

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

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

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

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# ***THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST***

2024 Lenten  
Devotionals

Written by members and  
friends of Burke UMC



## **An Invitation**

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

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

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***Christ is Risen!***



***Alleluia!***

# ***AN EASTER BLESSING***

It is an astonishing thing to behold:  
That a seed falls, and entombed there in the damp earth  
it swells and cracks open, unfolding to reveal  
a tender root searching downward,  
a bright shoot rising upward toward the light,  
becoming this material wonder we call a plant.

Just so, the physical body of Jesus was entombed, hidden away,  
along with all hope that the world could ever change,  
could ever be freed from its miserable cycles of destruction and  
decay.

And yet  
and yet.

That Easter morning to his bewildered friends,  
Jesus burst forth from the grave  
changed but still recognizable, eating and drinking,  
a physical presence that they might believe.

His body reassembled at a cellular level  
by regenerative power beyond their comprehension,  
reminding them "I am the resurrection and the Life."

It's a husbandry of love, that in the season's fullness  
the rescue would be accomplished,  
for our helpless earth—for all those on it and those under it.  
Life came, to lift us into Himself.  
Alleluia!

-Kate Bowler



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# February 14, 2024 - Ash Wednesday

Ellen Quisenberry

Psalms 51:1-17

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

-Psalm 5:10-12

As we enter Lent, I'm sure many of you share my concerns this coming year, our country, our world, our environments, our relationships with others, and many of the other things we can be fearful of during difficult, uncertain times. It's really scary if we just sit in our thoughts!

Lent provides us a time of solemnity and self-reflection; who we are, who we want to be, where we excel and where we struggle. Who am I and how can I possibly make any kind of difference with all the big scary stuff seemingly happening everywhere around us?

Today's reading, specifically verses 10-12, gives me the solace and strength, to take that deep breath, enter this time of serious self-reflection, knowing that I can go forward, through the struggle, with perseverance and joy knowing my Creator stands with me.



# March 31, 2024 - Easter Sunday

Romans 6:3-11  
Rev. Dr. Jason Snow

Christ is Risen!! On this Easter Sunday, we hear this named once again. Hopefully, you will come to worship at Burke or somewhere and once again here the story of the Resurrection. Each gospel tells it a little differently, but the bottom line is the same...Christ is Risen!! But what does it mean for us. This passage from Romans might give us a place to start. The book of Romans is one of the few books where Paul is writing to a group of people he doesn't know. It is a community where he has to lay out the basis for this faith in Christ and therefore, he fleshes out his theology in a different way than a lot of the other letters. In this passage, he names that we were baptized into Jesus' death, and if so, we also are baptized into Jesus' resurrection. In Paul's mind, that death is a death to our old self. A death that happens when we come to realize the ways we sin and act in ways that hurt ourselves or others. A death that happens when we can put down the slings and arrows that have become our way of operating in the world. A death that happens when we no longer allow greed and envy and pride dictate our actions. We must consciously lay these down and allow them to die. But that is just one step. The other is resurrection. When we live into our new self and find new and life-giving ways to view ourselves and our world. When we live in ways that peace and justice are our new benchmarks for how we operate in the world. When we live in ways that love and grace and hope and forgiveness dictate our actions. This is the resurrection made known in each and every one of us. Christ is Risen!! And so may we if we embrace the resurrection in our own lives! May Christ's resurrection urge us to let our old self die that we might be resurrected into a self that is alive to God in Christ Jesus!

# February 15, 2024

Linda Lavery  
Matthew 6:1-6, 12-21

Reading this text, I can almost hear my father saying "Beware a man who wears his faith on his sleeve; he's different inside." He used more colorful language, but I've found it to be true. Dad had grown up in a Catholic family but left the church when he was very young. He wasn't a member of our Presbyterian Church, and wasn't there on Sundays with our family. People knew to call on him, though, whenever there was a project involving hard work or things that needed to be done that others didn't want to do.

Someone would ask him and he would quietly get it done. Mom and Dad served as the advisors for the youth group for the eight years my sister and I were involved, planning activities for every week and being there to supervise. Mom talked him into joining the church after I'd left for college, surprising everyone that he hadn't been a member all along. I am married to a man who reminds me of my Dad in so many ways. For one thing, although he doesn't attend church, he quietly shows me his faith and Christian good every day. He has devoted decades of volunteer hours to others, and gives generously to several charities that have touched his life in the past. I've watched as he has turned down offered dinners and ceremonies to recognize his gifts. That's not why he does it.

He ends each day in prayer, including words of thanks as well as concerns for many others. And now, while shoveling snow at our house this winter, my grandson headed next door on his own to shovel our neighbor's driveway. When I told him she probably wouldn't pay him for it, he said that was ok. She was old and lived alone, and it made him feel good anyway. It made me smile to think of a new generation of men in my life who do good without looking for anything in return. As Matthew wrote, their rewards will be in Heaven.

