

Lent 2024 Devotion Series *by TWK Delegation*

After multiple postponements due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the delayed 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church will meet from April 23 to May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Delegates elected at the legacy Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conference meetings in 2019 will attend and participate in the General Conference, which is the only body that can set official policy and speak for the denomination. Because these elections occurred before the creation of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference, our delegations will still be referred to separately as legacy delegations from Memphis and Tennessee. Yet, in heart and mind and preparation, we function as one delegation with vision and consideration for our new TWK conference.

As we prayerfully prepare for this important yet delayed gathering, the delegation invites you as a member of the TWK Conference to join us in prayer this Lent for a series of daily devotions. Written by delegation members and other key leaders in the TWK, we hope these devotions will introduce you to those individuals who are representing you at General Conference and in the shared ministry and mission of our annual conference. In these devotions, you will learn more about the delegates' and leaders' personal experiences, hope for the Church, and faith in God.

Your friends in Christ,
The Delegations of the Memphis and Tennessee legacy Conferences



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February 14



By Robert “Rob” Dean Martin

Assistant to the Bishop, legacy Memphis Delegation Chair, Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

**Prayer: Create in me a new heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me....
Psalm 51:10 (RSV)**

As a child, I would put my hand over my “heart” located on the left side of my chest to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Later, after being CPR trained as a First Responder, I learned the heart is not near your left shoulder but located in the center of your chest about 4-5” above the base of your sternum called the xiphoid process. The heart is in the center.

It’s a wonder of God that God would place our hearts in the center of our body. In addition, if you search the internet, you will find that many mystics, philosophers, and practitioners of thought and religion have written on the centrality of the heart in life.

We know the heart is important to physical life, but it is also a key part of our spiritual and emotional life. The physical, emotional, and spiritual condition of our heart is very important. Just consider the words of Jesus when he taught, “...what goes out of the mouth comes from the heart. And that’s what contaminates a person in God’s sight” (Matt. 15:18, CEV). The heart really is the center of our lives. Therefore, the condition of our heart matters.

When David wrote this psalm, he had reached a low point in his life. He was overwhelmed by his own regrettable actions—actions that came, as he understood them, from his heart. Therefore,

with an attitude of penitence, he cried out to God for the one essential thing he needed...a new heart.

Today, as we begin the Season of Lent, we are invited to a time of examination of our own hearts. In that examination, we may discover that we may not be who God has called us to be and we may need to request a little “heart” work ourselves.

Be not afraid, if your heart is not right and you discover it. David writes, “A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God. You won’t despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed” (Ps. 51:17, CEV). In other words, God is ready and willing to be in the transplant business—giving new hearts for old. I don’t know about you, but I’ll pledge to that!



Rob’s permanent residence is Paducah, KY where he and his wife, Amy, an ordained Deacon appointed to Reidland UMC, share life together. They have two adult daughters, Brittany and Ashley. Rob commutes to Paducah on the weekends while living and working in Nashville, TN during the week as the Assistant to Bishop McAlilly. In addition to enjoying time with friends, music, watching the grass grow, and spending quality time with Amy, Rob aspires to be a card-carrying member of the PGA...the Preacher’s Golf Association.

February 15



By David R. Reed

Lay Member of Martin First United Methodist Church (MS River District) and Lay Delegate

“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.

The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.”

Hebrews 11:1-3 (The Message)

Faith in Action: Walking Towards the Light

Eugene H. Peterson translates these verses in such a way as to bring to our mind's eye, vivid images of things unseen: "...this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see."

There is no greater foundation on which I can build my relationship with God than a faith that totally submerges me in the light of God's love.

I remember a story about needing only enough faith to walk to the end of the light. I heard this story as a member of a Vacation Bible School in a tiny country Methodist Church (pre-1968) in northwest Tennessee.

There was a farm family consisting of a father, mother, baby boy and an 8-year-old daughter. The daylight was about gone, and the family had gathered for dinner when a thunderstorm rolled in.

The wind began blowing against the trees and the side of the house. There was thunder and lightning in the distance. The father jumped up from the table, grabbed his raingear, and rushed out of the house down the path toward the livestock barn to make sure the baby calves were all inside the barn.

It was dark outside except for a single light above the barn door and the occasional flash of lightning. There was a blinding flash of lightning; followed by a deafening clap of thunder. Instantly, all the electricity was gone. The baby began to cry, and the little girl began clinging to her mother's apron. The mother lit a kerosene lamp to have light.

The mother grabbed the little girl's rain gear and helped her put it on. She handed her a flashlight and told her to take it to her father. The little girl was afraid because she couldn't see the barn. The light only reached a few feet ahead.

The mother reassured the little girl, "Just stay on the path and keep walking toward the end of the light and you'll be fine."

That Vacation Bible plan still works today.



David is married to Carol Reed. They live on their farm near Martin, TN. David served 6 years as the legacy Memphis Conference Lay Leader. David also served 9 years as Vice President of Development and Planned-Giving for the Foundation for the Memphis & Tennessee Conferences. The 2020 General Conference to be held in 2024 will be the fifth United Methodist Church General Conference to which David has been elected to serve as a lay delegate or as an official presenter on behalf of The Connectional Table.

February 16



By Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland
*Senior Pastor of Millington First United Methodist Church (Metro District), Clergy Delegate,
and Ordained Elder*

*Thank you, my Lord.
Thank you, my Jesus.
Wherever I am now
is just for your grace.*



As I walked hand in hand with Neema, whose name in English means grace, through her small Tanzanian village, she softly sang these words that the youth choir had sung the morning before during worship at Gamasara UMC. Our mission team was touring different homes to see the results of the Chicken Project, which helps provide women with chickens and protective enclosures so they can provide protein for their households and earn income by selling extra eggs. While we were at Neema's home, she returned from her day at school. Immediately recognizing our team from afar, she ran down the path towards her home and, before I knew what was happening, gathered me up in a bear hug.

Children teaching Amanda to dance after worship in Tanzania

Once Neema saw us, she refused to let us go anywhere without her. As she accompanied me through her village, she slowly and patiently took my hand, showing me the best path to walk as we moved through plowed fields and past herds of grazing cattle. She guided me around pitfalls and trenches, and she went up and down steep inclines first to illustrate the speed with which I should walk to keep my balance without tripping.

Neema guided me down paths to places where I learned about God's ways and the Lord's truth. I learned about extravagant generosity from Sarah, who gave every member of our mission team three eggs each from her chicken coop, a precious gift that represented days of collecting. I learned about intentional hospitality as one family pulled their couch out from their hut just so they could offer us a place to sit and rest awhile as we visited. I learned about hope as woman after woman shared stories of the economic independence they had gained from the Chicken Project, now able to send their children to school and to save money for the future. I learned about joy as a grandmother placed her grandchild, born just the night before, in the arms of one of our team members so we could gaze on a wonderfully made child of God. And I learned about grace from a girl named Neema, who made sure I was never alone on the path to discovering God's good and faithful love.



Amanda with Neema and her sister

Prayer Prompt: Who has helped guide you to God's loving and faithful path (Psalm 25:10)?

Spend a moment in prayer giving thanks to God for this friend on God's path and your life journey.

Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland is a life-long United Methodist who grew up in Memphis, TN before attending Lambuth University and Vanderbilt Divinity School. Currently, she serves as the Senior Pastor of Millington FUMC, a congregation her grandfather Rev. George K. Comes, Jr. served in the 1960s when he was also in his thirties. Amanda lives in Millington with her husband Adam and their two rescue dogs: Hadewijch "Haddie" (an 11-year-old Australian Shepherd mix named after Amanda's favorite Christian mystic) and Martin "Bluey" (a 10-month-old Blue Tick Coonhound named after the patron saint of Memphis and the best cartoon about a dog ever). She enjoys spending time reading fiction, writing creatively, and taking her three-year-old nephew Ry on adventures.



February 17



By Maggie Taylor

Lay Member of Edgehill United Methodist Church (Cumberland River District) and Lay Delegate

**Where do you find your sanctuary?
Whose wisdom guides you?
How do you connect through prayer?**

For many of us, the answers to these questions are diverse, often influenced by the day and the context of our lives. Our sanctuary may exist within the walls of our home, the halls of our school, the embrace of our church, or simply within the quiet recesses of our own minds. We may draw knowledge from the divine essence, the earth beneath our feet, or the people who encircle us. And when we pray, our words may flow in prose, dance in poetry, or be whispered in the stillness of silent breath.

This scripture depicting Jesus in the temple serves as a poignant reminder of the chaos that can engulf our lives. It accentuates the pervasive clamor for productivity and profit, often overshadowing the soul's profound yearning for tranquil communion with the divine. It can be challenging to discover those moments of stillness, yet Jesus encourages us to actively seek them out, turning away from distractions that steal our time with God.

In this current season of your life, I urge you to embrace a moment of serene sanctuary, be it in the company of a friend, within the pages of scripture, or in solitary reflection. During this time, allow the demands of the world to recede, permitting yourself to be immersed in the nourishing and graceful essence of a moment with God.



Maggie Taylor is a laity member of Edgehill UMC in the Cumberland River District of the TWK Conference. In her free time, she enjoys baking, hiking, skiing, and CrossFit. She believes that every day should begin with a good cup of coffee and a moment to look out the window and appreciate the world around.

February 18



**Oración de Cuaresma
(Prayer for Desert Times)**

Señor y Pastor de nuestras jornadas en el desierto, venimos a ti durante esta Estación de Cuaresma como siervos de Jesucristo. Recordamos la manera en que liberaste a Moises y a los Israelitas durante su jornada en el desierto, y también al profeta Elías, en su jornada escapando la sentencia de un rey corrupto.

Ahora, en esta jornada de Cuaresma, rogamos tu dirección, tu paciencia, y tu sostén espiritual. Como enviaste a tus ángeles para cuidar a tu pueblo Israelita, a Elías en su desierto, y a Jesús en sus cuarenta días de tentación, así envíales a nosotros en nuestras jornadas terrenales. Rogamos esto en el nombre de tu obediente hijo, Cristo Jesús. Amén.

Lord and Shepherd of our journeys in the desert, we come to you during this Lenten season as servants of Jesus Christ. We remember how you liberated Moses and the Israelites; we remember also how you liberated the prophet Elijah in his journey to escape from a corrupt king.

Now, in our Lenten journey, we implore your direction, your patience, and your spiritual support. As you sent your angels to care for the Israelites, to the prophet Elijah in his journey, and to Jesus during his forty days in the desert, send them also to us in our earthly journeys. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Written by Joel N. Martínez, in Fiesta Jubilosa, ed. Raquel Mora Martínez (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2022), 119. Accessed: Discipleship Ministries Website (2024).

February 19

No devotion was sent on February 19 due to Presidents' Day holiday.

During Presidents' Day weekend, the TWK Delegation members met at Lakeshore Camp and Retreat Center to discuss legislation to the upcoming General Conference. In 2024, the delegation members are meeting regularly to prepare for the General Conference. You can learn more about the UMC General Conference and how to contact the delegation with questions and comments [here](#).

Below are pictures from the February delegation meeting.



February 20



By Jim Allen

Lay Member of Bethlehem United Methodist Church and Lay Delegate

Blessing

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult; instead, repay them with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.”

1 Peter 3:8

I wish I had been assigned an easier text. At best, I seem to be able to get only halfway there. On my good days, I can ignore an evil or insult against me, seething quietly until it either melts away or is forgotten. But on those other days I am more likely to lash back, hoping my wisdom will overwhelm their ignorance; or else find someone else to whom I can complain behind the other's back.

Divorces are nearly always awful and ugly. Mine (mostly my fault) still stings, almost 20 years ago. Sometimes the parties move apart and never speak again. But more often, especially when there are children or pets or family businesses involved, the two are obligated to stay in contact and work through their differences as best they can. Sometimes the horrors of “divorce” even fall on institutions like our church that is struggling through 25%+ loss of churches disaffiliating. It is easy in the course of a divorce to exchange evil for evil, and insult for insult. It is harder to stay in community through mutual blessings. But that is exactly what St. Peter tells the first century Christians to do, repaying evil with blessing.

His words ring true to me today. I was recently blessed with a call from a daughter offering apology and forgiveness related to a hard conversation nearly 13 years ago. With the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, I now regret I have been unable or unwilling to fully instigate that conversation.

But she made the call, and we shared blessings and forgiveness. We never stopped loving each other; but through her courage I am grateful that our relationship is finally fully restored. We have inherited a blessing from our Lord and Savior, as promised by St. Peter. If you receive an insult or evil this Lenten season, may you be able to respond with a blessing, so that you may inherit the promised blessing.



Jim Allen** – I am a lifelong Methodist, who with my wife **Deb** are members of **Bethlehem United Methodist Church, Franklin, in the Harpeth River District. A recovering attorney, I was employed by the UMC as a Conference Chancellor, General Counsel, and Conference Treasurer before retiring in 2020. We have 5 daughters who with their hubbies blessed us with 7 grands, living in 5 cities in 4 states (none of them in Tennessee ☺).

February 21



By Harriet Bryan

Senior Pastor of Madison Street United Methodist Church (Red River District), legacy Tennessee Delegation Chair, Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

**I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;
I will remember your wonders of old.**

Psalm 77:11

I no longer remember who introduced me to the spiritual practice of journaling, but I do know that it never fails to help me name my deepest fears and griefs and connect with God. When I start writing, all of the assurances I use to keep myself from worrying give way to the secret concerns that I try to gloss over and keep buried.

Over time I have learned that it is only after these troubling thoughts come pouring out that I am able to let them go and fully turn them over to God. On those rare occasions that I am still troubled after journaling, then I begin to flip through the pages of my journal. As I remember each concern that overwhelmed me at a certain point in time and how God sustained me, I grow calm and my faith is restored. As I remember God's steadfast love and faithfulness, I am able to trust that the same God who has walked with me in the past is still walking with me and will continue to walk with me.

Psalm 77 is one of my favorite psalms because the psalmist follows the same pattern of acknowledging inner turmoil and then remembering God's mighty acts. The psalmist begins by being "so troubled that I cannot speak" and then "consider[s] the days of old and remember[s] the years of long ago," and then begins specifically recounting some of the ways God has kept God's promises to the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. By the end of the psalm, the focus is no

longer on the psalmist or on God's possible absence or anger; remembering who God is and what God has done shifts the focus back to God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

As we remember God's past faithfulness, may our spirits grow calm and may we trust God with our present and our future.

