

# Who'll Be A WITNESS

## 2022 Lenten Devotionals

Lent is a time of fasting, repentance, and preparation. We'll use these words written from those in our community to center ourselves and spend intentional time each day focused on the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

You are invited to engage this devotional each day during the season of Lent, which extends from Ash Wednesday through Easter! We are better when we reflect and seek God together. We hope that these daily words help you feel immersed in God's love, grace, and mercy in the weeks to come.



Written by members and friends of Burke UMC

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# Ambassadors: Mission and Intermession - March 2, 2022

Marilyn Harris

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. -2 Corinthians 5:20

In today's complex global environment ambassadors need their typical diplomatic qualifications more than ever: tact, knowledge, wisdom, integrity, experience, authenticity, solid interpersonal skills. Each often "walks a tightrope," where even one ill perceived word or action might spell disaster for the diplomatic mission. Talk about stress. What about "Christ's ambassadors?" Aren't we always to be prepared "to give a reason for the hope we have" in Christ? (1 Peter 3:15) Despite our best intentions, sometimes doing just that can spell stress. Even Moses thought he wasn't qualified to lead the Israelites. Clearly stressed, he decried his speaking skills, even suggested God just find someone else. How do we face stress as "ambassadors for Christ?"

One year I followed husband, Don, to a faraway country for his military assignment. There, I discovered that even skilled diplomats are required to have one stress-reducing essential. We were most excited for the opportunity to be part of that "essential" when invited to house sit on the ambassador's compound during the required 6-week stateside leave for its' diplomatic residents. Twice we happily occupied such a lovely place, only needing pay household staff, to insure their retention during each diplomat's stateside leave. These breaks for the diplomat and his accompanying family meant resting, visiting other relatives, getting back in touch with changing U.S. culture, and State Department supervisors. Finally, diplomats returned to their foreign country posts refreshed, updated, better equipped for the diplomatic mission.

Daily, especially during Lent, a special "leave" can help us too, as Christian "ambassadors" with rest, reflection, and prayer. This more fully connects us with our unparalleled power source: Christ, *God with us*. Our power source, the One who loves and knows us best, then restores and equips us to better meet our shared mission as ambassadors. We also have our own diplomatic "support staff" in pastors, church staff, even in each other, our church family. God offers us this daily leave through devotional quiet time. Happily, this leave isn't limited to Lent, but Lent certainly can be a powerful place for "Ambassadors for Christ" to start, daily, renewing our spirits for serving.

# Trust in God: A Witness for Unexpected Moments - March 3

Linda Lavery

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." - Psalm 91:2

Just before Thanksgiving in 2000, a phone call informed us that our daughter was at the hospital in Blacksburg, being prepped for an emergency appendectomy. I threw a few things into the car and left at about 8:30 PM. Bob stayed home with our teenage son. As I almost flew down the interstates, I found myself praying out loud— not only asking God to be with our daughter for comfort and a good outcome, but also to be with me.

Somehow, saying those words calmed my pounding heart, bringing me desperately needed reassurance. I truly felt that God's angels were guarding both my daughter and me. When I arrived at the hospital, Kathleen was out of recovery, already being moved to a room for her two-night hospital stay. Finally, when all was clear for her release, I collected books, clothes, and other things on her list, then drove her safely, happily home to Clifton for Thanksgiving break.

Never was a Thanksgiving prayer so immediately meaningful . Our grace at dinner that year included gratitude not only that things had turned out so well, but thanks for an even deeper understanding about the amazing privilege we have all day, every day for bringing our cares and fears to Him in times of need—even while flying down dark, lonely interstates.

# Take A Moment TO REFLECT

How are you hoping to grow closer to God and trust in God more this Lenten season? Are you adding any daily intentions to your routine to help keep you centered? Are you fasting from any activities to create more space for God as we prepare for Easter?

Write about it in the space below today.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a reflection. In the bottom right corner of the page, there is a decorative, light gray flourish consisting of several overlapping loops.

# His Grip - March 4

Frank Esposito

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.  
- Psalm 91:16

When they ask "Who will be a witness?" my answer is "Certainly not I." I don't fit the script. I'm not like everyone else. I did not live a life of crime and waste before becoming a Christian. I can't start my witness by saying that I had fallen to the depths before being shocked to new life.

Jim Bouton once explained his efforts to play baseball long after he should have retired saying "You spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time."

My "Amazing Grace" feeling did not come as a flash but more as a realization of how God was working in me. I spent decades trying to come to grips with my relationship to God, only to discover that it had always been the other way around. God was gripping me. Seeds planted long ago by loving parents, patient Sunday School teachers, and wise mentors bore fruit as I acknowledged a faith I've always had. It took a few decades for it all to sink in, but it did. Even for a "wretch like me."

# A Weekend Prayer - March 5

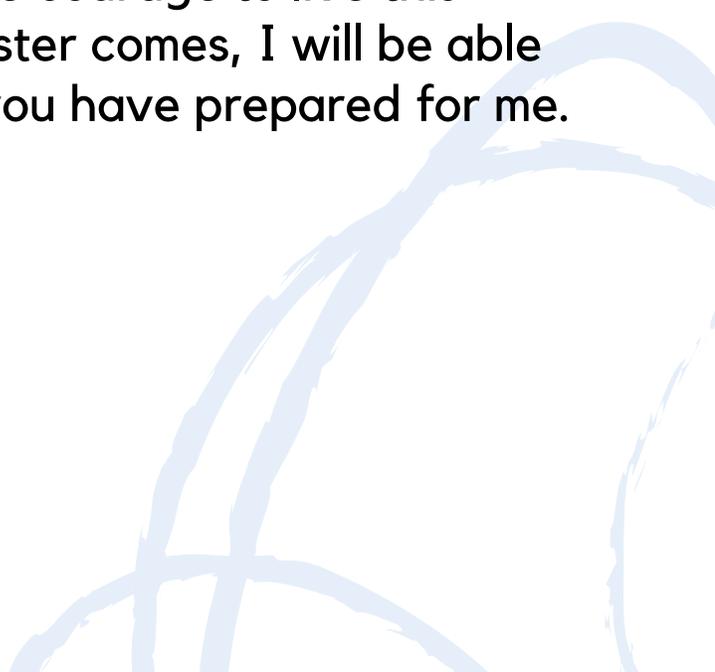
The Lenten season begins. It is a time to be with you, Lord, in a special way, a time to pray, to fast, and thus to follow you on your way to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, and to the final victory over death.

I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life.

I know that Lent is going to be a very hard time for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. There are not times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing you.

Please, Lord, be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me.  
Amen.

-Henri Nouwen





# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - March 6 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# Nature: A Gateway to Witness - March 7

Lucy Gallimore

I will praise You, O Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all Your wonders. - Psalm 9:1

My educational background is English and Library Science. While I enjoyed my time teaching high school English and holding various library jobs, I used to tell people half-jokingly that if I had it to do over, I'd teach about the wonders of God's creation. In the year 2000 I got that opportunity and started working part-time at a nature center teaching a variety of classes to children and, occasionally, to adults.

One of my favorite classes was about the growth and change of plants and animals. During my presentation, I would hold up an acorn and tell the students that everything that acorn needed to survive and grow into a mighty oak tree was already contained within it. Additionally, oak trees provide habitat needs for over 500 species of moths and butterflies alone, not to mention thousands of other species. For example, who doesn't associate oak trees with squirrels? Each acorn has so much potential!

Talking about the intricacy and interconnectedness of nature is a gentle way to witness about your faith and point people to the wonders of God's marvelous creation and, ultimately, to the Creator Himself.