**February 16, 2024**

Friday Hymns as Prayers  
What Wondrous Love is This?  
UMH # 292

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of life  
to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,  
to lay aside his crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing,  
to God and to the Lamb, I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM,  
while millions join the theme I will sing, I will sing;  
while millions join the theme I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on;  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,  
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and through eternity I'll sing on.

What Wondrous Love is This  
Anonymous  
Public Domain

**March 30, 2024**

Luke 22:42  
Pat Baskette

My father lived to be over 100 years old. With God's grace, he lived a wonderful life only experiencing some down times the past seven years of his life. He never complained, but at the end I could tell he was uncomfortable and in pain, and when he agreed to go to the hospital I knew it was probably serious. Sure enough, he had a large mass blocking his large intestine. The only solution was going to be surgery to remove it and leave him with a colostomy the rest of his life. My father was a proud man, lived independently up to the end, and that would not have been the way he would want to live out his last years. Not to mention the pain and recuperation from such a serious operation. His last words to the doctor were "I JUST WANT THIS OVER". We all kissed him goodbye and told him we would be there in the morning when he woke up after surgery.

I hated the thought of him going through this, but it was the only way to relieve his pain. I prayed to God to please get him through this, but whatever God's will I would accept it. His surgery was scheduled for 8 am the next morning. At 4am the doctor called me to say my father had passed away.

Was this God answering my prayer? Had my father cried out to take away his suffering?

## March 29, 2024 - Good Friday

John 19:30a

Rev. Evelyn Archer-Taminger

"It is finished"

When I was twelve, I experienced loss for the first time, in two very different ways. Within the span of a few months, my 98-year old great grandfather passed away, and my 18-year old cousin died in a car accident. While my family grieved both losses, one held a terribly tragic sting, while the other felt peaceful and expected.

At the time, I couldn't conceptualize what life would look like with them gone. And yet, life continued. My grandfather's children welcomed grandchildren, and my cousin's sister began her own family, with her portrait hanging proudly in her mother's home.

Jesus uttered the words "it is finished" as he died, according to John's gospel. Maybe he was referring to his own suffering, or maybe he was declaring that the world as we knew it was about to change. Though Jesus died that day, his work was far from finished. Good Friday is the end of a chapter, but not the end of the story.

## February 17, 2024

1 Peter 3:18-22

Jorge Burmicky

I recently learned about the meaning of the term "anhedonia" while listening to an episode of the Mel Robbin's podcast. In this episode, Mel interviews Dr. Judith Joseph, a leading psychiatrist and researcher who studies mental health. Dr. Joseph's research shows that many of us suffer from anhedonia, an inability to experience pleasure. Anhedonia hinders our ability to feel happiness and joy, especially since we're constantly bombarded with tragic news such as the Hamas-Israel conflict, the war in Ukraine, the US border crisis, and countless others.

So how is this related to 1 Peter 3:18-22? According to this scripture, Jesus died and suffered for our sins so we can be brought closer to God. Feeling closer to God is difficult when we're overwhelmed with our own lives and news around the world. After all, we're humans and we need to make room to grieve. Yet, we also need to intentionally make room to experience joy. Experiencing joy can come from small every-day acts that make us feel closer to God, from tasting a warm cup of coffee in the morning to hugging our loved ones before going off to school or work.

1 Peter 3:18-22 challenged me to find joy amid chaos.

- How do you find joy?
- What small rituals or habits draw you closer to God?
- How can you become more cognizant of the small pleasures in life that remind us of God's presence in our lives?

## February 18, 2024

Luke 23:26, 33-34a  
Rev. Evelyn Archer-Taminger

“Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.”

As Jesus faced death on the cross, he appealed to God and asked forgiveness for his captors. This kind of forgiveness doesn't come from human beings; it only comes from God.

We have all done things we are not proud of. Maybe something you have done keeps you up at night, and you replay it over and over in your head... wishing you had done differently. Maybe you hurt someone, and your relationship with that person is forever altered. Maybe you didn't step in to do the right thing, or you ignored a problem for far too long. No matter what, we all live with regret. We all hold anger toward our past selves, for one thing or another.

Now, imagine Jesus is speaking on your behalf. Jesus, condemned and humiliated, is crying out and saying “Please forgive him! Please forgive her! Please forgive them!”

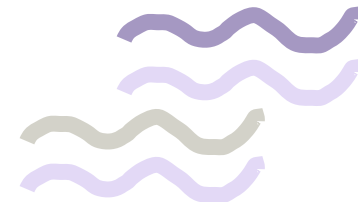
If there is something heavy which you are carrying, know that you are already forgiven. By all means, work to make amends and apologize where appropriate. But be buried under the weight of your guilt.

