against hope, he (Abraham) believed that he would become “the father of many nations”...No distrust made him (Abraham) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised’.*  
Romans 4:18, 20-21 (NRSV)

Even though Abraham and Sarah were old and beyond childbearing age, God promised Abraham that “he would become the father of many nations”. Abraham might have thought –“OK, God, but I don’t understand how this is going to happen”! Abraham was a faithful man and followed God’s directions; even leaving his ancestral lands and extended family to settle in a far-off country. Not only did Abraham trust that God would be able to do what God had promised, he didn’t even waver in that trust!

Most young couples dream of the children they will have, picking out names, thinking about who they will look like and what talents they might inherit. Early in our marriage we learned the devastating fact that having biological children was not a possibility for us, crushing our dreams of a family. Since I couldn’t be a mother, I reacted by descending into grief and depression, not understanding what I was to be and do.

During this time, I came upon this Romans passage: “*No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised*”. You see, Barrie had a pastoral visit with a church member who was a licensed social worker doing adoption home studies. She placed us on a lawyer’s list who did adoptions and started our home study process. Then the waiting began. This lawyer only had 2-3 adoptions per year. In the fall of 1984, 3 babies were placed for adoption through that lawyer. During that same time, spoke to Barrie in a dream saying: “You will have a son and will name him Joshua”. Even though it looked like our chances for a baby were dim, I learned through the Romans verse and, oh did I lean on that verse—through January, February, March, and April! In May we were notified that a young woman had contacted the lawyer about releasing her baby for adoption. We were next on the list! Joshua was born June 21<sup>st</sup>.

The birth mother released him for adoption, and the court proceedings took place. We picked up our new son on June 27, 1985.

During difficult times over the course of my adult life, I have continued to lean on that verse – through the adoptions of our other 2 sons, through one child’s many surgeries, through another one’s addiction treatment, and another one’s continued mental health care. God does do what God has promised—to stay with us, to support us, to guide us, to give us strength, and to place helpers and assistance in our path. We are never alone with God at our side.

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, we are so thankful that you do follow through on your promises. We are blessed that you stay by our side, encouraging us, giving us strength, guiding us, and sending helpful persons in the midst of our distress. Help us to always place our trust in you even when circumstances make it difficult to do so. Help our faith to never waver as we remember that we can count on you to do what you have promised to do. Amen.

Kae Tritle

God  
ALWAYS  
KEEPS HIS Promises





## MARCH 7

### My Little Princess

Read Psalm 67:1-7

*“How glad the nations will be, singing for joy because you are their King and will give true justice to their people! Praise God, O world.”* Psalm 67:3-5 (TLB)

Joy warms my heart when I look at the large colored picture of a princess with a beautiful brown face hung on my patio door. My 5-year-old great-granddaughter adopted from India did this artwork. Amy was dropped off as a newborn baby on the street by an orphanage with sewage water running beside her and was taken inside to join many other babies and children. My granddaughter and her husband wanted to adopt a child from India to join their 2 biological children. They were able to go to India for a week to finalize bookwork and bring this now 2-year-old home to become part of their family and a blessing for them all. Though other babies had died of starvation, Amy was a fighter and survived to come to a loving family.

My daughter brought Amy to visit me at Amy's request. While here, she colored this beautiful picture of a princess and made her face brown like her skin. She likes seeing people with dark brown eyes because, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she notices her eyes and skin are different colored than our family's eyes and skin. Amy has been blessed to learn that we are all God's children regardless of where we come from or what color our skin or eyes happen to be. God loves each one of us unconditionally and He alone has the plan. This is why I have great joy warming my heart with the addition of Amy to our family.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we pray for the children around the world who are starving, helpless, and in need of love and care. Thank you for loving families who are willing to make the sacrifice and adjustment in adopting babies. Amen.