# The Thing About Habits - March 8, 2022

Marilyn Harris

...and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth. -Acts 1:8

Young, sad, tired and alone, I boarded the cavernous "jumbo" jet that February day. I dreaded the long 13-hour trip, mostly over water, from Seoul to Chicago. My new husband, Don, was on a separate military transport from South Korea to Dover, Delaware. There he would receive the casket bearing the remains of his younger brother, Jim, home to Indiana for burial. Jim, a bright, engaging U.S. Air Force officer, had been shot down by hostile fire just weeks before he was to have finished his Vietnam tour of duty. Newly married, we lived in Seoul but, of course, had to fly home on the separate flights.

That cold 1971 day, all seemed surreal as I numbly walked past many oddly vacant seats. Why was the plane so empty anyway? Approaching my assigned seat (one of many other empty 2-seat pairings on window aisles,) I spotted my seat mate already in place. Oh, no, I thought. Of all the empty seats, why this one for me? Intending to slip unnoticed across the aisle, my seat mate caught my eyes and smiled kindly. Just then an attendant appeared, noticing my hesitation. "Can I help you find your seat?" she asked. Caught! I sheepishly accepted and settled into the assigned seat beside my new traveling companion—in her full habit, rosary in hand. I wasn't Catholic, and had few Catholic friends yet. Besides, I'd never even met or talked to a nun. I didn't think I was prejudiced, just uncomfortable--assuming I'd need be on my best behavior. Feeling deep grief, even anxiety, I just wanted to be alone.

Thankfully, I wouldn't be alone. This tiny woman sweetly dispensed with my habit of presumption—asking my travel purpose and plans, nodding understandingly, finally vanquishing my flight anxieties as we flew into darkening skies. Soon she had me describing Jim, explaining how Don and I had met, married, come to Seoul. She reassured me that all would be well, despite the heavy days ahead. Before I knew it, after a light supper, I was totally relaxed and sleepy. As the cabin lights dimmed, my new "friend in habit" smiled and said, "I bet they wouldn't mind if you moved to that center section to sleep. You'd be much better rested." Like magic, an attendant appeared to help remove arm rests. I slept like a baby (covered by prayers I'm sure) before our snowstorm-rocked descent into Chicago. We'd arrived so late that all connecting flights (like ours) were cancelled. The large airport was shutting down until the storm ended, and runways cleared. Delayed passengers would be taxied to on site lodging, then que up later for possible new connecting flights. We were to claim any luggage, then re-check it later.

I bid my "unexpected ambassador" a hurried farewell on the plane, then learned my luggage was missing! After filing my missing luggage claim, I joined the taxi line for the temporary lodging—scanning it for my caring seatmate. I wanted to thank her less hurriedly than earlier. She was gone! Nun? Angel? Perhaps she was both. Most of all, she was a gracious, unexpected witness of God's love and constant provision--reminding me of the dangerous habit of mistakenly focusing on perceived differences within God's family. Then, as in many times since, God chose the perfect "ambassador" on my journey.

# Master Quilter - March 9, 2022

Debbie Watson

O Lord, by your hand save me...You still the hunger of those you cherish..And I—in righteousness will see your face;...I will be satisfied in seeing your likeness.” - Psalm 17: 14, 15

As I read through all of Psalm 17—filled with adversity for God’s people, including countless attacks from their enemies— my first thought was how cruel life can be! Where is God when his people are suffering? Where is that comfort we desperately need to heal our hearts and souls? We read of Job’s life devastated; of David crying out for salvation; even Jesus announcing that one of his closest confidants will betray him. We read with the same confusion, guilt and pain that the disciples surely felt in hearing Christ’s own unforgettable words from the cross, “My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!?” I hear those words too! How do I explain that to anyone? What kind of witness is that?

Then, I picture a quilt. I see little bits of fabric that have been torn and rent asunder into so many different pieces, scattered about the room with no rhyme, reason or order. Then, I see in my soul’s eye God, the Master Quilter, taking up each individual piece, knowing exactly where it goes, joining each to another with carefully threaded needle. Stitch, stitch, stitch. Our lives are a patchwork quilt— also touched lovingly, perfectly by God. Let our beautifully pieced patches stand as evidence to all the world of God’s promise. While life can tear us apart in so many ways, thank God for taking all of our torn, seemingly useless pieces, and bringing such beauty from them all with that divine “needle and thread” of amazing grace and goodness.

# Light From The Passing Lane

March 10, 2022

Jane Wilson

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom will I be afraid?

-Psalm 27:1

A couple of weeks ago I passed a car with the license plate "Salm 27." Now there's a person witnessing! I looked up this Psalm and that first couplet said so much:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
Whom shall I fear?*

I love the Psalms of David, because David was, like so many heroes of the Bible, a rather imperfect person. I find in his Psalms so many of the feelings I live with every day: fear, anxiety, hope, joy. Like David, my life is full of poor choices, yet the Psalms tell me that God loves me, hears me, supports me, guides me, protects me just because I am His precious child-- not because of anything I have done. It gives me great comfort to know that God can use even me, sinner that I am, to further His work in the Kingdom. God shines that light in unexpected, creative ways in the everyday—even from a witness I've never met, in a traffic lane beside me.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:** Can you recall some simple, unexpected witness in your everyday life—some way you felt encouraged, found yourself smiling, or even challenged to cheer someone else? Do you think to thank God for these—or just regard them as accidental, coincidental?

# Lasting Courage

March 11, 2022

Meredith Moore

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom will I be afraid?

-Psalm 27:1

As far back as I can remember, I was afraid of the dark. Each night, I would tiptoe into my parents' room with my pillow, blanket, and protective teddy bear and lay at the foot of their bed.

Fast forward to my first deployment as a Navy wife. The days were lonely, and the dark nights could be just as scary as my childhood. After laying awake hearing strange noises in my small condo one night, I picked up the phone to Melissa, my trusted deployment buddy. I was embarrassed and a bit ashamed that at 25 years old, I was still afraid of the dark. I knew my fears were irrational. I asked her, "How do I pray for God's help to get me through this? How is He going to save me if there is someone inside the house?"

Her answer was life changing! She said, "God does not promise to save you from your present earthly danger, He promises to be in it with you! Feel His loving arms around you and know you are not alone." Dark nights no longer hold me prisoner because the Lord is my light and my strength. I am never alone, and neither are you!

# A Weekend Prayer - March 12

You, you giver!

You have given light and life to the world;

You have given freedom from Pharaoh to your people Israel;

You have given your only Son for the sake of the world;

You have given yourself to us;

You have given and forgiven,

and you remember our sins no more.

And we, in response, are takers:

We take eagerly what you give us;

we take from our neighbors near at hand as is acceptable;

we take from our unseen neighbors greedily and  
acquisitively;

we take from our weak neighbors thoughtlessly;

we take all that we can lay our hands on.

It dawns on us that our taking does not match your giving.

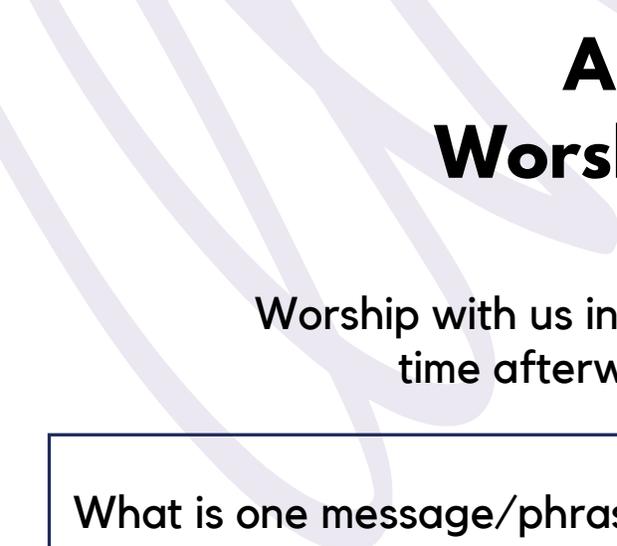
In this Lenten season revise our taking,

that it may be grateful and disciplined,

even as you give in ways generous and overwhelming.