Take a few moments in prayer to consider the following questions. Perhaps even grab a journal or piece of paper and write down your thoughts to offer as a prayer to God.

What is troubling you right now?

How and where have you experienced God's faithfulness in the past?

How does remembering God's past acts help you both trust God in the present and face your fears of the future?



Harriet is married to DeWain Harris. They live in Clarksville, TN, with their three biblically named, rescue cats—Priscilla, Amos, and Keturah—and their rescue dog, Blue.

February 22



By Rickey Wade

District Superintendent of the Caney Fork District

“Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” (Genesis 15:5)

Several years ago, while serving in the U.S. Navy, my submarine surfaced in the Caribbean. The sea was calm, and it looked as though one could just step out onto the water and walk to the end of the horizon. Attached to the edge of the horizon in every direction was the dome of heaven.

The night sky was aglow with stars, and I rediscovered an axiom of astronomy – the deeper one looks into space, the more one sees; the more one sees, the more one desires a deeper look. On

such a night, with such a view, the very notion of counting the stars was impossible. I can

only imagine the awe of Abram as he looked to the night sky, a seemingly endless blanket of stars, and the words of the Almighty echoing in his

head, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” As I

looked upon what seemed to be an endless sea that merged with the infinite grandeur of space, the largeness of God

and the smallness of me became clear.



God did not allow Abram's hope to reside in one child, but promised a nation of people who would bless the whole of humanity. The Triune God is beyond the bounds of time and space, and, beyond the limits of human understanding. The sheer grace of God humbles me when I realize the infinite God cares so deeply for a finite creature like me. By recalling the promise of God to count the stars, the God who is with us in this moment, who walks with us through each circumstance of life, is revealed as the One who sees a time when hope sheds its binding, and the distant someday becomes the reality of today. God was with Abram in his day and is with Abraham today; God was with us yesterday, is with us today, and will be with us in all of our tomorrows.

Gazing upon the depth and wonder of creation, I am filled with awe; the holiness of God permeates to my core, and I am left to wonder what marvelous love has brought me into existence. A clear night sky brings me to a sense of worship, and like Abram, I cannot help but confess, "I believe."

**Almighty God, reveal to all of us your grandeur and glory.
Help us who need to see the largeness of God. Amen.**



Rickey Wade is an ordained elder serving as the District Superintendent of the Caney Fork River District of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference. He lives in Tullahoma with his wife Becky; they have five grown children and five grandchildren. He enjoys the outdoors, hiking, camping, fishing, and spending time with Becky.

February 23



By Cynthia Dianne Davis
Retired Elder (Metro District) and former Clergy Delegate

Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (Romans 4:3)

I love walking on the river in downtown Memphis in the summertime. It energizes my soul and inspires my spirit. There is a beautiful one-mile park area that overlooks the mighty Mississippi River named Tom Lee Park. This park, only a about a mile in length, is named after Tom Lee, who was an African American riverboat worker. On May 8, 1925, this 39-year-old singlehandedly rescued 32 people on five trips as their steamboat sank. There is a statue of Tom Lee in a boat reaching out his hand to someone in the water who is desperately holding on to a piece of the ship. Every time I see that statue, I feel so small thinking of the immense faith of a man, who against all odds, became an unlikely hero.

I am always moved by the righteous heart of this man who could not swim but thought of others more than himself. He lived in a time



*Tom Lee Monument during the flood of 2011
(Photo: Courtesy of David Alan Clark, 2021)*

of racial lynchings, blatant hatred, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization. It was an expectation that he would get off the sidewalk when meeting a white woman. He also could not look a white man in the eyes during a conversation. The righteousness of Christ seemed to be his moral compass in overcoming human indignities. He lived out the righteousness of Christ as Jesus instructed the disciples: “...love each other as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13). That’s what righteousness looks like...sacrificial love!

I always reflect on what faith in God this man must have had despite adversities and challenges. His love for God’s people outweighed his love of self. Righteousness looks different when we ask ourselves, where is Christ in this situation?

Walking on the river is a reminder to me of trusting God enough to walk on the water as a testament to my faith.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live a righteous life regardless of the circumstances happening in the world.

(excerpts from *Tom Lee, A Memphis Hero* by Charmel Neely-Alexander, great niece of Mr. Tom Lee)



Cynthia and her husband Sonny have four adult children: Carrel, Calandra, Jocelyn, Derrick and daughter-in-love Bianca. They are proud grandparents of three grandchildren: Jalen, Blake, and Gianna. She enjoys reading history of all kinds, hanging out with family and friends, and traveling to visit their children and grandchildren.

Cynthia is grateful to have served as a District Superintendent twice under three different bishops.

February 24



By Samantha Tashman McGlothlin

Senior Pastor of Belle Meade United Methodist Church (Red River District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

Betty was a tall, thin woman with a persistent smile and endlessly positive attitude. I was blessed to be surrounded by her glow for the last seven and a half years of her life. In her late eighties, she was a part of our congregational care team, visiting homebound members to let them know they were not forgotten. She was still doing dishes after church-wide events and dropping her famous pralines by the office for the staff. You could never slow her down. Betty's father was a United Methodist minister, so she knew the ins and outs of ministry. I loved her stories of receiving in-kind gifts when moving into a new parsonage, her favorite being a couple of chickens.

When Betty had a thoughtful piece of wisdom to bestow, we all listened. One such instance happened at a Wednesday night bible study as we reclined comfortably on couches and padded chairs. Betty talked about her life as a nurse, what it was like raising four children, losing her husband John, and caring for her parents in their later years. Looking back over her life, scanning all the sorrow and the bliss, she testified to the God who is faithful through the ages. In her own words, caked with a southern draw that was somehow simultaneously fast and slow, she said: "He was with me in it all."

When I hear the words of the psalmist in our passage for today, I think of that moment when Betty reassured us that one day our purview could be the same. Some of us can already look back, however long our life has been, and testify to this same god — the God the psalmist says has not hidden his face from the afflicted one, but has listened to her cry for help. The God who

deserves great praise because of his presence in every season. Already, we can proclaim for future generations, “He has done it!”

This, I think, is how we survive the difficulties of the present. When we are on our knees with grief or so far past the end of the rope we cannot even see it, our lament often sounds like a litany of questions. How will I survive this broken heart and shattered spirit? How will I ever find relief from this ferris wheel of stress and busyness? How will I keep going when I am poured out like water, bones out of joint, heart full of wax, mouth dried up like a piece of broken pottery (v. 14-15)?

The answer lies in the evidence. We will survive, and find relief, and find ways to keep going because God has been faithful to us in the past. God has made a way where we saw no way. God has been with us in it all. Whatever your lot, hold on tight and proclaim with courage: God has done it before and God will do it again.

Thank you, God, for being faithful through the ages.



Sam is married to Mark and has two children, Lewis and Madeline. She loves to travel and spend time outdoors. Sam is a co-author of [On Purpose: Finding God's Voice in Your Passion](#) and author of [Advent: A Calendar of Devotions 2023](#) and [The Sanctuary for Lent 2020](#).

February 25



PRAYER OF THE DAY

(based on Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:31-38; Romans 4:13-25)

Though people may turn
their backs on us,
you do not hide
your face from us.

Though others may try
to take away our hope,
you assure us of
that future waiting for us.

You speak your name,
Inscrutable Creator,
and it is enough.

When we try to dictate
our fears to you,
you invite us to follow you
into self-denial and service.

As we struggle to shape
our lifestyle to yours,
you carry us with you
wherever we go.

You speak your good news,
Teacher of open hearts,
and it is enough.

Though we have done
nothing to earn them,
you pour out the gifts
of grace and mercy upon us.
When we stumble
over our lack of trust,
you set us back on our feet,
to follow you into the kingdom.
You speak your peace,
Breath of Holiness,
and it is enough.

God in Community, Holy in One,
it is enough that you hear us
even as we pray as we are taught,
**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory, forever. Amen.**

*Written by Thom Shuman, on his **Lectionary***

Liturgies blog. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>.

Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/call-to-worship-prayer-lent-2-b.html>.

February 26



By Marie C. King

*Pastor of Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church in Davidson County (Harpeth River District),
Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Deacon*

“Sing to God; sing praises to the Lord”

Psalm 105:2

Psalm 105 shares with the reader about wonderful and blessed acts of the Lord. It mentions His justice, wondrous and marvelous works, His covenant with Abraham, and solemn pledge to Isaac. It encourages us in our praise to sing, rejoice, seek, pursue, and remember.

Psalm 105:2 instructs us, “Sing to God; sing praises to the Lord; dwell on all his wondrous works!” One way I pray and praise God is through singing and playing some of my favorite hymns and inspirational musical pieces. We can all sing in our own way. You are not required to have the voice of a recording star. God only requires we give our best in praise and worship.

I recall one church where I was serving, and one of the members of the congregation had a disability that prevented them from reading and speaking clearly. However, they loved to sing. When they sang, a joyful expression of praise and thanksgiving glowed over their face. Their singing lifted the spirits of those around them.



The hymn writer of “There is a Balm in Gilead” penned these words, “If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say, ‘He died for all.’” There are times when visiting individuals who are not able to be physically present in worship, I will offer a song of praise. They will join in and clap their hands to the rhythm. The room is filled with joy as the melody flows in our hearts and the hallways as we “Sing to God: sing praises to the Lord: dwell on all his wondrous works.”

What are some of your favorite songs that guide you to celebrate the glory of the Lord and express your thanks?

Prayer: Gracious God, place a song in my heart that I may praise you with my singing. “Come thou fount of every blessing. Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.” Amen.

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing, lyrics by Robert Robinson, 1758



Marie C. King is a preacher’s kid and a teacher’s kid and has resided in Mississippi, Louisiana, and currently resides in Tennessee. Her siblings all live in the Nashville area. Her first career was in the healthcare field as a Registered Nurse in medical/surgical, critical care, education, management, Faith Community Nurse, and disaster case management. Marie was ordained a deacon in 2003 and is transitioning to the Order of Elders. Her children are her nieces, nephews, and her friend’s grandchildren. She likes to relax by playing classical piano arrangements of hymns, walking and talking with friends in the park, traveling by train, and having family and friends over for a bowl of gumbo. Marie is currently serving as the pastor of Mt. Pisgah UMC in Nashville, TN, Davidson County.

February 27



By Sara K. Corum

Pastor of Trinity UMC (Metro District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

A Not-So-Joyful Noise

I remember when Cooper, my oldest, was a toddler. I served a 3-point-charge in a rural area of west TN. While there were some of the most “salt-of-the-earth” people you’ll ever meet there, the area was void of childcare options, and I didn’t have an office, so I did my writing from home with my tiny human underfoot. Often before writing the first sentence of Sunday’s message, after sitting down to pray and begin, I’d hear the clanking of wooden puzzle pieces hit the floor, because when you’re just a year old, throwing them is much more fun than studying their placement. Cooper might fuss about something and require a snack. A kind farmer would drive his tractor by, honking at every person he’d see (because everyone in the community was family and they celebrated seeing one another). Inevitably, my phone would ring. Occasionally, my own sighs of lament for the noise would interrupt my thoughts, as I tried, in earnest, to pen Sunday’s message.

Today that is very different, as I have an office and the boys are in school. Still, the phone will ring, or a text notification will come through. Someone will tap on my door just to say, “hi.” After seven years with my flock, we are family, and we joyfully celebrate seeing one-another. Writing happens more often at home where, after-hours, the sounds of whatever oddities the kids

are watching on TV will reverberate through the house, or they will chat at full volume with their friends with whom they are engaged in video games. This is the life of a pastor-mom.

No matter the season, life can be noisy, and often, in the wake of the noise (both the literal and proverbial) it is hard to find the space to come to God, bringing our authentic self and life's circumstances.

Perhaps you can relate. I know Jesus did. This is why we often find him retreating to a quiet place to commune with God. Daniel seemed to see it, too — inundated by the sins of his generation — consumed by the calamity that seems to have befallen his people due to their transgressions — unable to hear, yet, the sounds of mercy, grace, compassion, and love from the Redeemer. Daniel doesn't run from the noise, but, instead, reaches out to God amid it and, perhaps, provides us with a most holy example of laying before God our authentic self. With an honest response of admittance and a clear understanding (with citations, even, to the words of Moses), he comes before God, accepting what he sees as God's response to his generation's disobedience. And, oh, is there noise! There is the consciousness of sin, wickedness, and rebellion, yelling loudly in Daniel's ear. There is the noise of all the transgressions of Israel and their turning aside from God's laws. There are the sounds of the calamity that Daniel has witnessed, raining upon his people. There is no peace. There is no perception of the assurance of grace — not yet. There seems to be no hope — no hope amid the noise.

But we who are people of faith — who have insider knowledge of what is to come — we know better. On the other side of Daniel's repentance, his claiming of responsibility, his admittance of sin — on the other side of all the noise — is the God who hears us when we cry out. On the other side of calamity, hopelessness, and fear — even that which we have, ourselves, created — is the God who is waiting in love and with mercy to receive our lament. The God who was, and is, and is yet to be, for Daniel, for Jesus, and for us, today, is yearning for us to speak, because no matter how loud the noise gets, God still hears us.

People of faith, the Church is in a noisy season, and it may be hard to hear the voice of God over all the sounds that lead us away from our mission, but we can be assured that God's voice is still ringing out, calling us from our distraction, welcoming us back from our falling, and pointing us straight toward what God's hope is for us — that we might be a Church that works to heal a hurting world.

Prayer: Let us pray together for this season of the Church we love, acknowledging that God is with us, God is listening for us, and God is still speaking to us.



Cooper James, 9 months old, making a truly joyful noise.

Sara is in her 7th year as the Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in midtown Memphis (Metro District) and is an elder in full connection from the legacy Memphis Annual Conference, with a BA in Religion and Studio Art from Lambuth University and an MDIV with a concentration in Formation and Witness from Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Sara lives near Rhodes College with her husband Josh who serves as the Pastor of Ellendale United Methodist Church. A clergy-couple household is a rare and fun adventure. To make it even more fun, together they share 5 children (hers and his): Aiden (9, hers), Reid (10, his), Cooper (12, hers), Jenna (15, his), and Gracie (20, his).