Marietta Johnson

## MARCH 8

### Don't Take Your Focus Off of Jesus

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him".*

Romans 15:13

"We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord". We need to build one another up in Christ. *"He will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee"*. (Isaiah 26:3). We are to come as a little child to enter the kingdom of God. When my sister died last month, her grandson was at the burial service. Carrying the flower the pastor gave him, he walked and danced up to his grandma and said, "Grandma died. Now she's on her way to heaven to live with Jesus." I remember my daughter in church on Palm Sunday as a child, marching proudly around the sanctuary with her palm branch. As an adult, she said, "I know and love God. I just really want to have a real relationship with him". My beloved husband, Jake, remembered singing Jesus Loves Me in Sunday School. Their version was: "Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is TOUGH"! (flexing their arms). As a grownup, Jake would talk to his brother-in-law about learning the Bible stories in Sunday School and believing it ALL. The brother-in-law's reply was "I know there's no God after all the things I've seen in the war. No loving God could allow all that". When we first married, I told Jake I would always love him; but he would be second as I would always love God most. He accepted that. I used to not like ending prayers with the catch-all phrase "Your will, not mine". As I have learned it's safe to trust God, I now consider it the ultimate insurance policy.

**Prayer:** God of hope, please fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in you. Please use us to be a good example of your great love for others. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen. Praise you, God!

Anita Edwards

## MARCH 9

### Just Trust

*“I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please...What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do”.* Isaiah 46:10-11 (NIV)

Have you ever been so weighed down by responsibility and the unknown that you simply forget how to make decisions? Stuck between what you should do, what you want to do, and what others want you to do? You feel like there is so much uncertainty in the future or in what has happened in the past that you become unable to move, stuck, and feeling like your arms are completely full of work, children, relationships, emotions, and fears.

God challenges us through Isaiah 46 to trust who he is and what he can do. He says, *“I make known the end from the beginning...I will bring about what I have planned”*. Take a breath and pretend you just dropped the weight of planning and hoping for more. Give him the weight of your work and the fear of missing opportunities. He knows the path you will take, and he is already far ahead waiting for you to follow.

The Lord says in verse 10, *“My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please”*. Take another breath and release your worry in relationships. Let your relationship with him fill your heart and mind. If you have weight you still bear, he will carry it. He is waiting for you to ask so he can take your weight, your pain, and your fears. Finally, in verse 4 he says, *“I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you”*. If you find yourself weighed down by the stressors of this world, take hope in the thought that he has been and always will be stronger than any burden.

Mike and Darlene Carlson

## MARCH 10 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### Psalm 23

*“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...”* Psalm 23:1

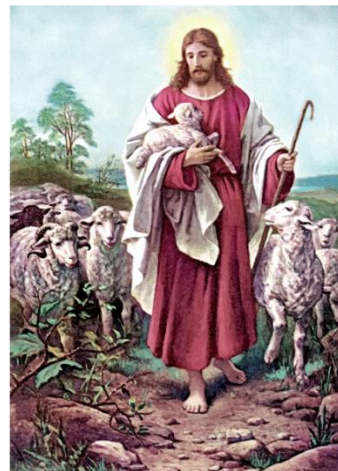
I heard a story the other morning, and I am going to share it with you.

There was a Shakespearean actor speaking to this congregation. He was eloquently saying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. He knew just when to raise his voice, lower his voice, and gesture at just the right time in the right way. When he finished, there was thunderous applause; and everyone rose to their feet.

When the people were seated, he asked if anyone from the congregation would like to come forward and say the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. From the back came an elderly gray-haired gentleman. As he said the Psalm, the audience sat in rapt attention; and when he finished, there was not a sound and not a dry eye in the place.

Someone asked the Shakespearean actor what the difference was between him and the elderly man. The actor said, “I know the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm – he knows the Shepherd”.