Amen.

-Walter Brueggeman



# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - March 13 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# Witness to Witness - March 14

Julie Chapman

Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path.  
-Psalm 27:11

I have a friend who is a hospital oncology nurse. She is a witness daily. She prays for patients and staff--usually out loud. She quotes scripture to mechanics, restaurant waitstaff, store clerks, each person she encounters. It's as natural as breathing for her. I am not that kind of witness.

Psalm 27 proclaims God's protection and assistance with confidence. My nurse friend never forgets that. Unfortunately, I have not always felt God's presence or peace during certain situations. I needed to be reminded of Ps 27:13: "I am confident of this; believe I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

God's goodness is all around me. I often benefit from the way God's Spirit is working in the lives of others and impacting my life: unexpected cards and gifts, encouraging emails, compassionate conversations; help moving my "stuff, " contagious laughter over dinner. God is at work around and within me-- around and within you, too. Sometimes we just need to be reminded--and even kindly remind others. I can be a witness to that!

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:** Is there someone who inspires or has inspired you as that sort of witness the oncology nurse is? Do you think you must be "exactly" like her? Why or why not? Can you think of ordinary ways that might just suit you as your own, unique sort of witness? What opportunities in your church family might help you do this, if you struggle with it—a class, or perhaps participation in a small group you've yet to try? Or, how can you encourage another person in becoming or continuing on in their own unique role as witness?

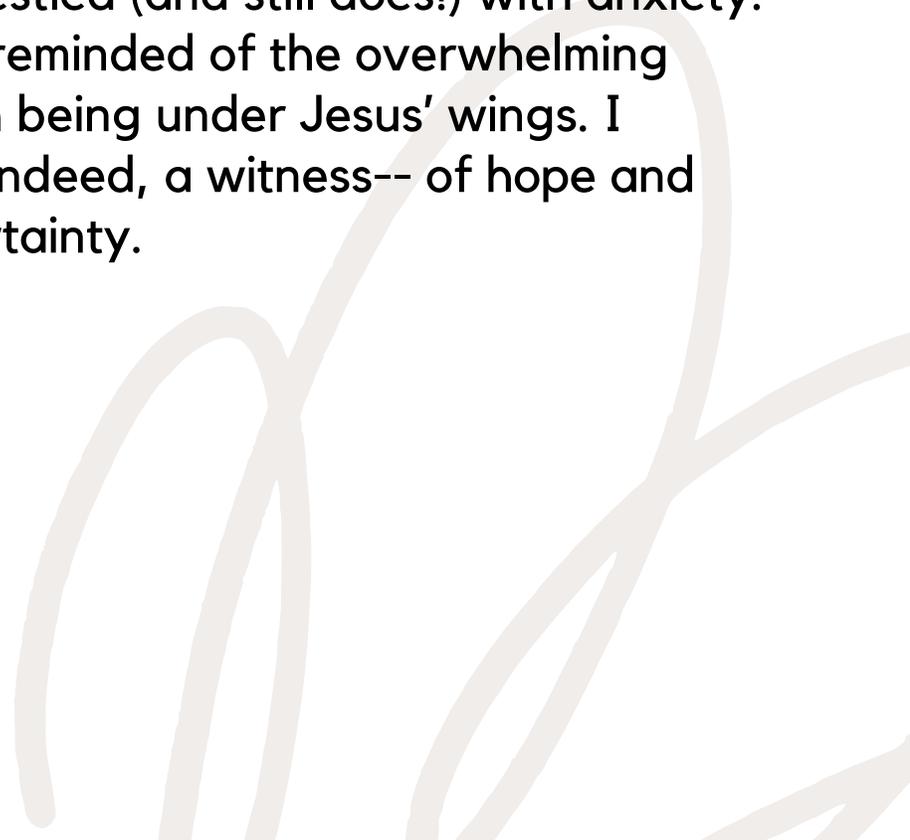
# As A Hen Gathers Her Chicks - March 15

Jorge Burmicky

...how often have I longed to gather your children together,  
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. -Luke 13:34

I center my reflection about this verse, and the entire passage of Luke 13: 34-35, in one word: *fear*. When I think of the threats that Jesus received before his death, it is difficult to ignore the intense fear that he must have felt over time.

As a child, I was terrified of Herod. This is not surprising after reading statements such as, "leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). Yet, I never pictured Jesus as someone overwhelmed with fear, even after getting multiple death threats. Instead, I pictured Jesus as the "hen that gathers her chicks under her wings..." (Luke 13:34) This is so reassuring to me as someone who has consistently wrestled (and still does!) with anxiety. To bear witness is to be reminded of the overwhelming strength that comes with being under Jesus' wings. I welcome this as a sign—indeed, a witness-- of hope and comfort in times of uncertainty.



# Barista Beginnings - March 16

Grant Thorton

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. -Romans 10: 12-13

In 2019 I reflected on my commitment to give up McDonald's coffee on the way to work for Lent. Perhaps it wasn't that big a sacrifice, I thought, but it was a beginning. In 2018 the \$1.50/day had turned into a \$60 donation in a "Change the World" can at church. More importantly for me both were the beginnings of daily reminder to serve those less fortunate than I--forty days to strengthen a habit, a simple witness of being intentional in loving my fellow man.

In 2022, my intentional gestures "brewed" into putting away \$5 each day during Lent for those who I will meet randomly--ones who are down on their luck. With encouragement from my Disciple Small Group, I have grown from just dropping some cash into their hands with a quick "God Bless," to taking a few moments to ask if I can pray for them by name. They usually respond with a smile, and a "yes," then a blessing for me. One man named Hal said, "Yes I need it." Eddie responded with "I'll see you in heaven." Some don't respond at all, or perhaps say "yes," or some may not even understand English. Still, I try to remember each one.

Jesus says in Matthew 25:40 (NIV) "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." These children of God are wonderfully made by our creator in his image, same as you and me! Jesus calls us to reach out with the Good News, which can be shared in many ways. I am proof that God can pull us out of our comfort zone to be his hands and feet in spreading the Good News so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

I know that I'm blessed each day by God's grace. God provides so much, yet asks little but that we simply love God with all our hearts, souls and minds-- and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. I pray that God will increase my courage to reach out today, every day, to someone in need—not just to share a cup of coffee or money for it, but to share the Good News of God's grace for us all.

# Joy Remains - March 17

Judy Fender

"For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy." -Psalm 63:7

Adversity causes us to pray and consider; "what do I do now, what does this mean, "what comes next". Often the difficult, crucial one is "why did God let this happen", it is an agonizing one filled with despair, not unlike Christ's anguished prayer to God in Gethsemane "that this hour might pass from me."

My husband Frank was diagnosed with cancer in 2/2018 and my regular world stopped. Our focus became his treatment and care as I and many prayed for healing. We never questioned "why us" for the merciful God I trust does not single out individuals or communities for adversity, punishment, or refinement.

In the enfolding wings of the Creator I found comfort and strength to find joy in our shared blessings and memories, visits by family and friends. In the dark moments as death approached and came, the promise of our Resurrection faith gave me hope and a deep joy that Frank was free, whole again; experiencing another adventure...the best of all.