Outside of the ecclesial setting, Sara enjoys traveling, oil painting, playing guitar, and making memories with her family.

February 28



By Leslie Hotzfeld

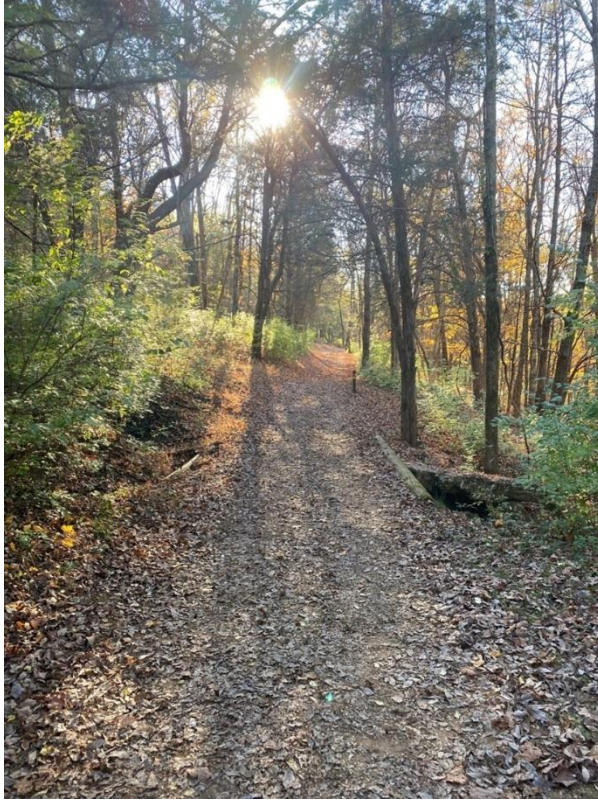
Lay Member of Brentwood UMC (Harpeth River District) and Laity Delegate

**"The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul."
Psalms 19:7-8 (NLT)**

We often think of instruction as confining or restricting. I love that Psalms 19 reminds me that God's instruction is life-giving and joy-filled! We read that the instructions of the Lord are *perfect, trustworthy, right, and clear*, and they are for *reviving the soul, making the simple wise, bringing joy to the heart, and giving insight for the living*. God always wants what is for our good!

How does God speak to you? Through scripture, a sermon, or other people? This Psalm tells us that sometimes, God speaks, gives instruction, without words.....

**"The heavens proclaim the glory of God....
They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.
Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world."
Psalms 19:1-4a (NLT)**



One of my favorite things to do is going for walks in the woods. Sometimes I am ‘on the clock’, with a goal for mileage or time, getting my heart rate up, or burning calories. Sometimes I am aimlessly wandering, spending intentional time ‘not thinking’, just observing the beauty and intricacies of nature, God’s handiwork in creation. I’ve noticed that on my walks through the woods, I always come across roots and rocks. I am usually watching out for the roots or the rocks, being sure to step over or around them, to not trip on a root, or slip on a rock.

But sometimes, when it is raining, or if the trail is muddy, I am watching for roots and rocks, but for a different purpose. This time, I am looking for stability, a place to step that will be a firm foundation, a rock I can use to step over the water or around the mud; or a root, where I can firmly plant my heel to keep me from slipping. On a recent hike, as I carefully stepped, rock to rock across a stream, I began thinking about

roots and rocks..... what are the ‘roots and rocks’ in my life? That day, I sensed God was teaching me, giving instruction, to pay attention to where I was stepping - What are the places or situations that might cause harm, or trip me up? What are the messages the world gives that are not for my good? I also “heard” God saying to be confident in the practices and places that bring stability – spending time in prayer and contemplation, reading the scripture, and worship.

I love that God speaks to us, gives us instruction, in many ways and places. For me, that day, it was the roots and the rocks.

How do you hear from God?
From where do you get instructions for living?
Are you paying attention to the words,
and also to the silence?
To the images or the experiences that God provides?

Ask God to show you what God is teaching you in
that moment.

**“God speaks to all individuals
through what happens to them
moment by moment.”
– Jean-Pierre Caussade**





Leslie is married to Rick for 37 years, and they have 2 adult children, Wesley and Allie, who live in Seattle, Washington. For fun she enjoys knitting, listening to all genres of music, and reading mysteries. Her favorite places are the woods or on a beach!

Leslie is in her 12th year serving as Executive Director for Brentwood United Methodist Church, where she has been on staff for 27 years. She also serves on the TWK Connectional Table and is the leader of the Administrative Strategy Team. She is grateful for the UMC, a place that believes in and lives out the ministry of all believers and strives to create pathways and opportunities for every person to understand their giftedness and call to ministry.

February 29



By Paul Purdue

Pastor of Belmont UMC (Cumberland River District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

Our passage mixes metaphors like cornerstones, capstones, living stones, stones rejected by the builders and other icons. I have always enjoyed working with my hands. Fixing things is a great sabbath-like diversion from my day to day pastoral duties.

A few weeks ago, I helped my oldest son replace a few loose patio bricks on his first home. To fix unstable bricks you must chip away any moldy mortice, loose cement, and then wash away any sandy loose debris. There is a bit of art or touch in striking the old mortar with the masonry hammer testing the sturdiness of the base layer. Any unstable stuff has to go or the replacement bricks will never truly adhere.

Our verse beckons us to cast off “ill will and all deceit, pretense, envy, and slander”. Through daily examination and honest confession we allow God to chip the spiritual junk from the cracks and crevices of our lives. Such spiritual work can be slow and painful as we let go of unhealthy attitudes and actions to make room for grace to shape us into the image of Christ. As we move through this season of lent, are there things we need to release so that God might build something more lovely, just, excellent, beautiful, pure or praiseworthy in us?

Once we have tossed the unstable bits of old mortice into the bin and washed the sand away, the real building begins. I love that when mixing up the mortar with the water a little chemical reaction occurs. You can feel the bucket strangely warmed. The writer invites us to allow Christ to build us up into a spiritual building as lovely and valuable as the priceless ancient Temple. I kind of imagine God building us up brick by brick. God sends some holy moment, some excellent experience, something worthy of praise into who we are already building us up bit by

bit. The writer reminds us in this slow process that we are beloved by God. God names us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession.

Consider taking a few minutes to think where God's love has grown something a little more beautiful in your life.

Paul has been married to Connie Starnes Purdue for 35 years. Paul credits Connie and God's grace for wooing him into the UMC 33 years ago. Paul has two children: Caleb, who lives and serves at Cedarcrest UMC Camp, and Lewis, an engineer, who married to Jillian Miller Purdue, an attorney, and lives in Huntsville.



March 1



By Elyse Bell

Lay Member of Paris First UMC (Tennessee River District) and Lay Delegate

**“Then the Lord said to him, “Take off your sandals,
for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”
Acts 7:33 (NIV)**

Several years ago, I co-led a medical mission team to Taiama, Sierra Leone. During the day our physicians, nurses and volunteers saw patients while other volunteers worked with children in the community. At night we were often invited to go preach and lead worship in one of the many United Methodist churches in bush villages.

One day, I was invited to go to Gola. The pastor, James Kaille, drove our three volunteers several miles down a dark gravel road. Then he slowed down and kept looking for a turn off to his right. Finally, he stopped and said we are here. It troubled me that there was no discernable road! I wore a long dress with sandals. We gathered outside the van and looked across a dry creek bed. Where was the road? How far at night would we walk?

Each of us had a very small pen light. It was pitch black and it seemed our tiny streams of light didn't reach the ground. That is when Pastor James announced we had a two mile walk on a bush path to the traditional African village of Gola. It was his next statement that terrified me, “We should join hands and pray God will keep the cobras off our path.” I was paralyzed with fear at the prospect of walking in near total darkness among snakes!

After prayer, the four of us made our way across the creek and up a path through the tree line. What emerged was a path where a villager had cut the grass down to calf level with a

machete. To either side was tall Elephant grass. It was a fearful pilgrimage. The village pastor took the lead followed by me and Ruth Johnson (our R.N.) and Joe Geary (preacher of the evening) followed behind.

About a mile and a half through this dreadful journey, I began to think of the villagers of all ages who walked this path daily. I thought about how they would be gathered in darkness in a mud hut church waiting for us to arrive. Slowly, as I thought about depending on God for every step, my fear gave away to faith. I decided to choose love over anxiety. It wasn't long before we could see a sentinel walking toward us with a kerosene lantern swinging and bringing much needed light. Worship that evening was powerful and inspiring.

Not only was that small church tightly packed with people holy ground, so was the long snake infested path to Gola. I learned that evening the fearful journeys we take are holy ground too. God is with us and addresses our fears. Truly in trust, we can choose love over anxiety.



Elyse Bell's childhood dream was to go to Hong Kong and open an orphanage for the street children. After graduation from college, she was employed by the Missouri Division of Welfare in St. Louis County working with Aid to Dependent Children. Elyse is currently the chair of the Mission Committee at Paris First United Methodist Church, and she enjoys spending time volunteering weekly at the Second Harvest Food Bank in Camden, TN. Elyse is married to Don, and they have two adult children, Traci and Todd, as well as two grandchildren Rachel and Andrew. Elyse's passion is identifying and providing for human and spiritual needs in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

March 2



“A person’s steps are made secure by the Lord
when they delight in his way.
Though they trip up, they won’t be thrown down,
because the Lord holds their hand.”
Psalm 37:23-24 (CEB)

You're invited to pause for a moment of worship and praise as you play this video. Sing along with the words or spend time in quiet contemplation as the lyrics of the song guide your prayer.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWLhnP33F3Y>

March 3



PRAYER OF THE DAY

(based on Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:31-38; Romans 4:13-25)

Though people may turn
their backs on us,
you do not hide
your face from us.

Though others may try
to take away our hope,
you assure us of
that future waiting for us.

You speak your name,
Inscrutable Creator,
and it is enough.

When we try to dictate
our fears to you,
you invite us to follow you
into self-denial and service.

As we struggle to shape

our lifestyle to yours,
you carry us with you
wherever we go.
You speak your good news,
Teacher of open hearts,
and it is enough.

Though we have done
nothing to earn them,
you pour out the gifts
of grace and mercy upon us.
When we stumble
over our lack of trust,
you set us back on our feet,
to follow you into the kingdom.
You speak your peace,
Breath of Holiness,
and it is enough.

God in Community, Holy in One,
it is enough that you hear us
even as we pray as we are taught,
**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.**

*Written by Thom Shuman, on his **Lectionary Liturgies** blog. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/call-to-worship-prayer-lent-2-b.html>.*

March 4



By Steph Dodge

Pastor of Glendale UMC (Cumberland River District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Deacon

For me, home is a place of respite and relaxation. It is family, card games, and laughter. Home is the smell of fresh air and freshly cut grass. It is the taste of vegetables straight from the garden, and the glow of a sky full of a million stars. Home is only a 12-hour drive in good weather.



Photo from Steph's home in Minnesota

I know not everyone has fond memories of the place where they grew up, and not everyone has one location that they call home, but having a place where we can feel safe and loved is essential for our flourishing. Sometimes just knowing that we have a safe place to go and find rest is enough to get us through the day.

In Psalm 84, the psalmist cries out for home: “My soul longs for the courts of the Lord.” It is in God’s home that the psalmist knows true joy is found – such joy that spending one day in the house of the Lord is worth more than years spent anywhere else. As Christians we are taught to look forward to the day when we will eternally rest in God’s home, but we still have to get ourselves out of bed on Mondays, attend to responsibilities we don’t always enjoy, and deal with all the struggles that life throws at us when sometimes we really just want to go home and escape from the world.

There is a Brandi Carlisle song that says, “Wherever is your heart I call home.” Until the day when we enter our eternal home, I think it is helpful to know that we can experience home wherever we encounter the heart of God. These encounters happen for me in deep discussions with others, at times when I am able to help others in meaningful ways, and when I unexpectedly see the beauty of God displayed in nature. Whether you experience home as a physical place, a loving community, or simply a space in nature where you encounter the presence of God, you don’t have to wait until your life is over to experience what the psalmist is speaking about. Sometimes a few moments of feeling like we are home is enough to sustain us through the day.



This week, reflect on the positive memories you have of home.

What are the things that make you feel like you are home?

**Where are the places that you encounter God’s heart
in your everyday life?**

Consider how you might seek out God’s heart throughout the week to have experiences of home even when you are not physically at home.



Steph grew up on a dairy farm in southeast Minnesota. She still loves doing anything outdoors including running, cycling, playing softball, or working in her yard. She also loves coffee, cooking, and a good book.

March 5



By Jefferson Furtado

Pastor of The Vine UMC, Equip Ministry Associate, Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

After leaving military service, my father began a career as an architect, working for the state-run telephone company. For many years, his role involved extensive travel across the state, laying out future paths for telephone lines. In that season, home was often cluttered with tools of the trade: rolls of draft paper, blueprint tubes, and layers upon layers of detailed plans. As a child, the significance of his work was often lost on me. As I grew older, traveling with my father would often expose me to the tangible outcomes of his labor; Dad would point out areas where he had worked and share stories of being in those places before sewage, pavement, or lights were installed. Somewhere along the way, he would acknowledge that his work was just a piece of a larger mosaic, contributing to the foundational infrastructure that allowed communities to thrive. While he drew plans for the telephone lines, others—working from the same foundation as he—did the same for power lines, lights, water, sidewalks, streets, and more. Despite competing interests, each had to play their part for the project to be made whole.

The Apostle Paul's message to the Corinthians resonates deeply with this notion. Paul addresses the Corinthian church, a community fraught with divisions and competing allegiances to various leaders. He emphasizes that while many may contribute to the work of God's kingdom, they are all building upon a single, unshakeable foundation: Jesus Christ. In our spiritual journey, just as in the construction of a city, it is not the individual contributions that define the success of the project, but the strength and integrity of the foundation upon which everything is built.

Paul's message is a call to unity and humility. He reminds us that no matter our role, talents, or contributions, they hold value because they are rooted in Christ. Our efforts, skills, and spiritual gifts are diverse, yet they are all meant to serve a singular purpose: to glorify God and further the

reality of the peaceable kingdom on earth.