Submitted by Dorothy Hale from a Lenten Devotional in 1981 from the United Methodist Church, Manchester, Iowa



## MARCH 11

### PROMISE to PEACE to HOPE

*“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”.* Lamentations 3:21-23 (NIV)

Three years ago as a January devotion in Esther Circle, we each chose a word for the year as suggested by Pastor Barrie in his December 31<sup>st</sup> sermon. At that time my chosen word was PROMISE. I don’t quite remember what prompted me to choose that word but am sure I was anticipating positive outcomes. As usual, God gave it a different twist as it became a year of promised challenges: mom in a care center, COVID, a problem renter, my son and daughter-in-law’s move to Texas, war in the Ukraine, and strife within Grace Church. But as God always promises, he was there with me through it all.

Last year my word was PEACE, and my goal was to Choose Joy every day. Some challenges continued; but as a focused church group relying on God and each other, we saw our way through to that joy. As my sister’s two-year-old granddaughter taught me from Frozen: “Let it go! Let it go! Let it go! I was able to find peace even in my mom’s passing as there were loving people all around.

And now my chosen word for this year is HOPE. As Romans 12:12 puts it, *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer”*. And I notice that the word HOPE keeps popping up everywhere I look. It is still God’s challenge to be prayerful, to have patience as he works on and through me, and to never give up hope.

**Prayer:** Dear Father God, help me to always feel you near me and your followers of Jesus, to ask for your guidance, and to recognize your care and blessings every day that give me hope. Amen.

Cyndi O’Hara

## MARCH 12

### Are You Living a Cautious Life?

Read Matthew 25:14-30

*“The Master was furious. ‘That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that!’”* Matthew 25:26 (The Message)

In The Parable about the Talents (or in The Message Bible, “The Story about Investment”), a master is about to take a trip and calls together his servants to delegate responsibilities. He gave one \$5,000, another \$2,000 and the third \$1,000. He returns later to be delighted with the wise investments and returns received from the first two servants. However, the third servant’s return was no more than the original amount. Out of fear, the third servant had hidden the money and was proud that he returned the money safe and sound. However, the master was furious, stating, *“That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that!”* He could have at least invested the sum with bankers and received a little interest.

I found this passage inspiring and motivating. What parts of my Christian life am I living cautiously – hiding or holding back? There are many aspects that round out the Christian life: developing our beliefs, learning through our experiences, serving others, caring for family, financial management, relationships, forgiveness, trust, managing our health, and making time to rest and renew. This passage helped me realize there are areas in which I need to step away from fear and dive into living more honestly, in trust and deeper faith. Let’s all take time to reflect and evaluate the areas where we need to stomp down fear and live in the freedom God gives us through faith and trust. Let’s throw away old habits, kick fear down the road, and allow God to lead us to new adventures in faith.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for your love and guidance. Help us to recognize the areas in which we have been hiding. May we lose those fears and step up in faith. Amen.

Sandy Heerdt

## MARCH 13

### The Ties that Bind in these Changing Times

Read Matthew 6:25-34

*“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”.* Matthew 6:34

As we age, changes are more difficult for us; it takes patience, trust, and courage to adapt to the changes that we sometimes have a hard time accepting.

We have all been faced at times in our lives with loss of loved ones, difficulties, illness, COVID, violence in our world, broken relationships, and division in our country and our churches. However, with God in our lives, lots of prayers, family and friends around us, we are never alone.

These challenges have shown us just what we can do when we work together. When faced with issues, work programs, decisions and whatever needs to be done, we are fortunate to always have someone there. All of this has definitely brought us closer together, and I believe we have gained new friendships. We have also learned that working together can be fun, healthy, and therapeutic! Being kind and having the support of our family and friends makes everything in life easier and happier for everyone. GOD BLESS ALL!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to trust you and not be fearful of what the future may hold, for you have promised never to leave us. Amen.

L. Elaine Orthmann

## MARCH 14

### What Can I Do, Lord?

Over the last few months, my time for listing gratuities has often been overlooked. While I am grateful for a multitude of blessings, when I get up each day my thoughts go instead to difficulties and concerns of life rather than the many of God's blessings. I do not remember the talents I do possess and can share; rather I focus on my inability to keep up with others who seem to work or play circles around me. This is wasted energy! Will God accept my inability to be perfect? Will He forgive my shortcomings? I wonder if this is a slap in the face for God?