# Witnessing As We Walk - March 18

Michelle Hettmann

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. -1 Thessalonians 5:11

I used to hike a lot in Blacksburg during my time in college: on the weekends, after class, during class sometimes (oops — senior skip days are a real thing). I loved getting to explore new trails, working hard to trek up to a new destination that had so much history and peace. The air feels different while you're hiking. Sometimes I would hike alone and let my mind wander, discovering feelings I hadn't even realized I still needed to process. Other times I would hike with friends, telling stories and jokes to distract ourselves from the pain of our calves working overtime to keep up with the incline.

When I moved to Atlanta for grad school, I got sad that I wouldn't be able to hike anymore. City life would mean lots of new places to explore, but I grieved the connection to nature and the built-in wonder right around the corner. My second year at Emory, I heard that a few friends were going hiking in North Carolina over Spring Break and I asked if I could come. I knew I was out of hiking shape but hoped I'd be able to keep up. We went 20 miles in 3 days. I had never carried a pack that far or cooked my own food over a camping stove. I felt exhausted and questioned my abilities, but I was also grateful for the experience.

These new friends were the best companions on the journey. We told stories and laughed and shared about our faith — about how school was both awakening us to new truths about God and our calls and about how it was challenging beliefs we'd held for all our lives. The mountains brought us together. I pray that the mountains in our lives can continue to bring us together, too.

# A Weekend Prayer - March 19

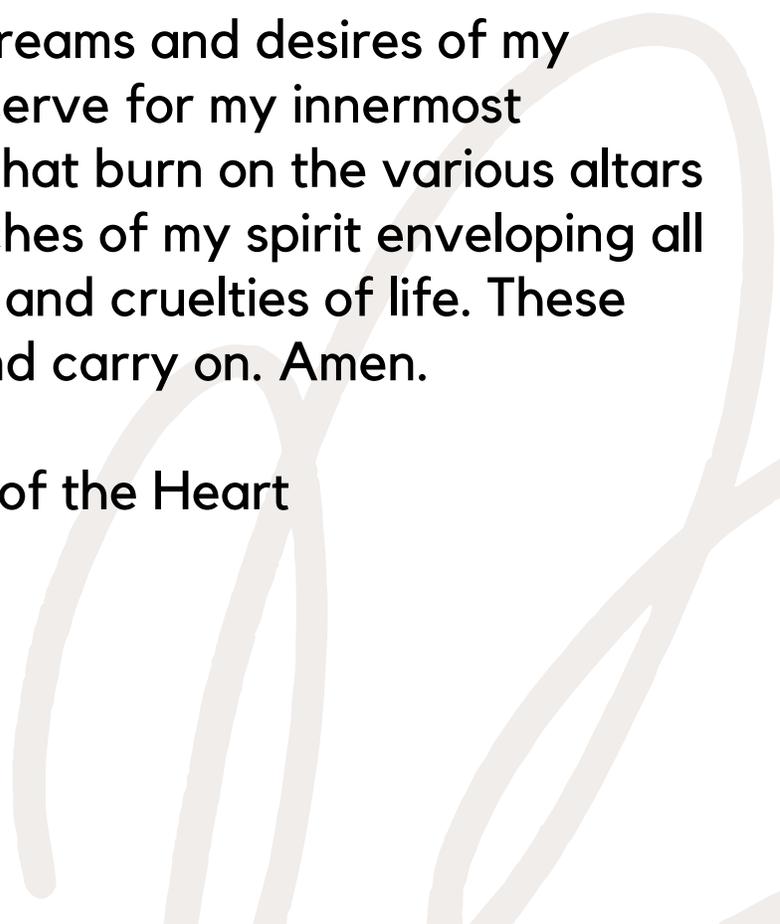
I surrender to God the nerve center of my consent. This is the very core of my will, mainspring of my desiring, the essence of my conscious thought.

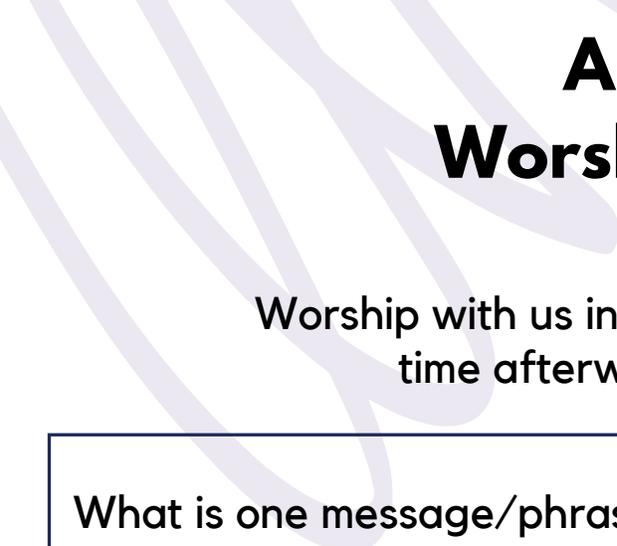
I surrender to God the outlying districts of my self. These are the side streets down which I walk at night, the alleys of my desires, the parts of me that have not been laid out with streets, the wooded area, the swamps and marshlands of my character.

I surrender to God the things in my world to which I am related. These are the work I do, the things I own or that threaten me with their ownership, the points at which I carry social responsibility among my fellows, the money I earn, my delight in clothes and good food.

I surrender to God the hopes, dreams and desires of my heart. These are the things I reserve for my innermost communion; these are the fires that burn on the various altars of my life; these are the outreaches of my spirit enveloping all the hurt, the pain, the injustices and cruelties of life. These are the things by which I live and carry on. Amen.

-Howard Thurman, Meditations of the Heart





# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - March 20 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# Love, Honor, and Sacrifice - March 21

Cindy Spain

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... -Ephesians 5:25

As I write this, I have been married for 30 years to the wonderful man God put into my life. Marriage is a covenant relationship that must be viewed through a lens of love, honor, and sacrifice.

January 2016, when my dad died, I was quickly on a plane to Arkansas. One of our daughters in college could not fly with us, so my husband, Chris, drove 2 days through a terrifying ice storm so that she too could be with us. Right then, I witnessed God's protective power carrying them through their creeping journey along I-40 with cars sliding, some into in the ditches, others even crashing. Chris did not--really could not-- stop. The sacrifice that trip required reinforced for me the love my husband has for our union, our family, me. Relationships and sacrifice go hand in hand; faith and sacrifice go hand in hand. Ephesians 5:25 says, "For husbands this means to love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her."

I am so blessed to be so loved by my husband. We all are blessed to be loved so completely, sacrificially by our Triune God.

# Train Witness - March 22

Katie Beuthe

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. -Acts 1: 8

I was riding the train from D.C. to Milwaukee, enjoying the view out my roomette window, and reading my devotion books. Across from me was a young woman who looked a bit sad and distressed, so I said a little prayer for her. I feel uncomfortable, I thought to myself, just intruding on any strangers, let alone asking if I can pray for them. Heaven knows, I could never ask if they knew about God, or were even saved!

I returned to my devotions, occasionally sending up another prayer. When I finished my Guidepost magazine of uplifting Christian stories, God "nudged" me to pass on my magazine to the woman. As I did, I told her how much I enjoyed it, and asked if she would like to read it to keep her company.

When I returned from the lounge, she had a big smile on her face, and, clearly, much gratitude for my gesture.

Praise God!

# Windows to God's Presence and Love - March 23

Linda Lavery

Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. - Exodus 40: 33\*

While driving down Braddock Road one day, I heard my grandson ask from the back seat, "what is that big white building?" I explained that it was a new church. After a thoughtful pause, he responded, "How can it be a church? It has no windows."

He went on to say how, from his seat in the front row of our own church, he could see the sky and clouds, and sometimes trees. For him, seeing God's world outside was part of the worship experience, and a reminder of God's presence.