Each of us must consider our own roles within our communities and churches. Are we contributing to the collective mission with humility and grace? Are we ensuring that our efforts align with the foundational teachings of Christ? Just as architectural plans are a part of a larger scheme of building a functional city, we too are called to acknowledge our part in God's greater plan.

Paul's teachings prompt us to reflect on the nature of our contributions. Are we building with materials that will last – love, compassion, truth, grace – or are we using perishable items marked by selfishness, pride, and division?

Let this be an invitation for us to examine the blueprints of our lives.

Are they designed with Christ as the true architect?

Are we working collaboratively with others, valuing their contributions as integral to the whole?

Are we building on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, ensuring that our collective efforts will stand the test of time and reflect the glory of God?



Rev. Jefferson M. Furtado is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He began his journey in the United States in Holly Springs, Mississippi—graduating from Rust College, a historically black liberal arts college and one of our United Methodist higher education institutions. He later continued studies, receiving a Master of Divinity with a concentration in Church Renewal from United Theological Seminary as well as a post-graduate certificate in Homiletical Peer-Coaching through Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Jefferson is passionate about the life of faith and the work of the church. In particular, Jefferson feels called to the work of equipping individuals who respond to God's gracious invitation of love. He believes that nothing is more worthwhile than the work of equipping individuals for their calling, connecting them with partners for the journey, and creating environments where they grow to become the people God has created them to be. Jefferson brings diverse work experience, having served in local congregations, United Methodist general agency, corporate settings, and an institution of Higher Education.

Jefferson is married to the Rev. Linda Louise Furtado, a native of Nashville, TN. Linda serves as pastor of Beech Grove UMC in Nashville. Together, the Furtados are blessed with three amazing daughters Sueli, Cintia, and Emma.

March 6



By Holly Neal

Lay Member of The Vine UMC and Lay Delegate elected at 2023 TWK Annual Conference

**Matthew 9:9-13 (New Living Translation)
Jesus Calls Matthew**

⁹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰ Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. ¹¹ But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?"

¹² When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." ¹³ Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

This Scripture I have heard referred to as a "Matthew Party" and reminds me of this story told by Tony Campolo:

Wandering through Honolulu at 3:30 AM, I stumbled into a greasy spoon diner. Ordering coffee and a donut, I found myself surrounded by loud prostitutes. One named Agnes mentioned her upcoming birthday, sparking an idea.

Next day, I proposed to the diner owner, Harry, that we throw her a surprise birthday party. Excited, he agreed, offering to bake the cake.

At 2:30 AM, I returned to decorate the diner. By 3:15, every prostitute in Honolulu had arrived.

At 3:30, Agnes entered, and we all screamed "Happy Birthday!" She was overwhelmed, tears streaming down her face.

As we sang, Harry urged Agnes to blow out the candles. She hesitated, asking if she could take the cake home to show her mother. We agreed.

As she left, there was a stunned silence. I suggested we pray, despite the unusual circumstances.

I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her.

When I finished, Harry leaned over the counter, and said, "Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?"

In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at three-thirty in the morning."

Harry waited a moment, then he answered, "No you don't. There's no church like that. If there was, I'd join a church like that!"

After a moment of reflection, consider offering this prayer or your own to God: Gracious God, we come before you with hearts open to your guidance and grace. Help us to become hosts of "Matthew Parties," where unchurched friends and Christian friends gather, fostering relationships that lead others to encounter Christ. May these gatherings be opportunities for genuine connection, understanding, and love. Empower us to be welcoming, inclusive, and authentic in our interactions, reflecting the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Grant us the wisdom and courage to share the joy of knowing you with those who have yet to experience your grace. In your holy name we pray, Amen.



Holly Neal is a dedicated member of the United Methodist Church, with her membership in the Vine, an online community of the TWK. Her lifelong commitment to the church has seen her serve in various capacities, including as a youth volunteer and Sunday School teacher. She has held leadership roles such as District Director of Lay Servant Ministries, District Lay Leader, and Tennessee Conference Lay Leader from 2012 to 2021. Additionally, Holly is a Certified Lay Minister.

As a third-generation member of the Women's Society of Christian Service/UMW/United Women in Faith, Holly has provided leadership at the local unit, district, and now serves as the TWK UWF Spiritual Growth Coordinator. Her extensive involvement and leadership within the church reflect her deep faith and commitment to serving others.

March 7



By Pat Freudenthal

District Superintendent of the Red River District and Ordained Elder

Following the destruction of the earth, God makes a covenant to never again use water to obliterate all life. This covenant is made with Noah and all his descendants and is the first of three major covenants in the Old Testament (Noah (Genesis 9), Abraham (Genesis 17), and Moses (Exodus 20)) and anticipates the covenant Jesus offers in the New Testament (Luke 22:20 and Hebrews 8:6-13). God declares that the rainbow will be sign of this first covenant.

When I think about covenant, I think about relationship. When I think about relationship, I think about what it takes to make a relationship meaningful, deep, and lasting – unwavering commitment, truthful communication, willingness to share joys and struggles, awareness of one’s strengths and a willingness to work on one’s shortcomings, a readiness to offer forgiveness, understanding, and unconditional love. When I think about unconditional love, I think about my mother.

Mom was 5 feet tall, blue smiling eyes, and red hair – and the feistiness of a red-head, too! Mom had a way of loving people. She rarely met a stranger and always had either peppermint or butter scotch candy in her purse for any child she met. Every child became one of her children. She adored children – taught children in Sunday School, VBS, etc. She made cupcakes for our school classes, made sure our youth groups had pizza, chili or whatever was asked, and even gave out candy while I was preaching in one of my appointments. Mom told my brothers and me, “You can always come home – no matter what has happened, no matter the decisions you have made, we (she and dad) will always love you.” She was my first teacher of God’s love for God’s people.



*Pat with her mom (Chris) and
Kirk (great-grandson of Chris and great-nephew of Pat)
at his first birthday 11 years ago.
Chris is now in the presence of God.*

I've tested my mother's love throughout my teenage and young adult life. My mother was not perfect and there were times when our relationship was rocky – that is the nature of being human. I never doubted that she loved.

I also learned that I was responsible for my part in the brokenness of my relationship with my mom – just like I am responsible for turning away from the covenant God made with me at my baptism. I have turned away from God's love. I tested the reliability of the truth of the unconditional love of the one who created me in my mother's womb. I have strayed from God's grace, and I need God's grace working through the Holy Spirit to bring me back into a deeper relationship with God.

Have you felt the same way toward your covenant with God?

Do you need to turn back to the love that can heal all wounds and guide you to mend your relationships?

After a moment of reflection, consider offering this prayer or your own to God: Holy and merciful God, help me and others like me who need your grace to run to you with the full expectation that you will receive us, renew us, and restore us. We want to have a deeper relationship with you. Amen.



Pat Freudenthal is an ordained Elder in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference who is currently serving as the Red River District Superintendent. She lives with two of the most spoiled dogs known to humankind – Gracie Madeline, an eight-year-old gentle soul of mixed lineage who puts up with her little brother, Harrison Eugene, a one-year-old Havanese who thinks everyone’s lap is his own personal space.

March 8

No devotion was sent on March 8 due to International Women's Day observance.



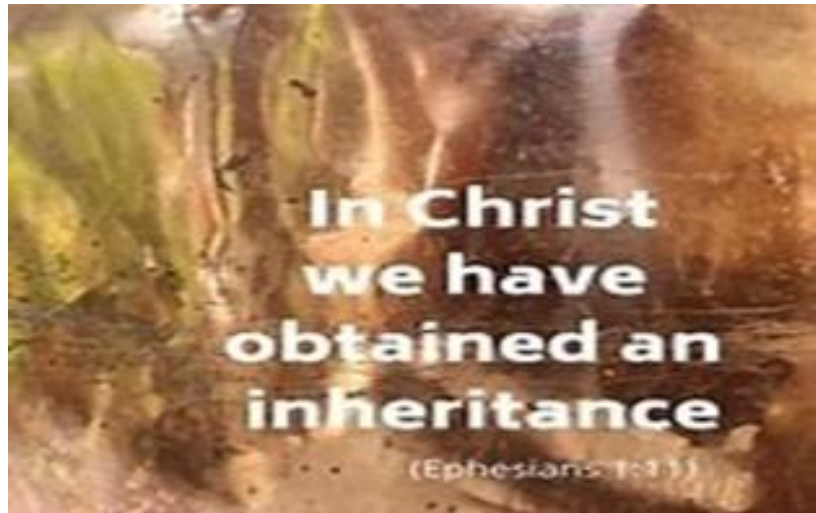
March 9



By Melba Mitchell

Lay Member of Lighthouse UMC (Mississippi River District) and Lay Delegate

Inheritance is defined as receiving something upon the death of an individual. An inheritance can consist of many things, sometimes large in value (land, homes, money vehicles, jewelry etc.). As for me, I have not been that fortune yet to receive these blessings. I have learned that you cannot miss what you have never had. I will rejoice with those who have received such a blessing.



I strive to live a Christian life and my life is filled with many challenges, like most others. While meditating on this passage of scripture (Ephesians 1:7-14); I begin to think about the requirements that are due from me to receive the greatest inheritance, a gift and blessing from God to me. Why am I not doing all that it takes to receive my inheritance?

I like the words that Paul uses when he says Jesus lavished on us with wisdom and understanding, meaning that he gave us a generous or extravagant quantity of wisdom and understanding. Not only that, but Jesus also saves us from all our iniquities through the shedding

of his blood. Not many people make known to you the mystery of their will. They pass on and whatever you need to know about them remains a mystery. But Jesus made known to us the mystery of His will. God is so good that he gave us an inheritance through His son Jesus Christ. In him I was predestined (meaning to decide beforehand) for inheritance. I was not even thought of yet, still I have an inheritance through Jesus Christ. I want to receive the inheritance that God has for me.

God also has an inheritance for you, will you receive it?



Melba is a member of Lighthouse United Methodist Church. Married to Dwight, they have 2 children, and she loves canning, trying new recipes and spending quality time with her family.

March 10



PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us a little child one of us,
flesh and blood, to share in our humanity
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as carpenter
and yet in whose creative hands a world was fashioned
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as fisherman
and yet pointed to a harvest that was yet to come
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as teacher
and opened eyes to truths that only the poor could understand
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as healer
and opened hearts to the reality of wholeness
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as prophet, priest, and king
and yet humbled himself to take our place upon the cross
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus who came to us as servant
and revealed to us the extent of his Father's love for humankind
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

Blest are you, Lord Jesus, who rose from the ignominy of a sinner's death
to the triumph of a Saviour's resurrection
For God so loved the world
That all might have eternal life.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for the sake of me and you and other sinners,
too. God so loved the world. Blest are you Lord Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. **Amen.**



Written by John Birch and posted on his *Faith and Worship* website, <http://www.faithandworship.com/>.
Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/opening-prayer-easter-day.html>.

March 11



For today's Lenten Devotion, we'd like to introduce you to a spiritual practice app you can download on your phone. As a delegation, we are committed to being faithful to our personal spiritual disciplines in order to center ourselves in God's Spirit as we seek to serve the church and minister to a hurting world. Yet, it's harder and harder to find space and time to be quiet, to pray, to study Scripture, and to discern God's voice in our relentlessly busy and noisy world.

[Everyday Sanctuary](#) is an app that was created and is curated by United Methodist pastor Abigail Browka. An app like Everyday Sanctuary may help us make more space for God in our everyday lives this Lenten season by keeping guided devotions and prayers at our fingertips on our phones. We offer to you this sample devotion from Everyday Sanctuary's website as our shared Lenten delegation devotion today.

May you experience
the grace and peace of Jesus
through this devotion and during your day.

Everyday Sanctuary



Prayer for Presence

Begin by praying this simple phrase that invites God's presence

Quiet Fear.



Today's Sanctuary Scripture

John 14:27 (WEB)

**Peace I leave with you.
My peace I give to you;
not as the world gives, I give to you.
Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.**



Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deeply for 2 or 5 minutes using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale. Prompts can be spoken internally or out loud.

Temper your heart rate. I know you want to.
I know you want to feel whole, not busy.
Arrived, not always racing. Take -

**IN | Peace
OUT | In**



Gratitudes

What are you grateful for today?



Today's Prayers

Where you need God to be at work in the day or week to come?

March 12

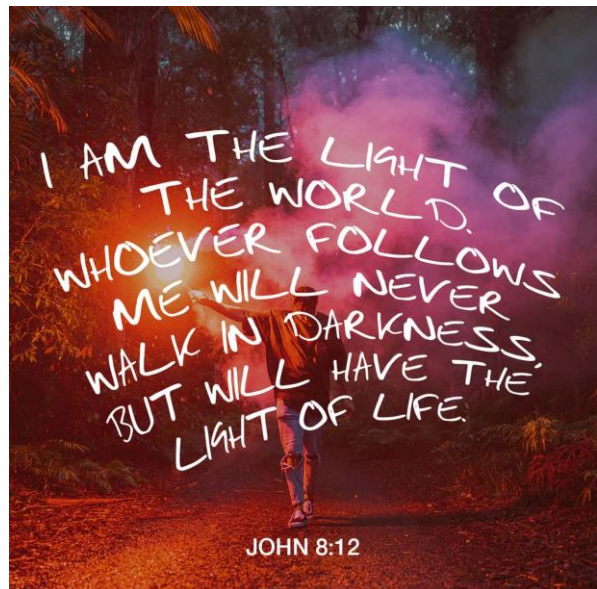


By Josh Shaw

Lay Member of the Vine UMC (Mississippi River District) and Lay Delegate

Jesus, the Light of the World

The first time I learned the verse John 8:12, I was in middle school at a local missions camp. It was the theme verse of the week; the theme being “Shine Where You Are.” We sang countless times, “Jesus says, I am the light of the world (2x), whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness. But will have the light of life, light of life!” All week we learned about serving and shining our light. What I remember feeling for the first time ever was that my light matters in this dark world. It was not just mine, but the community’s light around me as well. For the first time ever, the body of Christ looked like the church in a brand new way.



In this passage, we find Jesus teaching in the temple and sharing one of the seven “I am” statements. “I am the light of the world.” We find Jesus sharing about the Father who sent Him. Those in the temple had become extremely judgmental. From trying to stone a woman to denying who Jesus is, the church people failed to see Jesus at work. The religious people failed to see the light within others. Bishop Joe Pennel said, “The church is at its best when grace allows it to be a redemptive place.”