Less worry would most likely add energy, focus, and hours to my day and lessen sleep deprivation. Philippians 4:6 says we should *"be anxious for nothing and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"*. God created me and allows for my uniqueness. In 1 Cor 16:14 it tells us that God's love is "unconditional" and its strength "unimaginable". God loves BIG! He loves me no matter where I am in life or what I am able to do. Eph 2:8-9 tells us that we are *"saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and not by our efforts or works"*. He has plans for me.

The price God paid to remove my sin is personal. He is my Father; I am His child. No matter how I think or what I accomplish, He loves me and wants me to be in a relationship with Him. His love out loves my sin. God created me this way; it is my job to accept my weaknesses and strengths, to rely on God's plan for me, give thanks, ask for forgiveness, and make time for a gratitude attitude.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me embrace my weaknesses this day and allow you to make them strengths. Help me to know that you will give me the strength to do the work you want me to do. Thank you. Amen.

Becky Prentice



## MARCH 15

### Much Has Been Given

*“From everyone who has been given much, much will be asked. And the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked”.*

Luke 12:48

As a new year starts and we look back at the past year, we have so much to be thankful for. We have been given our church back and a new pastor and wife to help guide and direct us through our new resurrection time. These times have been a challenge, but it has given us an opportunity to thank God for all that has been given to us. As grateful people, we will continue to give back through mats made for the homeless, food donated to HeadStart and the food pantry, diapers for Birthright, and meals for comradery of church and friends as well as coats, hats, and mittens for needy children.

Yes, Lord, we have been given much and we continue to have much to thank for. We give thanks always for all things unto God, our Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for allowing us to grow in faith this year. Because growing in faith we did! Amen.

Bonnie Foust

### Lent

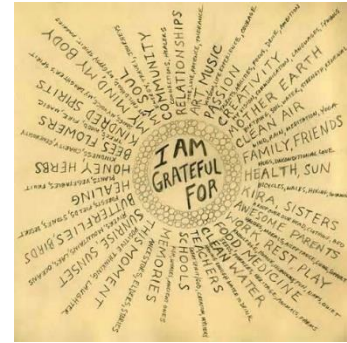
UM Hymnal 268

O God our deliverer, you led your people of old through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide now the people of your church, that, following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

**MARCH 16**

**Grateful**

*“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” Psalm 118:24*



I have been blessed in so many aspects of my life. My wonderful childhood: Grandparents who were very instrumental in my upbringing, extended family with 36+ cousins, and lifelong friends. My mother always taught me to think of my glass as half full. She could make the best of a bad situation. She had a difficult childhood, but she never dwelled on it. She was my biggest cheerleader and my best friend. I was so humbled to be able to help care for her with my family’s assistance, making it possible for her to remain in her home until she was just seven days from turning 90.

I also am so blessed to be able to have a career that allows me to love what I do. People often ask me when I’m going to retire. I will, but each day is a gift, and I try to unwrap it with such care. I feel sometimes that at work I am caring for my mother over and over. It brings me joy. I’m not always good at making the most of my time...but I am working on it.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, always help us to see the good in each day and spread love and kindness to each other. And remind us to treat each day as a gift and open it with gratefulness. Amen.

Linda O’Clair

## **MARCH 17 – FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

### **This is the Day**

This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made, that the Lord hath made.

Let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made.

UM Hymnal 657

This familiar song, This is the Day, is a call-and-response gathering song based on Psalm 118:24. It came from Australia during what was described as a very hard time of going through a valley. Can we sing this song on any and every day, no matter the circumstances? Can we rejoice and be glad in every moment of our lives?

Thorne Wittstruck

### **O How He Loves You and Me**

O how he loves you and me! O how he loves you and me!

He gave his life. What more could he give? O how he loves you and me!

Jesus to Calvary did go; his love for sinners to show.

What he did there brought hope from despair. O how he loves you and me!