Then I talked with him about my family's church, where and when I was growing up. I explained to him that it had huge, beautiful stained glass windows. My favorite, I told him, was one of Jesus with little children gathered around him and on his knee. When I was little, I was sure one of them looked just like me. Gazing at that and the other windows were part of worship for me. I could almost feel God's welcoming and reassuring presence.

Exodus 40 relates the detailed instructions to Moses for building the Tabernacle--very different from what we see today. However, the critical point has to do with the cloud that forms over the tent housing the Tabernacle: a visible sign of God's presence for the Israelites. When the cloud moved, the Israelites would move as well.

Wherever we worship, God is with us. As my young grandson had pointed out (as unexpected witness he was for me and others), seeing God's presence and worshipping go hand in hand.

\*See also Exodus 40: 1-36

# Our Amazing Unseen Witness - March 24

Jane Wilson

For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal. - 2 Corinthians 4:18

For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

I recently read an opinion piece in Sojourners magazine. The author postulated that the Spirit touches our lives 10,000 times each day and in general we are aware of about 3 of them. What would our lives be like if we actually listened to the Spirit a little more?

This challenged me to pay more attention to that internal voice that was saying, "Jane, stop racing through the church and stop and listen to that person" and "Jane, not another episode of Grey's Anatomy - go for a walk" and "Jane, you haven't talked to the French lady in a while - go call her." At least once a day God makes me laugh with the suggestion being made to me!

Now I talk about it. "The Spirit nudged me to call you today". "The Spirit nudged me to volunteer today - and now we have the opportunity to chat". I am so grateful that God loves me enough to care about even the smallest details of my life.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:** How might God's, Christ's Spirit have nudged or tried to nudge you some time? Have you ever noticed an opportunity to share about it with someone else? Did you feel a bit foolish or hesitant to do so? Why or why not? How do you know when or when not to share—to witness—such moments?

# Carrying Comfort Together - March 25

Michelle Hettmann

Praise be to the God and [Creator] of our Lord Jesus Christ, the [Creator] of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. - 1 Corinthians 1:3

It's been a year where myself and many around me have felt pretty wounded and in need of comfort. An ongoing pandemic, injustice towards groups of people I deeply care about, resources distributed inequally and societal grief that feels unbearable at times. It's hard to hold all these feelings and to know what the best next step is sometimes.

One of the best exercises a trusted mentor led us through in college campus ministry was about how to move forward when things feel too hard. She had us stand in a circle, close our eyes and put out both of our hands, palms facing up. She asked us to imagine all of the hard feelings we were holding – sorrow, grief, fear, pain – and put those in our left hand. Then she invited us to do the same with our lighter feelings: our happiness, joys, excitements. She gently directed us to put our hands on top of each other, putting all the feelings together in one safe, small place. "You don't carry these feelings alone, dear ones. God is always here to carry these with you. And we are here in community to carry them together."

May we be witnesses to those around us this Lenten season by reaching out our hands and providing simple reminders that nobody needs to carry their feelings and experiences alone.

# A Weekend Prayer - March 26

Dear God,

Help me to stop feeling like everything is a test. A test of my compassion. A test of my fortitude. A test of my faith. Help me remember that I am not being graded. I am being guided. Guided to see that maybe I have a greater capacity to be ok when everything is horrible than I thought I did, but that it is not limitless, and it does not need to be.

Help us manage our compassion fatigue and the judgement we feel toward ourselves for having it. If you did not create our psyches to be able to withstand and respond to every tragedy and hardship happening to human beings right now, then nudge us to respond when it is our turn, and be gentle with ourselves when it's not.

Help us know when our work is done. Help us rest when we should. Help us reach out to serve when we can. Help us remember to check on our strong friends. Help us be kinder toward those who can't do as much as we can. Help us do the next right thing. And Lord, help us not forget the ice cream when we go to the grocery store next. Amen.

- Nadia Bolz-Weber



# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - March 27 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# Gracious Clarity - March 28

Marilyn Harris

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. - Matthew 7: 24-25 NAS

I remember a lesson on clarity in faith witness from when I was just 7 years old. Growing up in a church that taught us countless old hymns, so many based on Bible passages, I had one memorable experience in learning about winsome witness. I stood between Mom and my pig-tailed younger cousin, Phyllis, during congregational singing at that Sunday's worship service. At 5, Phyllis enthusiastically sang along with a lively rendition of the old hymn, "The Solid Rock." Phyllis, though, hesitated each time we sang the refrain's last line, "On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand." Finished, seated for morning Scripture reading, Phyllis (as eager to understand as to sing) reached past me, tugging at Mom's skirt. "Aunt Lucille," she asked, clearly puzzled, "just who is this *Sinking Sam*?"

I saw Mom smiling, carefully lifting a cautionary "Sh-h-h..." finger to her lips. Once seated, she leaned over and quietly, respectfully explained to Phyllis, "It's sinking sand-- like in the Bible story about the foolish man building his house on sand, instead of on Jesus, our Solid Rock."

With a nod of instant understanding, Phyllis's puzzled expression changed into a smile. After all, she already knew that Bible story because she was part of a church family who continually shared, treasured and clarified the Bible's many stories. I look back at that rich blessing, knowing that not everyone has that privilege early in life.

I think then it's helpful to offer graceful patience on my part when a new believer or even non-believer questions something we may assume as basic to our faith. We need sensitivity, humility, grace-- a pause. We don't need some long theological treatise, just maybe some simple clarification. We, like Mom, can sweeten our own witness with honest—but never patronizing--answers from the heart, from experience—including maybe even from a favorite hymn. We have, after all, "The Solid Rock" to guide us in providing such gracious clarity.

# Guilt-Free Good News - March 29

Rev. Judy Fender

"See, I have taken away your guilt away from you".  
- Zechariah 3:4

The Lenten Season invites me a season of repentance; a time of turning away, in both mind and heart, from self to God. In a vision God speaks to Zechariah, "Joshua's guilt has been taken away." The allusion points to the reemergence of the Davidic line and the one who would inaugurate the era of cleansing from sin.

Jesus sacrifice grants salvation to all the whole created world; it is beyond my comprehension, unconditional love given freely to all. We are asked to repent and walk in his way, God's kingdom on earth.

At a gathering time in Vacation Bible School, the video failed. I had time to fill as techs solved the problem. Our bible focus was on repent. I demonstrated in the center aisle that it meant to turn and walk in a new direction where you praised and thanked God, were kind to others, told the truth, shared your toys and good things. Detours happened if you fell off the path, you asked for forgiveness and returned to straight path in Jesus' footsteps.

After students left, a visitor approached; not raised in faith she struggled with concept of sin, forgiveness, and repentance. But the simple demonstration moved her journey forward. A problem let me witness the Good News.

# Fixer Upper - March 30

Melanie Barry

...he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. -1 Peter 5:10

Five years ago, I started a business buying run down homes, repairing them, and reselling "flipping" them. Many of these homes are in terrible shape, deteriorating and falling apart. Most of them have had severe water damage, resulting in harmful black mold growing inside them. The water damage is most often caused by holes in their roofs or cracks in the homes' foundation. When my business partner and I choose a "fixer upper" property to flip, we must look past all the home's damage to see the home's full *potential*.

Similarly, God sees the potential in us. No matter how damaged I, or anyone else may be, God can help restore anyone, anytime. When we are broken down, he tries to build us back up so we can shine and be our better selves. Like a strong roof protects a home, God's word helps guide and protect us from all the stormy times we may face in our lives. The Bible is our best "floor plan" or blueprint. Reading and learning from God's messages in the Bible helps restore us and strengthens our foundation as Christians. A stronger foundation helps to support us when we encounter challenging times in our lives. As our faith and knowledge grow, we are also increasingly transformed as Christians and better able to live up to the full potential God sees in us.