I believe Bishop Pannel is right. When the body of Christ is mindful that individually it is unique but together complete, the church is working for better together. I think it is a beautiful part of our sacred worth that every believer carries the light of Christ in them. This light within each of us shines in unique ways. The things that dim that light are different for each of us, We all have found ourselves in doubt and judgment. We have all needed grace to allow our lights to continue to shine.

When we individually share that grace with others, we give them the opportunity to continue shining. By sharing in that grace, many individual lights begin and continue to shine. When the light of others becomes as important as our own, we are sharing in the uniqueness of the light of Life.

Have you taken a breath and appreciated the light in your life?

Have you taken a breath and appreciated the light from someone else?

How is God shining through you?

Will you breathe and pray with me?

Breathe in: Jesus is the bread of life. (John 6:35)

Breathe out: Fill me Lord.

Breathe in: Jesus is the resurrection. (John 11:25)

Breathe out: Make all things. Make me new.

Breathe in: Jesus is the good shepherd. (John 10:11)

Breathe out: Lead me with your grace.

Breathe in: Jesus is the vine. (John 15:5)

Breathe out: Let me be a branch that connects You to others.

Breathe in: Jesus is the door. (John 10:9)

Breathe out: Thank you for making a way for me.

Breathe in: Jesus is the way, truth, and life. (John 14:6)

Breathe out: Guide my way, as I share the truth of your glory in my life.

Breathe in: Jesus is the light of the world. (John 8:12)

Breathe out: Help me to shine. Help me to help others shine.

**Remind me to stay in love with You, God, to love everyone I meet, and to love myself.
Amen.**



Josh Shaw is a lay member of The Vine UMC. In addition to his service as a lay delegate to General Conference, he serves in many volunteer roles for the United Methodist Church at the general, jurisdictional, conference, district, and local levels. He is a member of the TWK Youth Operations Team and a constant champion for the leadership of children, youth, and young adult disciples. In his spare time, you can find him dancing to Bruno Mars and spending time with his family and dogs!

March 13



PRACTICES FOR SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove your stony heart from your body and replace it with a living one, ²⁷and I will give you my spirit so that you may walk according to my regulations and carefully observe my case laws. ²⁸Then you will live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, you will be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezekiel 36:26-28

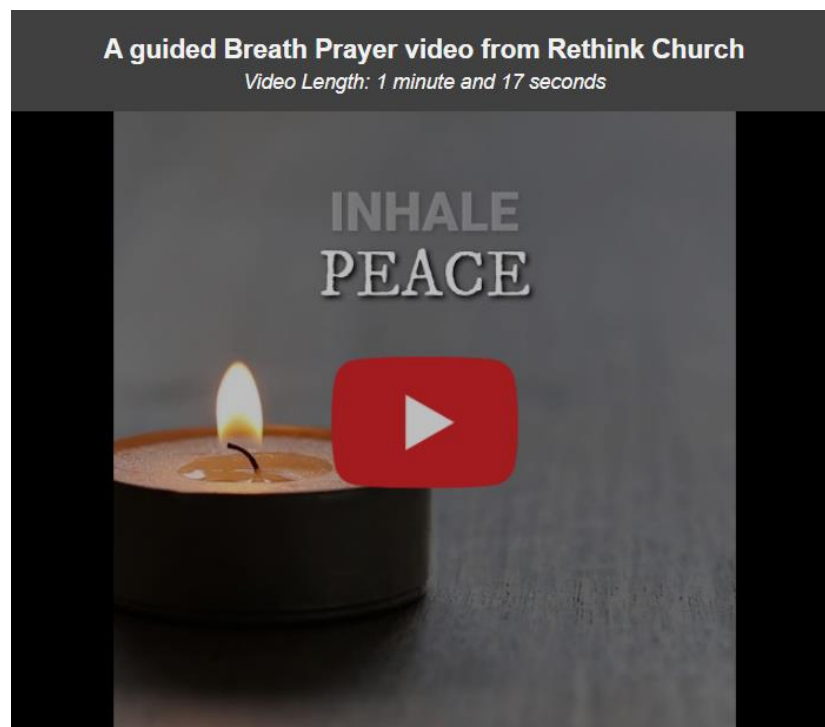
Common English Bible

This week, many of the Lenten Devotions have been focused on different spiritual practices. Often, when we talk about our time spent in devotion, we assume time spent with God primarily looks like reading the Bible and praying. But spiritual practices (or spiritual disciplines as many United Methodists would call them) come in varied shapes and sizes. Just as God created us to be uniquely ourselves, the practices that speak to our heart and soul will differ: breath prayer, searching the Scriptures, meditation, silence, reading theological texts, spiritual songs, community service, and more.

Truly, any activity that turns our attention towards God and helps us become aware of God's loving presence -- that activity, for us, is a spiritual practice. These activities, in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, give us "a new heart" and "put a new spirit" (vs. 26) within us as we worship and walk with the living God. In addition to the spiritual benefits, regular use of spiritual practices has been linked to physical health benefits such as less hypertension, more positive feelings, reduction of symptoms of depression, and healthy management of stress.

It's clear...God designed our bodies and souls to respond positively to spiritual practices. While we may often feel that reading the Bible or praying is an obligation or duty, perhaps we can shift our focus and discover that spiritual disciplines are truly a gift from God for our wellbeing...a means of grace. So, as you engage in the spiritual practices that speak to your heart and soul, may you remember this promise: we are God's people, and the God who is our God -- He is the everlasting Lord of Life who loves you so much as that He designed your body to benefit from investing time in practices that grow your relationship with Him. Thanks be to God for a love like that.

You can learn more about practices for spiritual wellness [here](#). Take a moment today to improve your spiritual and physical wellness by engaging with the video below.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XV32S2Qe7o>

March 14



By Vona Wilson

District Superintendent of the Harpeth River District

READ: ISAIAH 30:15-18

***¹⁵ For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.***



Waiting as a way of living our faith is counter cultural. From a young age, the instruction to “wait” often prefaces disappointment.

Today we run into Isaiah who is proclaiming, “in returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength.” Really? Strength comes in quietness and trust? When it feels like we need to charge into the day early and remain late tending to the overflowing list of things to do...is THAT when we need to stop, rest, and get quiet?

Well, yes. It turns out that this is exactly what God tells Isaiah to share with the Israelites who are determined to act with their own means of influence and power. We humans love to “make

things happen." Notice what happens when we refuse to wait and allow God to equip and bless us: we end up isolated and alone, flying our banner, and still longing for what we cannot create for ourselves. (v. 17)

I learned the spiritual practice of centering prayer many years ago. I watched a change happen in my mother's life that she attributed to this practice. It was a profound change that was subtle in its beginning and transforming in its persistence. From stress to peace. From worry to trusting. I stepped in with trepidation, beginning with five minutes of silence at first, and slowly built up to the twenty-minute silent prayer. It is a posture of vulnerability that allows me to simply be held in the arms of my Creator. That place of unknowing mystery wraps me up in grace and love that is too deep for me to comprehend. It changes me and brings peace.

I don't know how to wait without the practice of centering prayer. This practice helps me surrender to God's ways. I make different decisions when I am consistently using this practice as a daily grounding. It trains my spirit and mind, without any effort on my part, and yet requiring my full trust in God's faithfulness.

Serving as a District Superintendent challenges me to hold steady in this trust. We are in the middle of appointment season as I write. Waiting for God's wisdom and assistance is a shared practice we cannot afford to miss. Taking time to listen and be still enough to allow us to receive the blessing of grace and mercy God promises IS our work.

Isaiah reminds us to depend on God for our strength and makes it clear that the Lord is also waiting on us. Waiting to be gracious to us! Waiting to show us mercy! Waiting to bring blessings of justice into our lives.

The practice of centering prayer helps me "return and rest". It trains my spirit and mind to wait with trust that I will find strength here. **What helps you wait?** How are you cultivating waiting as a spiritual practice in your life right now?

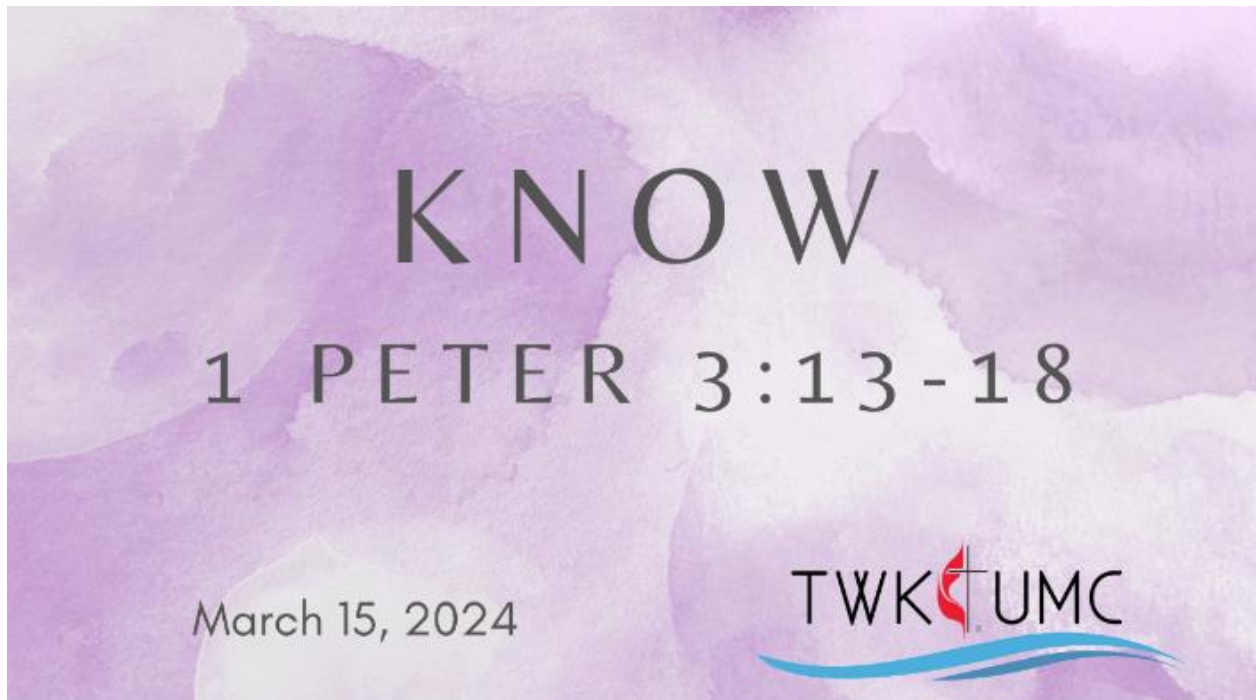
After a moment of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God: *Lord, we love you and we trust you completely. We wait with full confidence in your faithfulness. Amen.*

Learn more about the practice of centering prayer at this link:
http://www.centeringprayer.com/centering_prayer.html

Dr. Vona Wilson is an ordained Elder currently serving as District Superintendent of the Harpeth River District, and clergy leader for the TWK Faith and Innovation Team. She enjoys time in the outdoors, hiking, experiencing other cultures, and sharing life with family and friends.



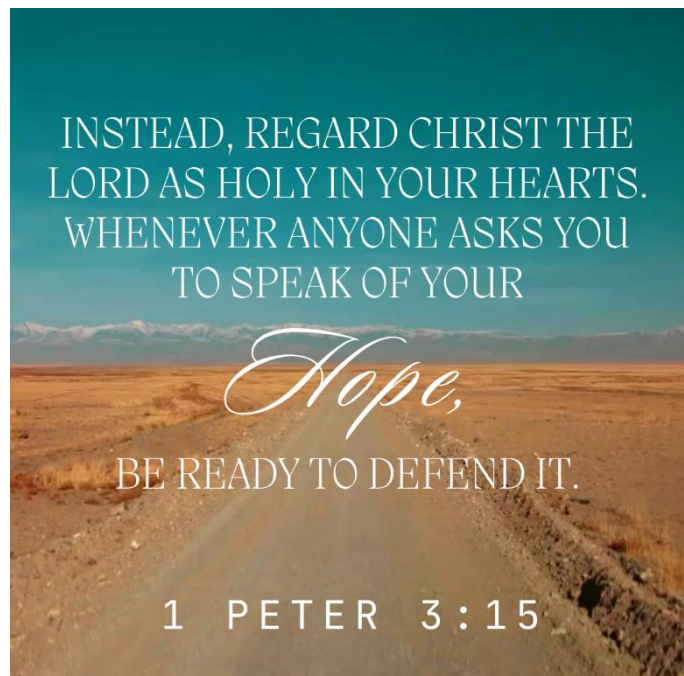
March 15



By Rachel B. Hagewood
Lay Member of Bellevue UMC (Red River District) and Lay Delegate

Those of us on the delegation have, at times, joked that we are members of the never-ending delegation. In the UMC, delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conference are elected every four years and generally they serve about fifteen months, from the Annual Conference when they are elected through General Conference in April/May and Jurisdictional Conference in July. They may be called upon if a special session of General or Jurisdictional Conference is called sometime with a four-year period before the next elections are held.

Those of us on the delegation to General and Jurisdictional Conference were elected in the summer of 2019. By the time we attend the postponed General Conference in April of 2024, we will have served on the delegation for 59 months.



I tell you this not so you can be impressed (really, don't be), or so that you'll express sympathy

or wonder at our strange tenure (there are many other effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that warrant your sympathy or wonder; we're low on the list). I instead share it because it's one of the few things I know about the upcoming General Conference. This event in the life of our church is anxiety-inducing in the best of years. Following a global pandemic and amid disaffiliations, approaching General Conference feels like approaching the edge of a cliff. Will we fall? Or will we fly?

What else do I know about General Conference? I know we will be tired. The days will be long. I know we will be weary, weary of the ways we will hurt one another, fail one another, miss the shape and form of a body that God is calling us to be. I know we will get things wrong. We let our need for control drive our actions. We don't let God work through us, or, even more damaging, we act according to our will and try to pretend it is God's.

But I also know I have hope.