The Faith We Sing, Page 2108

Written by Kurt Kaiser

## MARCH 18

### Stay Positive

*“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.”* Philippians 2:14-16

What disappointing moment makes you grumble? Before going to bed, I looked at my daily planner to note that there was nothing scheduled for the next morning. Even though Roger had plans, I could sleep in. While I was sound asleep, the landline phone rang. At first, I was disappointed and felt like complaining but answered the phone on my nightstand. My first instinct was to be grumpy, but then I heard the voice of a frail elderly woman who asked if this was Pastor Kaldahl. I answered, “No, I am sorry. I am not Pastor Kaldahl”. The woman must have dialed the wrong number because she hung up. I was not concerned about my own sleep anymore but became concerned for the elderly woman.

The NIV Life Application Study Bible footnote for Philippians 2:14-16 reads the following: *“Our lives should be characterized by moral purity, patience and peacefulness, so that we will shine ‘like stars’ in a dark and depraved world...Are you shining brightly, or are you clouded by complaining and arguing? Don’t let dissensions snuff out your light.”*

Let’s shine like stars in a dark and depraved world! Stay positive!

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for the positive friends I have at Grace United Methodist Church. Please forgive me, Lord, when I disappoint you with negativity. Open my heart to continue to step out in faith to new experiences. Help me to fulfill God’s purpose for my life. Amen.

Jane Ingledue

**MARCH 19**

**Servant Leadership**

*“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”* Luke 12:48b

Years ago, I was asked to serve on the board of a private church college. Early on, a highly respected board member spoke about servant leadership, a new concept to me at the time. This same person reminded us to look at our lives in perspective and recognize all of the various blessings and opportunities we had received in our lifetimes. He challenged us with the biblical saying: *“To whom much is given, much is expected”*.

Carole Lea and I have had the privilege of being members of Grace Church for nearly 60 years. As with all worthy institutions, there have been ups and downs. The trauma of the events of the past year have presented challenges. With this, the thoughts of servant leadership and God’s expectations of us come back to mind.

From a distant perch in left field, I would like to express my deep admiration and respect for all those many servant leaders in our church who, along with our great pastor and his wife, have made the wonderful effort to insure the current and future influence of our church. Each of you has provided your own niche with your particular interest and talent. You’ve made this a church of kindness, devotion, approachability, friendship, helpfulness, and optimism.



God Bless

To paraphrase Tiny Tim, “God Bless You, Everyone”!

John Cotton

## MARCH 20

### God's Promise of Peace in Every Storm

Philippians 4:6-7

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

We all want God to answer our prayers. In the verse above, God promises peace. Maybe we are struggling through an issue that leaves us lying awake at night or facing a personal obstacle that seems insurmountable. We have experienced issues in our church that left us struggling with anxiety and anger. One thing is for sure: anxiety, anger, and hopelessness can leave us feeling like God is not listening to our prayers. But God wants us to have the same peace He gave Jesus in the darkest hours before his crucifixion, a peace beyond description. We have to trust during these times of uncertainty that God is always with us and has a plan for our lives.

Here are three commitments we might make to help recognize God's peace:

- Commit to praying through scriptures that promise God's peace
- Commit to seeking and pursuing the peace God promises
- Commit to trusting God for our 'unanswered prayers'

Seeking peace requires action on our part: perhaps a daily walk in nature, Bible reading, intentional prayer, praise music, art, or a new hobby. In times of fear and anxiety, it is important to be intentional to look for ways God is offering His peace. We need to continually 'let go and let God' be in control of our lives.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, please gift me with inner peace today. Free my mind from worries, fears, and doubts that disturb my tranquility. Help me to discover the stillness within me, finding solace in Your divine comfort and wisdom. Amen.

Judith Olson

**MARCH 21**

**The Affirmation Station**

*"I am alive in Christ".* Ephesians 2:4-5

This has been a year filled with personal growth for many in our congregation as well as a time of grief and loss and new beginnings for others. Is there anything that could be done to help draw us more closely together?