# Ordinary Opportunities - March 31

Larry Van Horn

Paul then stood up in the meeting...and said...The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth, and does not live in temples built by hands...For in him we live and move and have our being... - Acts 17:22, 28\*

Being a witness often can be filled to the top with drama. It sure was when I, as a youth, watched all of the Perry Mason episodes. Mason cleverly solved the mystery and usually had a witness on the stand break down and confess he or she was the murderer. Being a witness seemed most precarious-- at least it seemed that way on TV. Better to be the lawyer than the witness, I thought.

Thank goodness though, not all witnessing is in court. In our own Christian faith background the greatest witness had to be the Apostle Paul. His most famous moment of witness was surely his Areopagus sermon, as described in Acts 17, 22-34. You likely remember the story. Paul observed the Greeks had an alter to an "unknown god." Then he proceeded unapologetically telling them about that God—versus our own, through Christ. Bold for sure!

I've stood on the place where Paul gave that sermon. Pretty impressive. You are way up there, high above, while the crowd is way down there below. ("Paul, you go dude," I was thinking.) Standing there on that day I experienced the lofty, historical place, I didn't have to preach.

Remembering that ancient site and the memorable Biblical account, I thought:there are countless times I have been called to be a witness—but usually in spectacularly mundane ways. I love to say something like, "Wednesday? I'm afraid not. That's choir practice night at Burke United Methodist Church. Any chance you sing tenor?" I'm a Christian, after all. I can invite someone very simply—tenor or not--to come along and make discoveries in faith too.

\*See also Acts 17:22-30

# God's Perfect Timing - April 1

Roz Hoagland

I will not leave you comfortless;  
I will come to you. -John 14:18

I've made banners for our church for many years—a job that is time consuming but truly a very rewarding, creative outlet. Ideas for the banners have come from many sources: a phrase in a hymn, or part of a sermon sometimes inspires me to sketch a new idea during the church service.

One of my most memorable banner inspirations began with a design featuring a violin, as part of a series of 8 musical instruments. My daughter, Kate's violin provided the starting point, but I had no idea what words to use with it.

While mulling this over, I headed for the fabric store to complete the violin's "color scheme." At the checkout counter, the clerk for some reason asked what my plans were for the fabric. I explained about the violin banner and how the appropriate phrase still eluded me. With only a moments' hesitation she said, "The Touch of the Master's Hand!"

She then explained that it's the title of a poem telling the story of an old, battered violin being sold for next to nothing at an auction. In the midst of the bidding, an old man picks up the violin and begins to play the most beautiful music. The value of the violin suddenly increases dramatically following "the touch of a master's hand." The violin becomes an analogy for the worth of a soul touched by God's hand.

The clerk said the poem had been her grandfather's favorite. He, a retired Methodist minister, had recently died, and she had memorized it for his birthday one year. I asked if she could still recite it. She took a deep breath and recited the entire poem, word for word.

I could tell by the tears in her eyes that the memories of her grandfather made this loving recitation difficult for her. Meanwhile, a line of other customers had formed, and when she finished, we all broke out into applause. It was an amazing moment.

I knew then I had the perfect phrase for the new banner, along with a truly inspiring experience among God's "extended family."

## The Touch of the Master's Hand By Myra Brooks Welch

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste much time on the old violin,  
But held it up with a smile...

...And many a man with a life out of tune  
And battered and scarred with sin  
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd  
Much like the old violin...

...But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand  
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought  
But the touch of the Master's hand.

# A Weekend Prayer - April 2

God of Sorrows,

We cry holy for a God who is moved to tears when met with the conditions of this world. We are grateful that You are not a God who drags us out of our pain before we are ready— one who is not threatened by our tears but beholds them as holy. This Lent, help us to make space for a faithful examination of injustice, death, and decay in this world. We confess that we so often reduce salvation to the personal; let ours be a salvation tethered to the liberation of the world. And so form us into people who truly see the world, in all of its beauty and depravity. And when we find ourselves tempted to look away, steady us, that we may see with clarity our most desperate need for a Christ.

As we prepare for the memory of God hung from the cross, let us bear witness to all that requires it. Oppression, famine, war, neglect, loss, exclusion, loneliness, grief— all suspended by sin itself— let us resolve to see and name it all. That we would daily apprehend the breach between what we were created for and the distortion we see in the systems and powers of this world today. Let us grieve the chasm. And as we allow ourselves to weep with you, let us hope with you in the coming restoration of all things.

Glory to the One who met the cross with tears on his face.  
We look to You. Amen.

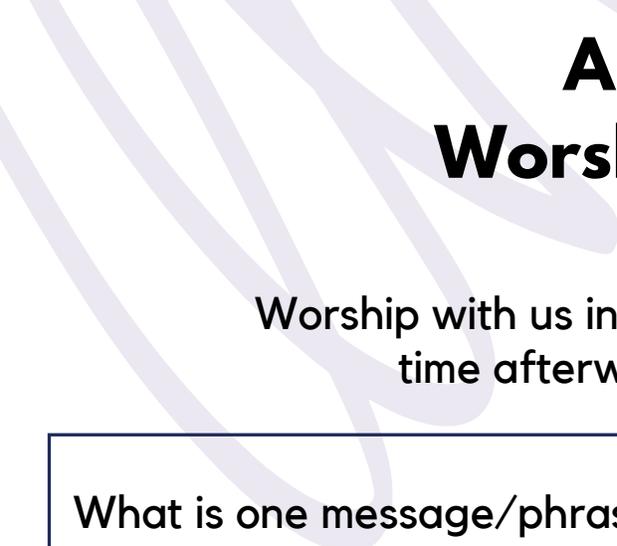
- Cole Arthur Riley

# Take A Moment TO DREAM

What is God speaking into your life so far this Lenten season? Have you felt any recurring words or phrases arise during your prayer/reflection time? How do you hope to carry these lessons/longings with you into the Easter season and beyond?

Write about it today in the space below.





# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - April 3 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# The Witness of Seasonal Treasures

## April 4

Linda Lavery

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. -Ecclesiastes 3:1

For everything there is “a season...” says that familiar passage of Scripture. Life’s seasons overflow with seemingly countless emotions and actions—both negative and positive. Solomon, the famous Biblical king to whom this Biblical passage generally is attributed, goes on to add something we often miss in life seasons that we may first see as negative. Solomon added, “He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time.” Beautiful? Even negatives, he believed, have important meaning as people experience them throughout life.

For me it initially was hard to see that during 2000, one year that certainly first seemed largely negative to me. A stroke in the spring left my mother physically healthy— but with profound dementia. My father, seemingly overwhelmed by losing her, died in the fall. For the next 7 years—continually demanding seasons— I called Mom almost every day to check on her and hear her usually cheery voice. During 2 week-long visits a year, I chatted, ate, and held her hand in the nursing home. She always explained that Dad was upstairs napping or out for coffee with his friends. In her world, thankfully, he hadn’t really left her.

In my very real world, I played the sunroom piano while she sang hymns. In fact, she knew all of them by heart. That season in both our lives brought unexpected treasure to each visit. Though recognizing me as her younger sister, she filled my mind and heart with so much I’d never known about her life— including the lasting treasure about how she felt about me. She was an unforgettable witness for me as God taught me more about patience, about truly listening. Most of all, I learned about finding good even in those times we usually see only as bad—just what I think King Solomon had discovered about seasons too.

# Our Own Unique Witness - April 5

George Gallimore

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. - Acts 1:8

I attended a Bible Study at another church several years ago. There, the study's teacher instructed that unless someone speaks to others about Jesus that person is "a counterfeit Christian!" Afterwards, I began trying to talk to others about the Savior-- but without success. It just wasn't me.