I have tangible hope that the United Methodist Church can be an agent of God's transformational love in the world. I know there are those who have lost hope. I get it. There are times the tiny flame of hope inside me is so small that I wonder if it is still lit. But every time I look, I find it. As long as God's flame for the UMC flickers in my life, I will continue to serve, to push for transformation from within.

And this is not because I hold some mighty expectation that the church can solve our problems. No, only God can, and only when we let go of our need for control can we step aside and let God transform our church. When we stop working for the structure and polity of church and start making the structure and polity of the church work for us. When we let God work through our brokenness to bring transformation and healing.

This I know: I have hope. Not for the church, but for God, to work through this body, Christ's church, to transform the world.

I have hope. God is my hope, and God is with us.



Rachel Britt Hagewood is a lay member of Bellevue UMC in the Red River District and a Senior Developmental Editor at The Upper Room. A lifelong United Methodist and preacher's kid, Rachel is active at all levels of the UMC. She is a certified lay minister, chair of Equitable Compensation for the TWK Conference, and serves on the TWK delegation to Jurisdictional and General Conference. When she's not wielding a purple pen to a manuscript, she loves to listen to musical theatre soundtracks; create art that may or may not one day exist outside her brain; and take her spouse, Mark, and their two kids, Luke and Ben, to Disney World.

March 16



By Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland

Pastor of Millington First UMC (Metro District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

Until February 24th, 2024, I had rarely had the opportunity to intentionally offer prayers for someone who was near death. As a pastor, I am graciously invited into the most precious and intimate moments of life – birth, marriage, crisis, death. Still, in my experience, more often the call for the pastor to come follows death, rather than preceding it. The few times when I have been called to the bedside of a person who is dying, I have felt wholly underprepared. In these moments, I rely upon my instincts to offer prayer, read Scripture, sit in silence. When I'm not sure that my best is good enough, I humbly trust that the Spirit will meet me in my weakness and transform what I offer into words of grace and comfort for those crossing the threshold from this life to eternal life.

But on February 24th this year, I came prepared. Well, that's not entirely true. As the Divine so often does, the Holy Spirit had prepared me for this moment in ways I could not have anticipated or planned on my own. A bottle of anointing oil left in my purse from Ash Wednesday, not yet returned to its rightful place on my bookshelf. A kindle copy of the United Methodist Book of Worship downloaded on my phone, purchased when I couldn't find my hard copy after moving from one appointment to another. An awareness from my last conversation with my grandmother, who lay dying in the hospital bed now, that she would need our family's blessing and prayerful permission to let go of this earthly realm and go home to Jesus.

And so, in the late hours of February 24th, as a dozen children and grandchildren and loved ones crowded into that tiny hospital room, I gingerly anointed my grandmother's forehead with oil and borrowed a prayer I had never said before,

**Depart in peace, beloved child of God;
in the name of God the Father who created you;
in the name of Christ who redeemed you;
in the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you.
May you rest in peace, and dwell for ever with the Lord.
Amen.**

As I read about Mary anointing Christ, I wonder...*did Mary come prepared for this moment?* Had she heard her rabbi Jesus share prophecies of the suffering he would soon face in Jerusalem? Did her memory contain stories of magi travelers and their strange gift of myrrh to her friend when he was just an infant? Was using her own costly perfume to anoint Christ's feet something she had painstakingly planned, counting the cost?



Or, I wonder, did Mary come unprepared? When encountering the presence of love and grace in Jesus, did she trust her instincts? Did she grab her jar of expensive nard because it was still on the family table, not yet put back in its place after preparing Lazarus for burial, the same Lazarus whom Jesus had resurrected from the dead and who now sat at the table with her and Martha and Jesus, eating and laughing and fully alive?

The Gospel of John doesn't tell us if Mary had been planning this moment for many months or for mere minutes. What we do know is how Jesus responds when Judas criticizes Mary for wasting this costly ointment.



There are plenty of good, theological reasons why Mary might anoint Jesus. A foreshadowing of his impending death. A prophetic act, anointing him for his God-given mission, as prophets anointing the kings of Israel for their holy tasks of leadership. A worshipful response of gratitude for raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. And a dozen other implications folks a lot smarter than me have written and preached about across the centuries.

Yet, I don't think these are the reasons Jesus has in mind when he tells Judas to leave Mary alone. Instead, I believe Jesus receives this extravagant generosity (and, in turn, silences any critique) because he knows this act is poured out from the overflow of love in Mary's heart. As I reflect upon my own moment of anointing a person I love for death, a person whose absence will forever change my life, I find myself trusting this implied promise in Christ's words – when love is our motivation, Jesus will tell our critics, "Leave her alone," and graciously receive what we offer, whether we came prepared or not.

After a moment of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God:

God of Grace, may everything I do be so anointed by my love for you and neighbor that the fragrance of my offerings would be pleasing to you, for you alone are my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland is a life-long United Methodist who grew up in Memphis, TN before attending Lambuth University and Vanderbilt Divinity School. Currently, she serves as the Senior Pastor of Millington FUMC. This is her second devotion offered in this Lenten series from the TWK Delegation to General Conference. Amanda writes this devotion in memory of her grandmother, Charlotte Comes, who passed away on February 25, 2024, to the Glory of God.



March 17



You are invited to center yourself for prayer and praise as you listen or sing along with this musical arrangement of the Prayer St. Patrick.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b21F-ZjfuYs>

March 18



By David Weatherly

District Superintendent for Metro Memphis and Southwest Tennessee and Ordained Elder

2 Corinthians 3:4-11 (NRSV)

⁴Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. ⁵Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

How is God's *Glory* revealed in us?

How often do you use the word "*glory*"? We hear it in scripture most often when God is described or has been revealed in some spectacular fashion. We may use it in prayer to credit or express our gratitude, as in "*giving God the glory*" for bountiful blessings bestowed upon us. We may sing in worship to give God our praise and glory, especially in hymns like "*To God Be the Glory*", "*God of Grace and God of Glory*", and in the caroling refrain of "*Angels We Have Heard on High*". Often after acts of worship such as an Affirmation of Faith, psalmody, or

canticle, a congregation will sing the familiar words of the liturgical chant known as the “Lesser” or “Minor Doxology”, aka the “*Gloria Patri*” (Latin meaning “*the glory be*” or “*Glory to the Father*”).

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.*

While we frequently sing, say, and pray about God’s glory, how do we demonstrate it? In chapter 3 of 2nd Corinthians, Paul writes of God “*who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant*” (v.6a). God’s Glory can be revealed in us and through us, but not in ways that the world would recognize as glorious. Usually, we seek to impress or glorify our competence through accomplishments, achievements, and accolades that might impress a college admissions office, a potential employer, or a person whose acceptance we hope to gain. That kind of “glory” is fine for such purposes, but it will likely not result in the Kingdom of God being revealed. It will not allow anyone to see the evidence of our work as ministers of a new covenant.

Worse, Paul warns that some have sought glory through condemnation and judgement, even acknowledging that one can indeed build a shining reputation by investing in moments of self-promotion and self-righteousness. But Paul challenges the Corinthians to imagine how much brighter the glorious Light of Christ shines when we humble ourselves, pray, and assume the posture required to do the work of the servant God has called us to follow. “*For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!*” (v.9)

During this season of Lent, my hope and prayer is for our culture of exclusion and egotism to be replaced with moments of affirmation, grace, and mercy...that the *Glory of God* will be revealed through our acts of Christ-like love, not our acts of religious piety.

*...for they’ll know we are Christians, by our love, by our love,
yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love...*

May God’s glory be revealed in and through us as we love and serve God, by loving and serving our neighbor.

David Weatherly was born and raised in Memphis and in the United Methodist Church. He is married to April, with whom he shares two adult sons. In twenty-nine years of lay and appointed ministry, David has served churches in Memphis, Jackson, Collierville, and Cordova.



March 19



By George Brown

Lay Member of The Vine UMC (Stones River District) and Lay Delegate

When I plant corn, I have four computer screens in the tractor cab with me. One counts each seed that goes into the ground, and the depth, ground pressure, and compaction. One has the GPS that tells you what part of the field you have already planted and steers the tractor back in a straight line. One monitors the nitrogen, potash, and chemical that goes in the row. One manages the acres planted, applies the amount of resources that go into the new crop as it variable rates the inputs, and maps the field for the future.

Then in the fall at harvest time the combine does the same thing: it maps the field year after year, and when you overlay each years yield map over each other you get a history and it tells the planter tractor which part of the field produces the best yield and which part has the poorest ground. Then the planter puts more seed and resources on the rich ground and less on the poor ground. That way you do not waste your inputs and resources on poor ground and can maximize the potential on the better ground.

God seems to deal with us in the same way. He gives us a history (The Bible) that tells each of us where the rich ground lays and where poor results were received. We each have a history and if we will overlay our own history over the Bibles' history, we can avoid poor results. God is like the GPS,



he can steer us in a straight line never venturing into poor results.

God gives us a goal (full potential). He wants us to worship with our Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, and Witness. Jesus is the map he has given us.

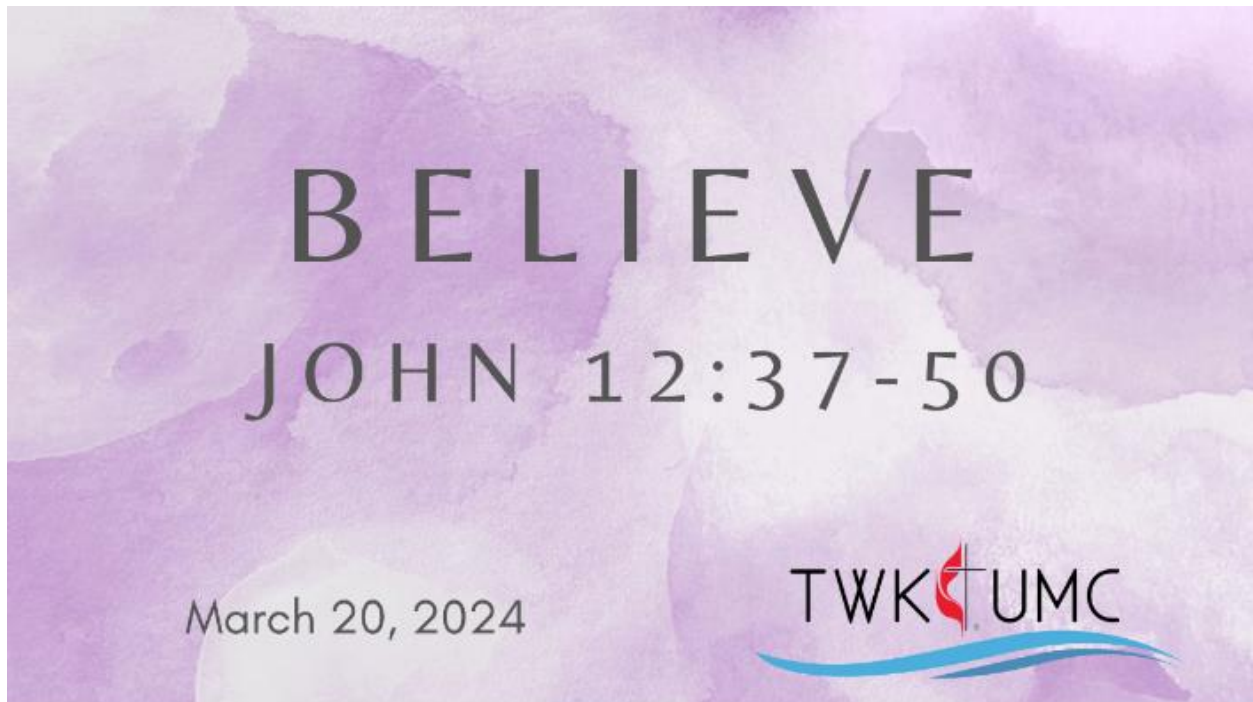
God has taught us his statutes (experience). Our part is to learn how to apply them in a way that builds and honors His Kingdom. When we are in need or seek to help someone, he applies more inputs and strengthens us.

He desires a top harvest for each of us!

George and June Brown live on a farm in Hillsboro, TN. They have three great children, two wonderful daughter-in-laws and son-in-law, and six brilliant grandchildren.

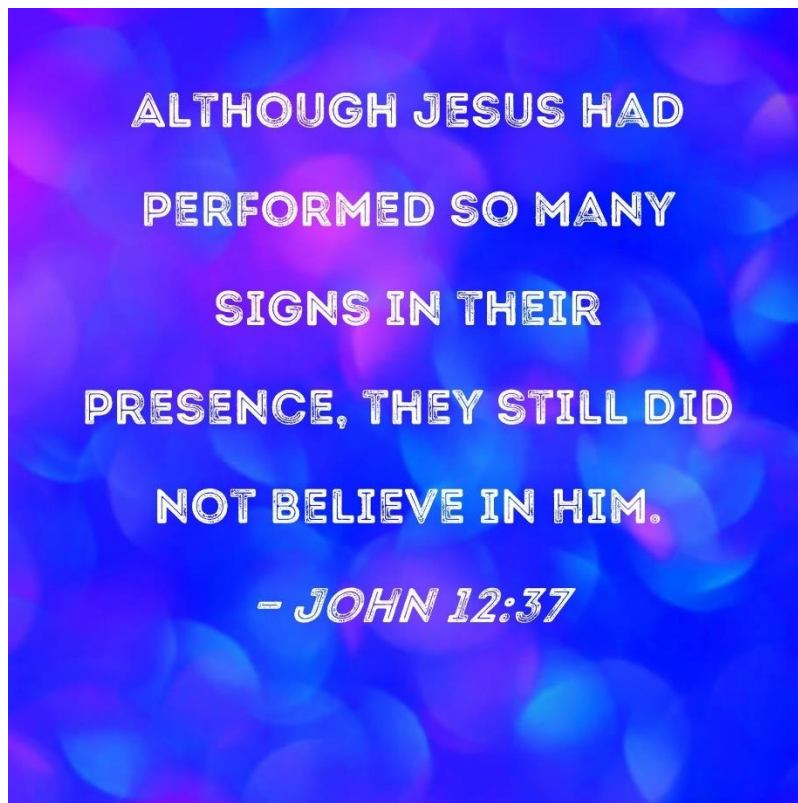


March 20



By Rebecca Little

Lay Member of the TWK Conference and Connect Strategy Team Leader for the [TWK Connectional Table](#)



This happens just after Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, foretold his own death and resurrection, and God has spoken to him from heaven. And STILL the people don't believe. I used to think the people around Jesus must not have been paying attention. How could they not believe? How could they not see "the light of the world" when Jesus was right there with them?