I was notified that I had received something from our great-granddaughter, Addi, on Messenger. Addi's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class was being featured in a 2-minute video about the Affirmation Station that had been created in their classroom. Mr. Langner had hung a mirror in the room and encased it with positive affirmations. Each child approached the mirror every morning, selected two affirmations, spoke them into the mirror and then returned to their seats. As a result of this endeavor, Mr. Langner felt that he was seeing positive change in his students' attitudes and sense of self-worth. He also felt they were treating each other better because of this daily activity. The children interviewed seemed to agree. What a concept!

I began to wonder how difficult it would be to come up with a list of Biblical Affirmations and found long lists of Christian affirmations are readily available in book form, on pamphlets, and in recorded messages on the internet. Affirmations are powerful words put together that are meant to affect our behavior and the course of our lives in a positive way, often based on our strengths and capabilities. Would it be possible to utilize this tool at Grace to develop concrete values and more positive attitudes? Do you think we might stand a little taller, smile a little bigger, feel more confident, show a little more compassion? I'd be willing to try. How about you? I think the Third graders are on to something!

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the opportunity to work together to become a more loving, caring congregation. Help us become the very best we can be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Brownie Small

**MARCH 22**

**Being Kind**

Read Matthew 14:14-22

*“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick”.* Matthew 14:14

Jesus also said love your neighbor. Being kind does not cost money. Being kind to each other helps people to feel secure and loved. When I’m kind to other people, I feel good about myself and think others will feel better about being around me in the community.

I was at the local pharmacy waiting for a vaccine shot when another person came to get in line. She said, “Are you waiting for service?” before she stepped up to the counter. Taking turns is so much a part of kindness. It is nice to feel like someone cared to be fair about things.

If you google “kindness” in the Bible, there are more examples of concern for others in the journey of faith. I thank God for the examples Jesus gave us in his journey on earth.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your grace and the example of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Everette Handy

**YOU**  
will never  
**REGRET**  
Being kind



## MARCH 23

### Aging Parent

*“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”. Exodus 20:12*

I don't think any of us are prepared to see our aging parents change – the memory lapses and increasing frailty. How do we make decisions for the people who gave us birth? Suddenly we are there taking care of or procuring care for the ones who cared for us. It doesn't seem right or fair. It is hard to think of my mother as getting old and dying, perhaps because in my darkest thoughts when she passes, there's nothing between me and death. I've had to work my way through trying to understand my thoughts and emotions while working with the care center finding practical solutions for her mental and physical problems at hand, trying to be gracious so that I don't possibly express resentment or even hostility. I often feel helpless and guilty; other times I also feel compassion and closeness. I have learned that I can only do so much to allow her to be happy and comfortable. I know I must accept the direction our lives have taken to do my best for her. Placing my mother in a care center has often had me reflecting on my own life in relationship to hers. Selfishly, I fear coming up short of both moral and social expectations. I have found I can only walk through this time of life in faith with the support of my wife and others. Doing the right thing must be some sort of sacred mystery; the purpose of which will be revealed to me in time.

**Prayer:** Father, give me grace in caring for my mother. I seek your wisdom. I know these days are the final opportunities for a deeper expression of love for the most important human relationship in my life. Allow me to show the same love I have for her that I know she has for me! Open my mind to this understanding and allow me to express all the love I feel in my heart in both actions and my thoughts! I humble myself before you and her! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Roger Ingledue

## MARCH 24 – PALM SUNDAY

### Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

“Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear; things I would ask him to tell me if he were here: scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea, stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

First let me hear how the children stood round his knee, and I shall fancy his blessing resting on me; words full of kindness, deeds full of grace. All in the lovelight of Jesus’ face.

Into the city I’d follow the children’s band, waving a branch of the palm tree high in my hand; one of his heralds, yes, I would sing loudest hosannas, “Jesus is King!”