That moniker of "Counterfeit Christian" stayed with me for years until I began volunteering to drive senior citizens to their medical appointments. After several positive encounters with some delightful, appreciative, and very Christ-like folks, we began to share our respective faith journeys. Over time I began to realize that witness involves a lot more than just talking the talk. It focuses much on how much we give of ourselves to others.

I read somewhere that to give is to live and to live is to give. I've concluded that this phrase was given to me for a reason: to make it my own and to use it every day in serving others. And, I discovered, it doesn't have to be in major service projects either. In my case, helping seniors with their walkers, a friendly chat to and from their appointments and just being there for them is a most fulfilling adventure.

Sometimes I still think about that "counterfeit Christian" quote--but not much. I'm too busy now enjoying good people. I think I now have a more personalized view of witnessing. I'm okay with that.

# Struggling to Make Sense - April 6

Monica Burmicky

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its' meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. -Luke 18:34

As Jesus predicted his death (Luke 18: 31-33,) his disciples listened with bewilderment. "It's meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about" (Luke 18:34).

As we continue to embark into uncharted COVID-19 territory, there's something so comforting about the mystery of God. For almost two years, I've struggled to make sense of this pandemic, while quarantined and "working" from home with two kids under 4. There were days of utter confusion and desperation, yet my doubts seem to pale in comparison to how the disciples must have felt trying to understand Jesus' prophecy. Yet, despite the disciples' doubts, Jesus's prophecy was fulfilled. He died and rose from the dead. This truth has allowed me to release my desire to control, and, instead, lean into the mystery of God. Although some days are better than others, I find peace knowing that the Lord's plan will be fulfilled despite my fleeting doubts and discomfort.

# Wide Eyed Witness - April 7

Marilyn Harris

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? - Matthew 7:3

One memorable night years ago, bedtime prayers with sons, Brian 7, and Kevin 4 were finished. As always, we'd started by praying together the classic poem-prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep...." Since I hoped to help them learn to improvise their own prayers from the heart, I'd also asked each to add things like simple thanks or blessings--in their own words. Finally, I'd close with my own spontaneous additions. That night I think my "spontaneous additions" passed our sons' tipping points. "Amens" finally said, I looked up to see Brian staring sternly at Kevin, then asking me, "Mom, do prayers count if your eyes are open?" (Clearly, he was not withholding brotherly admonishment.) I asked him why he asked, to which he bluntly proclaimed, "Because Kevin had his eyes open the **whole time** you were praying!"

I imagine God sympathized at least a tad with Kevin. After all, he was the youngest. I also felt a bit guilty, thinking I was at least partly at fault. Anyway, I assured Brian that, yes, God listens to all our prayers—eyes closed or open. I then reminded Kevin about respect for God and for those praying. Suddenly, I realized I had to ask big brother exactly how he knew Kevin's eyes were open! Hmmm! Mutual enlightenment (then slow smiles) arrived peacefully.

Often we "grown ups in the room" think children more easily make mistakes both in judgement and judging others. Truthfully sometimes we do the same, even if unintentionally. As adults our own faith witness to either children or adults is sadly diminished when we judge others too quickly, forgive too slowly, or forget how endlessly, unconditionally God loves us. We are expected, as we grow toward maturity in our faith, to love unconditionally too. Isn't that, after all, the essence of more effective witnessing: gracefully sharing God's amazing grace? I know that I still need open eye and closed eye prayers to help me along the way in doing that.

# A Mother's Witness - April 8

Katie Buethe

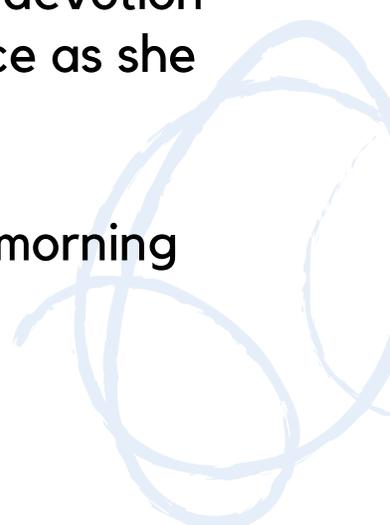
Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

-Matthew 26:13

My father was a distinguished and beloved Lutheran minister, college professor, and University President. I loved him as a fun father, but his sermons were way too long and theological for my brother and me. On Sunday mornings Mom would kiss him goodbye and say, "Don't preach too long today, dear." But he always did! To this day, I can't remember any point that stood out to me.

On the other hand, my dear Mother left the biggest impression on me with her silent witness. Before school my brother and I would kiss her goodbye in her bedroom where she was curled up in a chair reading her devotion books with a smile on her face. She was at peace as she communicated with her Lord and Savior.

This is the way I remember her as I do my own morning devotions, with a smile on my face!



# A Weekend Prayer - April 9

Why O Lord, should I be preoccupied with my fears and lose courage in the face of my weakness? You give me to understand that I must fortify myself in humility, and convince myself that I can do very little alone, and that without your help I am nothing. I shall put all my confidence in your mercy, and shall distrust my own strength, convinced that my weakness is caused by my self-reliance.

You teach me not to be astonished at my struggle, for when a soul wishes to give itself over to mortification, it encounters difficulties on all sides. Does it wish to give up its ease? What a hardship! To scorn a point of honor? What a torture! To endure harsh words? Intolerable suffering!

In short, it becomes filled with extreme sadness, but as soon as it resolved to die to the world, every anguish is at an end. Amen.

-Saint Teresa of Avila



# **An Invitation to Worship and Reflection - April 10 -**

Worship with us in person or online and take some extra time afterwards reflecting on the service.

What is one message/phrase that resonated with you from this morning's message?

What did you learn from this morning's witness we reflected on?

What is one thing you hope you'll carry with you into this week because of what we've learned together this morning?

# Wearing Our Witness - April 11

Jane Wilson

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. -James 2:17

Last Saturday, right after working at co-op in the church, I went to have my car serviced at the dealership. Of course, I was still wearing my "Burke Gives Back" sweatshirt with the tagline on the back "Loving Our Neighbors." I didn't purposely wear it to witness, hadn't really thought about it that way. It simply was easier to go straight to the dealership than go home and change. Another customer there stopped me and said, "I like your shirt! Wouldn't the world be a better place if more people felt that way?" We chatted for another 5 minutes, then drove off into our separate, busy days.

Afterwards though, I thought about how we have so many seemingly ordinary opportunities to "witness" our faith—ways besides handing out Bible leaflets or having to tell our whole life stories. The word "evangelize" often gives others—and us too—unfortunate, negative images. That's understandable, if we limit understanding that word as some sort of coercive, unpleasant thing. We can remember instead that the word "evangel" actually has to do with "good news" —as opposed to our daily doses of "bad news" from front pages to evening newscasts. Our consistent behavior, our words, the way we choose to spend our time, our quiet listening — even our shirts! — can transform negative expectations about sharing, living out God's "Good News." Then, others actually might see how that "Good News" works in OUR lives--- and ,more importantly, how God just might work in their lives, too.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:** Have you ever had an experience like this? Were you uncomfortable? How did you handle it? How would you handle it today—or do you intentionally try to avoid such situations? How might God want you to change or not change such possibilities?

# Jesus Weeps with Us - April 12

Michelle Hettmann

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it. -Luke 19:41

I had the privilege of traveling to Israel-Palestine during my time in grad school. We walked in the places where Jesus walked and got to experience the bible stories we knew so well coming to life. I didn't expect to get emotional on the trip, but when we made it to the Mount of Olives I went and sat down on a concrete slab on the edge of the hill, able to see the full city of Jerusalem, and it stopped me in my tracks.