Then I remember losing my keys when my children were small. We dumped out my purse, searched drawers, and looked under furniture. No keys.

A neighborhood boy came to play and we told him about the missing keys. He pointed to a door a few feet away and said, "Those keys?" Yes, those keys. They were right in front of us, but in a door lock that was seldom used. It was a place both obvious and unexpected. The Nazarene that rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was hardly the Messiah people expected to see.

The people of Jesus' time heard about or saw the miracles he did, but also heard the temple leaders disagree with him. How did they decide who to believe? Later in this passage, we discover that some did believe, but were afraid of what other people would think. They don't sound too different from us after all.

This passage shows us two different ways to look at God: if you see Jesus, you see God. And if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. We can show the world what God is like by our words and our actions - reflecting the nature of God by showing generous, abundant and reckless love to all God's children. Just like Jesus.

After a moment of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God: *Lord, as we welcome Spring, give us eyes to see You in all of creation. Help us to live so others can see You living in us. Amen.*

Rebecca Little has been married to her college sweetheart, Neill, for almost 48 years. They are delighted that both of their children and their families live nearby, so you can often find the Littles at a grandchild's band concert or sporting event. Rebecca enjoys reading, hiking, and playing with her dog Millie. Rebecca serves on the Connectional Table and as leader of the Connect Strategy Team. She would love to tell you about all the good things God is doing through the TWK Ministry Teams and Covenant Entities!



March 21



By Toi King

Senior Pastor of Clark Memorial UMC (Red River District, Urban Cohort) and Ordained Elder



The Psalm today is a psalm of praise for the goodness of God.

Please allow me to share one of my Toi stories.

I love to spend time with God early in the morning. I have a special space in my home just for God and me. One morning, however, right before my devotional time, I felt a notion to go

outside on the deck. I must admit I was a little hesitant as I do not like being outside for long periods of time. I am afraid of animals. I would prefer to look out the window and watch them enjoy themselves in the yard.

That morning, I heard a soft voice say “Toi, get your coffee and your devotional material and meet me on the deck.”

"On the deck, God, really?" I replied knowing I am afraid to go seat outside for a long period of time.

Then I heard, “Toi, perfect love cast out all fear.”

I exhaled and said, "Okay God, I trust you." I placed my coffee cup and devotional material on the patio table and looked around the deck. I noticed there were two gates attached to the deck and immediately I felt safe.

I freely sat down to read and write in my prayer journal. I had music playing and I was in my zone. I was not worried about the animals. The gate was my protection. They had their side of the gate, and I had mine. It was just God and I caught in our moment!

My devotional time was so powerful and moving. After I finished, I felt a notion to open the gate. The music was playing, and I was so full of the Holy Spirit, I felt like dancing. I danced on the deck and before I knew it, I opened the gate dancing down the stairs and in the backyard. I was so caught up in the moment I had not noticed the squirrels running, rabbits hopping, nor birds flying and chirping from tree to tree. I was dancing and praising God.

Praise God for God’s goodness! God invited me to experience our time together inside and outside the gate from the deck. The same gate that made me feel safe is the same gate that released me to freedom!

Praise God for Jesus Christ the gate! He secures all things inside. He keeps harmful things outside. He is the entrance into heaven, and he is the exit out of Hell. Much like the gate on my deck, Jesus can do both at the same time.

After a time of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God:

Lord God, I thank you for the gates in my life, whether on my deck or part of my fence or in the world as I walk each day, that remind me of the safety and freedom I receive everyday from Jesus! Amen.

Question to Ponder: What are the things in your life this Lenten Season that Jesus the true gate is inviting you to keep out and or let in?



Toi King is an ordained elder serving as the Senior Pastor of Clark Memorial United Methodist in the Urban Cohort of Red River District. She lives in Brentwood with her youngest two children Dynasti and Zackeius. Her oldest daughter Destani, son-in-law Milton, and grand-dog Kottin live in Clarksville, TN. Toi loves to dance! She loves music! Her favorite color is purple, and Toi is a true Prince fan!

March 22



"The time is coming, declares the Lord,
when I will fulfill my gracious promise
with the people of Israel and Judah."

Jeremiah 33:14

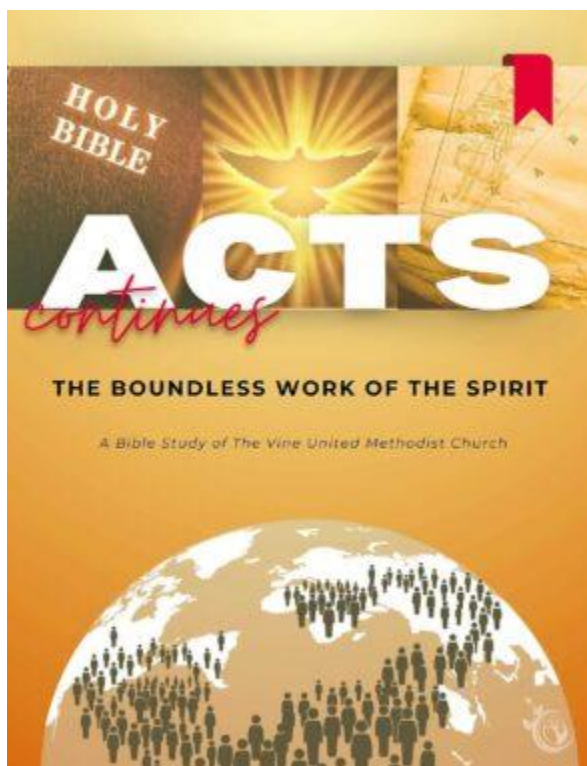
This passage of prophecy is often read during the two most holy seasons of the church year: Advent and Lent. In Advent, we celebrate the incarnation -- when God through Jesus Christ "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message*) -- and we look forward to the consummation of God's mission in Jesus when all of creation is redeemed and the kingdom of God comes in its fullness. When we read this text in Lent, as we prepare to enter Holy Week, we give thanks for the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption through Jesus Christ's sacrificial love and the expansive grace of God extended to the whole world.

Next week, in Holy Week, we will take time to sit at the foot of the cross, to ponder the wondrous love of God, to ask forgiveness for our sins, and to stand in awe at the amazing grace of our Savior. Yet, as morning dawns on Easter morning, and the resurrection becomes our reality, the journey of faithfulness is not done.

Some say Eastertide has fallen out of favor in the church. It's certainly not a word many of us sitting in United Methodist pews are as familiar with as Advent or Lent. Yet, it's the season that

carries us from the joy of Easter morning to the power of Pentecost Day, from our marvel at the empty to tomb to our mission as disciples of Jesus in the world.

The TWK Delegation's Lenten Daily Devotions will soon be drawing to a close, but don't let that stop you from continuing a journey of shared study with your United Methodist brothers and sisters across the TWK. This year, the TWK Annual Conference theme is ***Boundless: Acts Continues***. In preparation for annual conference, Bishop McAlilly encourages everyone to study **“Acts Continues: The Boundless Work of the Spirit,”** a seven-week Bible Study and Sermon Series written in collaboration with clergy of the TWK and produced by the Vine United Methodist Church.



This study seeks to rekindle your faith and deepen your understanding of the Holy Spirit's dynamic role in both the early church and our lives today. As we move into Holy Week and then into Eastertide anticipating the promise of the Holy Spirit's power, may God's promise of redemption be fulfilled in your life.

Want to join others across the TWK in studying Acts Continues? You can access a free version through The Vine UMC's website; you may also purchase a copy via Amazon in print (\$15) or through Kindle (\$9).

Pro tip: If you begin the Acts Continue bible study on April 1 (the day after Easter and the last Delegation Lent Devotion of this series), you'll finish the Acts Continue study just in time for Pentecost Sunday!

[Learn more and download the study today!](#)

Please note: in order to download the free PDF on the Vine's website, complete the checkout process by clicking "add to cart," "view cart," and then "checkout." You will then be able to access the study.

March 23



Imitate Christ

² Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, ² complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. ³ Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. ⁵ Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.

⁷ But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.

When he found himself in the form of a human,

⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow

11 and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11 (CEB)

As we prepare to enter Holy Week tomorrow, you're invited to pause for a moment of worship and praise as you play this video. Sing along with the words, or spend time in quiet contemplation as the song guides your prayer.

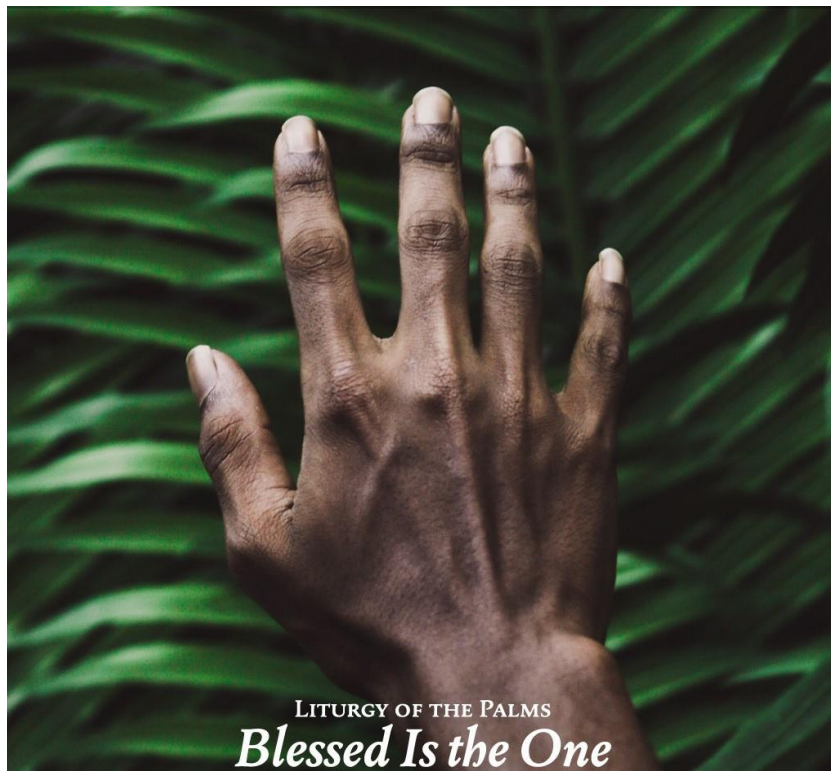


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkcDem2Pqzs>

March 24



PALM SUNDAY PRAYER



God of the foolish cross,
tottering down the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey,
You are not the savior we expect.
Your power doesn't look like the power we want our God to demonstrate.
Your wisdom makes no sense to us.
We are happy to join the crowd, waving branches,
But not so sure we want to follow you
into the temple courts
into the upper room
into the Garden of Gethsemane
to the foot of the cross.
Forgive our false assumptions.
Clarify our clouded vision.
Let us relax into the foolishness of your love, your grace.
Hosanna, hosanna.
Save us, we beseech you!

Written by Joanna Harader on her Spacious Faith blog, <http://spaciousfaith.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/prayer-god-of-foolish-cross.html>.

March 25



By Tom Lee

Lay Member of West End UMC (Cumberland River District) and Lay Delegate

An old judge in Nashville used to scold witnesses who fell prey to the temptation to start offering their opinions.

“No, no,” he would say. “The jury is not interested in your opinions. You tell what you have perceived with your five senses. What you’ve seen, heard, tasted, smelled, touched.

“You be a witness.”

I don’t know of a role in our discipleship journey that gives rise to more deep-seated anxiety than that of witness. We tend to associate witnessing with speaking. This is hard, because researchers say fear of public speaking is our most common. For most, it takes root in adolescence. Worse, it seems we do not grow out of this anxiety as much as we grow into it, as a fear of public speaking tends to morph into generalized social anxiety.^[1]

This cannot be the work of the church, can it, to set our society *more* on edge than it already is? If so, what an odd call. Can we not simply increase our pledge?

And God’s answer, at least in Psalm 40, is: Not quite.

The psalmist has known the worst of life—a “miry bog,” a “desolate pit”—places we, too, know well. The God that knew the cross knows these places, too. Indeed, this is where the psalmist comes face to face with God’s work of deliverance.

“God’s redeeming work is done,” Charles Wesley writes. This, also, is the claim the psalmist makes.

*"Then I said, Here I am;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me."
{ Psalm 40:7 }*

This isn’t just ancient poetry. I remember the first time I really read Jesus’ prayer for his disciples recounted in John 17:20: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word.”

Here I am! In the scroll of the book it is written of me!

The psalmist’s response is to tell “the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation.” But notice here what is missing. We aren’t told *how* the psalmist does the telling.

And here is good news for the witnessing-anxious: We need not witness with public speaking. We can embrace, we can sit with, we can ask, we can share, we can write, we can draw, we can dance.

And we can do so with confidence that the delivering is not on us. That has been accomplished by the One who knew not only the miry bog, but also the dark and dank tomb. There is nothing more we can add to this perfect, redeeming work. It is done.

All we need do is tell the story—however we tell it.

[1] Ebrahimi, Pallesen, Kenter, and Nordgreen, “Psychological Interventions for the Fear of Public Speaking: A Meta-Analysis, 10 *Front Psychology*, at 488 (2019), found at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6428748/>



Tom Lee is a member of West End United Methodist in Nashville, and a lay member of the legacy Tennessee Conference’s delegation to General Conference. Tom is an attorney, a certified lay speaker in the UMC, and a contributor to the Bitter Southerner online publication. He loves being a spouse to Laurie, dad to Virginia, and a lifelong fan of the Baltimore Orioles.