UM Hymnal Page 277

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus was written by William H. Parker following a request by a children’s Sunday school class: “Teacher, tell us another story”. What things would we ask Jesus to tell us if he were here? Would we follow him into the city? Although inspired by children’s questions, it’s a song we all need to join in singing.

Thorne Wittstruck

Almighty God, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to suffer death on the cross. Grant that we may share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and ever. Amen.

UM Hymnal Page 281

## MARCH 25

### Love Is...

*“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth”. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6*



These words are often used during marriage ceremonies in modern day America. Because of this, we often associate this message with good practices in romantic love & marriages. In Biblical context, these verses are speaking to us about the way we should strive to love ALL the people within our lives. Our relationships with spouses, partners, family, friends, children, co-workers, associates, and even with strangers all benefit from the practices outlined in these verses. The way we communicate with others and love others is frequently a reflection of how we see the world.

The New Testament often refers to love as a key to being more like Jesus. As I read this message, I think back on the ways I have been able to live up to these expectations of love throughout my days. I also reflect on areas where an opportunity may have been missed to treat others with love as described. How we love ourselves and how we express our love for others is a meaningful way to extend the olive branch of Jesus throughout our little piece of the world. It can be difficult to be truthful, humble, kind, flexible, and patient with ourselves and with others at times. It can be challenging to refrain from keeping score in our relationships. Striving for these things when we are tired, hungry, scared, grieving, or in pain is no easy feat. But if we are honest with ourselves and can lean fully into our faith in Jesus, it may just be possible to love the way Christians are designed to.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us love according to your instructions and example. Amen.

Jenn Pullen-Ingledue

## MARCH 26

### I Am Enough

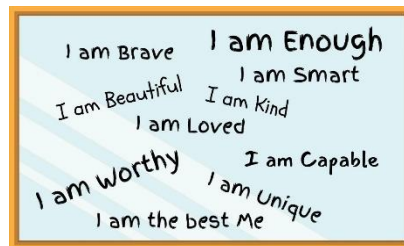
*“Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”* Isaiah 64:8

Recently I saw a video on Facebook. One of the Spencer 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers has created an Affirmation wall in his office. Each morning the kids stand in front of the mirror and read off two affirmations about themselves. He wanted the kids to start their day on a positive note. The one that resonated with me most was a boy that chooses to say: “I am enough”. He does not say I am Smart or I am Beautiful, etc.; and it’s not that he isn’t any of those things. He was just saying I am me and that is enough. Pretty mature for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader.

Wouldn’t it be nice to get up every morning, look in the mirror and be able to say “I am Enough” and set aside the doubts that we should be different than who we are? God made us in his image. He formed and shaped us all to be unique individuals. He loves us for who we are, regardless of our physical attributes. For Him, we are Enough.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for making me to be me. Please help me to be the best that I can be. Help me to remember that I am enough. Most of all, thank you for your unconditional love and support which has seen me through every challenge and kept me going. You are an ever-present source of comfort and hope. Amen.

Alison Herman



## **MARCH 27**

### **HOLY THURSDAY**

Gracious God,  
your Anointed One, on the night before he suffered,  
instituted the sacrament of his body and blood.  
Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully  
in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in  
these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life.

Amen.

### **GOOD FRIDAY**

Almighty God,  
Graciously behold this your family, for whom our  
Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed into the  
Hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross;  
Who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

UM Hymnal 283 & 284

## MARCH 28 – MAUNDY THURSDAY

### The Way, The Truth, and The Life

Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”*. John 14:6

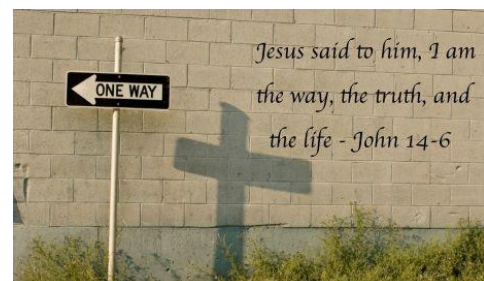
Recently I’ve been reading The Escape Artist, The Man Who Broke Out of Auschwitz to Warn the World by Jonathan Freedland. In the author’s notes, Freedland writes: “It was also the story of...how the difference between truth and lies can be the difference between life and death; and how people can refuse to believe in the possibility of their own imminent destruction, even, perhaps especially, when that destruction is certain.”