It baffles me every time I think about it. Jesus weeping. It's so human, so "God with us." Jesus has always been with us and for us. Jesus knew he was going to be crucified and when he looked over Jerusalem in this moment, instead of running in the other direction saying "Heck no, not me," he spent time grieving, feeling real feelings. No fleeing, no pretending, no masks put on to make an imperfect situation look seamless to those on the outside.

May we be people who have hearts open enough to weep for and with our neighbors. May we have faith strong enough to stay and be real with ourselves and with each other. May we have love big enough to be people who witness to others wherever we go, holding whatever they're experiencing with compassion and care. May we be the ones to remind the world that Jesus is always with us and for us — thanks be to God for that.



# When Did We See You Hungry? - April 13

Don Harris

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... -Matthew 25:35

In the late 80's and early 90's Burke UMC had our youth participate in a week's experience in Ashland, Virginia called Harvest of Hope. It was a unique opportunity for our youth to learn about poverty in our midst as well as around the world. Growing up in Fairfax County tends to mask the significant number of people who struggle to afford housing or buy food for their family. It was also an opportunity to show our youth how their own actions could serve as simple but meaningful witness of Christ's love for through and for others.

Harvest of Hope provided our youth with this experience by going into a farmer's field near Richmond and harvesting left over produce: corn, cucumbers, and other edible items. Once the gleaning was done, the produce was taken to a local cannery which processed and canned the goods. Our youth then had the experience of taking some of those canned goods to a homeless shelter in Richmond where they also got to serve breakfast to the residents.

Then, during the late afternoon, there were opportunities to learn about hunger in the US as well as around the world. This was followed on a couple of evenings where we shared a meal with the group of 100 youth divided into subsets based on the proportion of the US population in various socio-economic groups. In those subsets, they were served a meal that was typical of that group, with the wealthiest being the smallest group(served steak with all the trimmings,) while those representing the poorest were served rice, beans, and water. The meal was then followed with a discussion of hunger in the U.S. and what it means to be poor--- and, most importantly, what it means to be a follower of Christ in addressing poverty hidden in plain sight all around us.

This Lenten season gives us the opportunity to reflect once again on Christ's message as reflected in Matthew 25: 35 – 46, when he instructs us to reach out to those who are hungry. It is the invitation to witness using our actions to "speak" the Gospel in our own community.

# A Maundy Thursday Reflection - April 14

Rev. Evelyn Archer-Taminger

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. -John 13:34 (NRSV)

The disciples called Jesus "Rabbi". At the time, and still today, "Rabbi" refers to a scholar and teacher of Jewish law. As Jesus moved from town to town, teaching and healing, the disciples would call out "Rabbi! Rabbi!" when they needed Christ's guidance. The Messiah had come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18). Through his actions, he taught the world about God's everlasting love and grace.

And today, Maundy Thursday, we remember the last meal the Rabbi had with his disciples. He knew what was about to happen—that he would be betrayed by someone he trusted, that he would be publicly tortured and humiliated, and that he would be put to death. He knew that all these things would transpire in a few short hours; he did not have much time left.

How does he spend these last few hours with his disciples? He washes their feet. As he shares a meal with them, he commands them to love one another. He prays with them, teaches them, and reassures them that the Holy Spirit will guide them even when Jesus is no longer walking among them in this world. He chose to spend these last precious moments sharing love and grace.

As we eat the bread He called his body, and drink the cup He called his blood, we remember that this love and grace are alive. Today, the commandment Jesus gives us is the same commandment he gave the first disciples—love one another. Just as Jesus loves us, let us show this love to our neighbors, our enemies, and all of God's children.

# Art as Witness of Our Hope - April 15

Roz Hoagland

When he received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished'...  
- John 19: 30

Western art is filled with many scenes of the crucifixion. Certainly, the most unusual is the large oil painting on the outside panels of the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald, dated 1510-15. John consoles Mary on the left side while Mary Magdalen kneels at the foot of the cross, crying and raising her hands to Christ. In the center, Christ is much larger and gruesomely distorted. He is covered with flecks of blood and his weight drags the horizontal bar down. His fingers look broken and his ankles are cruelly wrenched so that one nail is used.

Grunewald made the death horrifying so that we identify with Christ's pain. The right side tells an entirely different story as John the Baptist calmly stands with a lamb, cross and chalice at his feet. Of course, John had already been beheaded and shouldn't be here. John holds the Bible and points to Christ as if to say: "This is NOT the end." The two sides tell us of the dual nature of Christ. His followers lament His death as a man, but John clearly tells us that He was also God. John tells us that He will rise again. Easter will come!

# Who Are These Guys - April 16

Frank Esposito

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. -John 19: 38-42

This is not the way it was supposed to be. Jesus had been crucified. He needed to be buried. His disciples though are long gone. Peter, his "rock," denies that he even knows him—three times! Now some "fringe players," Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, take his body to the tomb. It's like benching the starters in the last two minutes to play the third string players, or like the marching band leaving the field to the back end of the tuba section for the remainder of the show. "Fringe players" want to serve, but none expect to do so. Here, two of them are playing a profoundly major role.

But then, God looks to the heart rather than the head. If Joseph and Nicodemus had used their heads, they would have been hiding with the eleven remaining disciples. Instead, they had the heart to prepare Jesus' body and bury our Lord and Savior. The rest of us who may sometimes feel like bit players on the fringe should try to be ready, as they were, when called to do the improbable.

# An Easter Reflection - April 17

Rev. Dr. Jason Snow

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. -Romans 8:34

A young boy was having trouble in math. The parents got him a tutor, extra help from a trained professional, everything! The local Catholic church had a math program and, although they weren't overly religious, they gave it a shot. All of a sudden, the boy was not only doing better in math, but seemed motivated to do better. The parents were thrilled and finally asked their son, "What has made you so motivated about math?" He said, "When I went into the building and saw the guy hanging from the addition symbol, I knew they meant business."

The crucifix...the cross. These are the main symbols that are displayed across the board in churches. Every church I have been to has a cross of some kind displayed, whether in the building or on some of the print media of the church. The death of Jesus is significant enough that we have made his instrument of death our symbol and use it to talk about how we follow Jesus. Take up your cross. This is the cross I bear. It's a little jarring...a little weird. If Jesus had died at a different point in time, we would have a hangman's noose or electric chair symbolized on the top of our churches. It's a strange symbol and yet, I get the significance of Jesus' sacrifice. But I have wondered why it gets center stage over the greater symbol of Jesus' victory over death, the open tomb. They should at least have equal billing in all churches symbology.

I like how in Romans, Paul names Jesus died, but more than that, he was raised to life. The resurrection of Jesus finishes the statement the cross makes. If Christ died and that was the end...just the sacrifice made, we would not be an Easter people...a people who follow Jesus Christ. The open tomb is affirmation of who Jesus was, and in turn, what Jesus taught us about how to live this life. The open tomb reminds us that we have been fearfully and wonderfully made to live a life abundant with love and grace. It does not downplay the sacrifice made on the cross, but fulfills Christ's love for us and for the world.

As you come to this Easter Day, may the symbol of the open tomb help remind you that you are loved, that Jesus is real in your life and that Christ's rising can be a source of affirmation that we may rise up and be all that Jesus intends for us to be in this world. Listen in this Easter season for God's call on your life and have a wonderful and joyous Easter Day!

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. -Acts 1:8

There are many ways to connect with Burke UMC this Lenten season! Check out our website for information about events, worship opportunities, and more.

[burkeumc.org/lent](http://burkeumc.org/lent)

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this year's Lenten Devotional project. We are grateful for your witness and for your willingness to share how God has been at work in your life. Our prayers are with each of you as you carve out space and center yourself around God during this Lenten season. You are beloved, friends!

All bible verses come from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise.

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