March 26



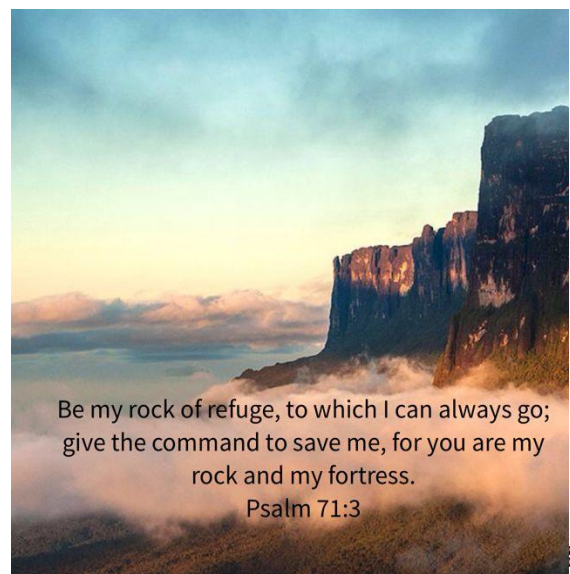
By Janice McCallen

TWK Conference Lay Leader and Lay Member of St. Paul UMC (Metro District)

Where is your place of refuge when you need to escape the realities of the world?

I never really thought much about the importance of refuge until 2½ years ago. In the months from July 1, 2021 to January 24, 2022, my husband, my dad, and my mom all passed away. When I think back on this time, all I could really do was take it one day at a time, through each one's short illness and subsequent death. God was my rock and fortress through it all!

The home that my husband and I shared for nearly 30 years became my refuge, and it still is. In fact, I love it more now because there are so many memories we built together here. It is at home that I feel safe: I can shut out the world and dwell in quiet security. While many widows may be anxious to move, and may need to for various reasons, I am at peace here (at least for now) cherishing the memories as they come.





I have found other places of refuge, as well. I love to take long walks outdoors when I can, and savoring the beauty of God’s creation makes me feel closer to Him. Memphis really has some gorgeous sunsets!

I look up to the heavens now more than ever, and when I do, I always think of my loved ones who are dwelling there.

My church is also a sacred place of refuge – I have been a member of St. Paul United Methodist Church for over 30 years, and I find great solace there with my wonderful church family.

But refuge to me is also more than a physical “place.” When I sit quietly with Jesus during my prayer and devotion time, I find refuge. I think having a safe, sacred space in my heart for the Holy Spirit to dwell in has certainly sustained me. God has surely embraced me with peace and comfort. Sheltered in His refuge, I hold onto the confidence that I will be okay. The Bible assures us that God is always with us and his enduring presence is consistent in our lives. Let us seek refuge in His presence daily!



After a few moments of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God:
Thank you, dear Lord, for always being a Refuge for me. Amen.



Janice is a lifelong United Methodist and was born in Washington, DC, but has lived in Memphis for 50 years. She is blessed with a son, J.T., daughter-in-law Carol, and two grandsons, Will and C.J. She is an active member of St. Paul UMC, where she is a member of the handbell and chancel choirs, teaches Sunday School and serves on several committees.

Janice is also a member of the TWK Conference Connectional Table, the Annual Conference Planning Committee, and the Conference Committee on Episcopacy. When she is not busy doing church work, she is at her day job as an Event Operations Specialist with Smith+Nephew. In this role, she plans and executes medical education events for orthopedic surgeons and travels frequently as part of her work.

Janice is honored to represent the laity of the TWK Conference in her role as Conference Lay Leader.

March 27



By Nancy Johnston Varden

District Superintendent of the Purchase District and Ordained Elder

Morning is for learning!

I recently went to my middle child’s last Parent-Teacher Conference of their high school career. I went because I was told to go and the reward for my child was extra credit points. I was specifically instructed to, “Sign in for each class, or I will not get the points!”

As I arrived in each teachers’ class and began to enter my child’s name on the sign in sheet, I heard from each something close to, “We don’t have too many Senior parents this time of year!” I am sure most are alluding to *senioritis* for many entering their last days of High School. My child however is not showing any signs of slowing down or taking a break from learning. You see my middle child has always been a keen student.

This passage from Isaiah is a servant’s song. The words most likely referred to the experience of a prophet of their time. As the early believers of Jesus came to fully understand his role as Messiah and Savior, they would have likely gotten encouragement from these words. May we be a student of these words of encouragement and learning as well—even in our *senior* years!

The first line of Isaiah 50:9 is translated in the NRSV as “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher.” The Hebrew text more closely reads “the tongue of those who are taught.” The Lord opens the servant’s ear to prepare them to learn and to speak. And we should be reminded as we journey closer to the cross this Holy Week that learning is an ongoing process rather than a one-time experience; the Lord ‘wakens’ the servant’s ear ‘morning by morning.’”

Do you remember the Dr. Seuss quote, “The more you read, the more things that you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you will go.” I think a phrase that comes to mind for the Isaiah passage for today is: “The more we listen, the more we’ll know. The more we know, the more we’ll serve. The more we serve, the more we’ll learn.”

After a few moments of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God:

Holy and compassionate God,
your dear Son went not up to joy
before he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified.
Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior. Amen.

(The Book of Common Prayer, U.S.A., 20TH CENT., ALT.)



Nancy lives in Hickman, Kentucky with her husband Rev. John Varden and their three children. In their spare time they tend a small corner of beautiful rolling hills in Cayce, KY where they have chickens, goats, a horse, a pony, and two barn cats. Come by anytime and hangout with the goats!

March 28



By Paul Purdue

Pastor of Belmont UMC (Cumberland River District), Clergy Delegate, and Ordained Elder

Today is Maundy Thursday and the Gospel lesson directs us to John 13, where Jesus gets up from the Passover Meal and washes the disciple's dusty feet. Tonight, I will readily wash other people's feet, but like Peter, will cringe when someone washes my feet. Maundy comes from Latin and means "commandment". After Jesus returned to the Last Supper with his followers, Jesus made clear his expectation and commandment for us: "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (John 13).



In keeping with his Jewish practice, Jesus celebrated Passover and likely regularly prayed the Psalms. Jesus prays Psalm 22 from the cross (Mark 15). Today the revised common lectionary directs us to Psalm 116. Maybe we might imagine Jesus praying this Psalm as Jesus washed dirty feet, gave us Holy Communion, prayed in the garden, was kissed by Judas, beaten by the police, abandoned by his male followers, and denied justice by the courts.

Perhaps Jesus found comfort in Psalm 116 during these terrible hours?

What shall I return to the LORD for all God's goodness?

I will lift up the cup of salvation.

The death of all God's faithful ones are precious to the Lord.

O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your servant [Mary].

I will offer a sacrifice and call on the LORD.

God's love poured out through the table and the cross baffled Charles Wesley: who wrote about how even the angels' minds can't explain such love ("And Can It Be that I Should Gain" UMH 363). If I will sit with Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the depth of God's love, the wideness of the Spirit's compassion, and Christ's inexhaustible forgiveness grip me as I remember that Christ washes my feet, offers me Holy Communion, prays in the garden, endures the cross, and forgives our sins.

Tonight, I pray that you might feel the love of Christ and a community of faith as you wash another person's feet and feel wooed by inexplicable Love to love others. Amen.

Paul Purdue serves as the Pastor of Belmont UMC in Nashville, TN. This is his second devotion in this Lenten Series.



March 29



By Rachel B. Hagewood

Lay Member of Bellevue UMC (Red River District) and Lay Delegate

What a strange concept to grapple with in the life of a Christian: God being far away. Don't we proclaim that God's presence is with us everywhere we go? Haven't we spent decades declaring that God is not confined to a sanctuary or the four walls of a church? According to our language, God is never far. And yet, God's presence is a constant question for those who follow. Even though we may not be brave enough to admit it out loud or even to ourselves, we all have times when we struggle to believe that God is present with us. We all have times when God feels very far away.

I have often felt that the offenses or injuries that harmed me the most were the ones not committed directly toward me but toward those I love. I felt pain on their behalf: the pain of loss, disrespect, dismissal. Indeed, the times I have most questioned God's presence were the times it seemed God had abandoned someone I love. I found myself crying out on their behalf: "My God, why have you forsaken *them*?"

We read Psalm 22 on Good Friday because many of the psalmist's feelings are echoed in Jesus' words as he is crucified. I struggle to identify with Jesus on the cross. I much more closely identify with the women watching from a distance, wondering how they can survive the absence of God from the life of one they love so dearly. Here's another strange concept for us to grapple with: Jesus, God incarnate, feels far from God. Again, our language is disorienting: At one time we say that Jesus is both God on earth and that Jesus felt abandoned and forgotten by God.

It is here that the holy mystery of Jesus' identity as both human and divine converge in such a powerfully compelling way. For it is in Jesus' humanity that God experienced the fullness of being human, including the moments of separation from God. This beautiful experience of life that is contained in each of us was finally fully contained in the one we praise.

I am reminded once again that Christ's life, death, and resurrection mean that we and the ones we love are truly never far from God. God has experienced the fullness of what this world has to give—joy-filled and devastating—and continues to experience it through the living Christ in each of us. When those close to me have suffered, I remain present with them and pray that they can feel not quite so far from God knowing they are not alone. When I struggle myself, I am surrounded by a community of people who support me and help me find my way forward. When we feel so very far from God, all we need to do is look up and look into the eyes of the person next to us. They remind us that nothing can separate us from God.

Rachel Britt Hagewood is a lay member of Bellevue UMC in the Red River District and a Senior Developmental Editor at The Upper Room. A lifelong United Methodist and preacher's kid, Rachel is active at all levels of the UMC. She is a certified lay minister, chair of Equitable Compensation for the TWK Conference, and serves on the TWK delegation to Jurisdictional and General Conference.

When she's not wielding a purple pen to a manuscript, she loves to listen to musical theatre soundtracks; create art that may or may not one day exist outside her brain; and take her spouse, Mark, and their two kids, Luke and Ben, to Disney World. This is her second devotion in this Lent series.



March 30



By Joy Shelby Weathersbee

Pastor of Paris FUMC (Tennessee River District), Episcopal Committee Representative to the [TWK Connectional Table](#), and Ordained Elder

Jeremiah is in deep grief, lamenting the loss of the Holy City of Jerusalem that has been seized and destroyed by the Babylonians. Gone are the physical walls of the city, now demolished, as well as the Temple which had given him and his people identity as the Chosen Ones of God. It was as if God had turned God's back on them.

That kind of loss is hard for us as Americans to fathom, except maybe to remember our disbelief and trauma when the attacks of 9/11 were upon us. We wondered, "How this could happen to us?", as we've felt somehow shielded from the atrocities of war, now generations removed from our sacred soil since the War Between the States.

Unless, of course, we dare to allow ourselves to identify with our brothers and sisters who are citizens of Gaza, now held hostage by the radical faction of Hamas, and suffering the retaliations of Israel. Like Jeremiah, they are living in a wasteland, without basic life necessities of clean water, food, shelter, and medical care, yet with the military machine intent on obliterating Hamas and any who remain in the Gaza Strip.

How can this be, that we humans who claim to be holy can be so inhumane? God, where are you, when we exhibit such gross failure to see your image in one another?

As for my personal lament, it seems the church that has nurtured me from my birth has been ravaged by attitudes of fear. How can it be that some cannot see God's image in our brothers and sisters, because of who they love? Who are we to judge and deny God's blessing of a sacred relationship or God's call to vocational ministry within church? To experience the landscape of our denomination so changed by dis-affiliations is to lament. With beloved congregations and trusted clergy colleagues succumbing to fear of the new thing that God is doing among us, church families and friends have been ripped apart. Oh God, where are you when we miss the mark and allow our fears to prevail, preventing us from living into Christ's call to be One body?

Jeremiah comes through his deep dark lament by remembering who God is, and so shall we! This week we have remembered the passion of Christ. On this Holy Saturday, as we prayerfully ponder the despairing darkness before the dawning of hope that we celebrate every Easter, Jeremiah reminds us that our HOPE is not to be found in the securities of this world, nor in our sense of safety found in our cherished homeland, not even in the institutional Church that has given structure to our lives of faith. But our HOPE is found only in God whose love is everlasting, whose mercies are new every morning. Therefore, come what may, we find our HOPE in God's eternal faithfulness.



[Click here to watch the video](#) above, as we remember on this Holy Saturday that our hope is found in God's eternal faithfulness.

After a moment of reflection, offer this prayer or your own to God:

Lord, the dark Friday just past we know full well.

Yes, Lord, we know it full well.

The trees of blood.

The forgiveness of thieves.

**Your shrieks about work completed and broken croaks of forsakenness.
We have the stories and the songs of Friday, and we have the wisdom to call it “good.”
But Friday flows uninterrupted into Saturday,
And, good Lord, what do we know of Saturday?
Of its graveyard silences. Its entombed hopes. Its dull, guarded, locked nothingness.
Perhaps we know it deep in our guts better than we care to admit—even to you.
Deliver us, good Lord, through the blood—not only as it drips from the cross, but as it
dries upon the slab.
Deliver us, good Lord, from both hot dying and cold death,
Deliver us, good Lord, from both tenebrae and rigor mortis.
Amen.**

By Robert P. Fugarino. © 2015 [Alive Now](#).



Joy Shelby Weathersbee enthusiastically serves as pastor among the good folks of Paris First UMC in the Tennessee River District. An Elder since 1987, Joy represents the Episcopacy Committee on our Conference Connectional Table.

She and her husband, Dan are proud parents of three grown children: Isaac, (Katie) in Denver; Shelby, (J Whitaker) in Jackson and Will, (Chapel) in Chattanooga. Dan and Joy find their hearts' delight in being “Dandad” and “Mombee” to Henry James and Audrey Ruth Whitaker.

March 31



Thank you for joining the TWK Delegation to the delayed 2020 General Conference for this Lenten Devotion series. We pray that your spirit was touched by God's grace and peace during this journey to the cross together. Please visit the Bishop's Blog for an Easter devotion. May you experience the hope of resurrection this Easter!

As we continue to prepare for General Conference, the TWK General Conference Delegation is hosting a live webinar on Tuesday, April 9, at 7:00 pm (CST).

During this webinar, the delegation will provide key information on some of the proposed legislation and answer questions from webinar participants.

The link for the webinar will be available on the [TWK UMC website](#) on the day of the webinar. You may also [submit questions](#) in advance for this webinar to delegates by using the contact form linked to the [General Conference Information page](#) on the conference website.

We hope you will join us for the General Conference webinar on April 9 and continue to pray with us and for us during our journey to, during, and following General Conference this spring.