As I pondered the gravity of those words and how our lives are defined and determined by what we call truth, I felt myself gravitating towards one of my favorite hymns: “Once to every one and nation comes the moment to decide, In the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side; Some great cause, God’s new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight, and the choice goes by forever twixt that darkness and that light.”

The last verse talks about the scaffold that sways the future. It is this scaffold, this cross, that reveals to us the true nature of God. It reveals a God who wants to separate us from our sins, a God who is with us in our pain and suffering, and a God who seeks to transform and redeem our lives. We can draw comfort and find strength in such a God.

**Prayer:** O living and true God, lead us in the paths of righteousness and truth, for the sake of your redeeming Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thorne Wittstruck



## MARCH 29 – GOOD FRIDAY

### Holy Week Lament

I bring an open heart that's still wary of opening up  
But wants more than anything to be able to love  
Others better, and accept the love you freely give to me,  
The hope of seeing change, and grace to live my life differently.

JoyLenton

Read Psalm 6 (NIV)

*“LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint; heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long? Turn, LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.*  
(Selected Verses)

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Accept our thanks for your Grace and Mercy. Continue to guide us daily by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Larry Oswald



**MARCH 30**

**Letting God**

Read Psalm 23: 1-6

*“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* John 14:2-6 (NKJV)

When the end of life comes for a loved one, it can be hard to let go. We like to physically see and touch that person; however, I feel that to release them from pain and suffering is a far greater way to show how much you love them.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was my grandma’s favorite Bible verse.

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* Psalm 23:4

Grandma didn’t fear death because she knew the Lord walked with her as she crossed over to be with her family who went before her.

Thought for the Day: No more pain and suffering

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for being with me in the hard times and for bringing me comfort in my grief. Amen.

Crystal Handy





## MARCH 31 - EASTER SUNDAY

### We Shall Overcome



Read 1 John 5:1-5; 11-12

*“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”* 1 John 5:4-5

In the last worship service of December, 2023, at Grace United Methodist Church, Pastor Barrie challenged the congregation to embrace a word for the New Year. I chose the word “OVERCOME”.

I have often used 1 John 5:1-5; 11-12 for funeral services. Verses 4-5 especially give me strength and comfort. It is the message of Easter and the hope we have as believers. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith that Jesus is the Son of God. The cross was not the end. We serve a risen Savior who helps us overcome in a fallen world. In John 16:33 Jesus says, *“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

The dictionary defines the word “overcome” as to surmount difficulties, overwhelm, win, and conquer. I like that word, “conquer”. In The Message, 1 John 5:4 it says, *“Every God begotten person conquers the world’s ways”*. We do that by having faith in our Lord and Savior. We know we can trust him to faithfully lead us and help us overcome the world’s way for Christ’s ways. The African American spiritual says, *“We shall overcome someday”*. With God’s help, we can overcome every day.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to be overcomers and to know our victory and our peace is in you. Amen.

Shurmaine McAlpine

## **EVERY MORNING IS EASTER MORNING**

Every morning is Easter morning from now on!

Every day's Resurrection Day, the past is over and gone!

Goodbye guilt, goodbye fear, good riddance! Hello Lord, hello sun!

I am one of the Easter People! My new life has begun.

Daily news is so bad it seems the Good News seldom gets heard.

Get it straight from the Easter People: God's in charge! Spread the word!

Yesterday I was bored and lonely; but today look and see!

I belong to the Easter People! Life's exciting to me!

Every morning is Easter morning from now on!

Every day's Resurrection Day, the past is over and gone!

Every morning is Easter morning, Every morning is Easter morning,

Every morning is Easter morning from now on!

Written by Donald S. March and Richard K.

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