If Jesus loved the crowd who called for his death, he loves you too.

## March 28, 2024 - Maundy Thursday

Matthew 26:26-30  
Rev. Dr. Jason Snow

Today is what is called in the church Maundy Thursday. It comes from the phrase *Maundatum Novum*, which means New Covenant. We generally commemorate this day in some churches with communion and washing of feet. This is mirroring what Jesus does during the Passover meal with his apostles. What I think is forgotten is that Maundy Thursday is all about others. The New Covenant that Jesus names is to love God and to love each other. The washing of the feet was a sign of how we might show love and reverence to each other and the taking of communion is a sign of our love for God. But remember that we always receive communion in community. That it is an act that is both very personal and very communal. Maundy Thursday, in the Catholic Church, begins the three days leading to Easter called the Easter Triduum. In Anglo-Saxon times, they called it the “still days”. At the end of the services on this day, they would cease music, strip the altar and make quiet space as we reflect on the death of Jesus and the days between his death and resurrection. I love that before we move into the still days, we honor Jesus by honoring God and each other! So, as we come to this particular day, may you consider what ways you might show love to someone today. Maybe it is a note you can write to let someone know you care. Maybe it is a meal you can take to someone who is going through a challenging time. What ways can we embody the grace we receive through communion through the grace we show others. May we all live into the new covenant as we move into the still days ahead!





## March 27, 2024

The Anointing at Bethany  
Lectio Divina Exercise

*Lectio Divina is a meditative style of reading scripture, with its roots stretching back to early Christianity. Follow these four steps:*

1. *Lectio: Read the passage. Our scripture is the Anointing at Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13), written below.*
2. *Meditatio: Meditate. Spend a quiet moment with the passage.*
3. *Oratio: Pray. Say a prayer over the story.*
4. *Contemplatio: Contemplate. Throughout your day, think of this scripture and the significance behind it.*

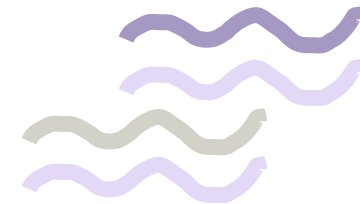
### Matthew 26:6-13

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." *NRSV*

## February 19, 2024

Mark 1:9-15  
Roz Hoagland

The first three verses of today's Bible reading have always made me think of an Early Renaissance painting now in London's National Gallery by Piero della Francesca. Baptism of Christ was painted for the chapel of an abbey in his village of Borgo San Sepolcro in Tuscany. The pale figure of Christ stands calmly in the center of the large arched panel with eyes downcast and hands together in prayer. John the Baptist steps forward from the right raising a shallow bowl to pour water over Christ's head. Drops of water are visible. A tall tree trunk separates these two from a trio of life-sized angels wearing colorful robes. This is the moment when God speaks and the dove of the Holy Spirit hovers over Christ's head. The angels regard the scene with serious expressions. The center one appears to gasp at the appearance of the dove. Piero located the event in Tuscany and his hometown even appears far in the left background. The Jordan River is only a shallow stream. In the right background a figure disrobes prior to his own baptism. There are also several men in the distance with funny hats which reproduce those of the Byzantine dignitaries who had recently come to Italy to try to negotiate a reunion of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Historical records say that Piero was a true believer. He painted the baptism scene with life-like, muscular, very realistic figures in order to affirm it as a timeless truth for his time and ours.



## February 20, 2024

Genesis 17: 1-7; 15-16  
Robert Greenwood

In Genesis Chapter 17 we hear the story of God's covenant with Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham is an important hinge point in the Bible. From this point springs the Tribes of Israel which form the Jewish tradition and the Muslim tradition looks at Abraham through his son Ismael as the beginning of their faith tradition. The Bible also connects King David and Jesus back to Abraham.

Chapter 17 is also one of the great call stories in the Bible. Another instance where God selects unlikely people to carry out his will on earth. God's plan is to create a covenant with an individual and his descents to work God's will through history. Instead of picking a young couple or even Abraham and Sarah at a younger age, God chooses a 99-year-old man and his wife who have long ago come to think of themselves as a childless couple.

One lesson is that we ourselves need to be open to hear the will of God which may come in unexpected ways and in unexpected times. It is hard work to open ourselves to the possibilities that God may provide. It is particularly hard when God may be calling us in a different direction from our culture.

Another lesson is one of listening for God's voice in others. Throughout the Bible there are stories of people waiting for God's revelation and then it comes in ways so unexpected that those who anticipate it the most miss it all together. No one heeded Noah as he prepared for the flood. When Jesus arrived many of the faithful were looking for an earthly king.

## March 26, 2024

Call to Action:  
Transformation

As Christians, we are called to transform the world. As we are in Holy Week, the time in which the relationship between humans and God was transformed, may we reflect on how we can use our actions to make positive change.

What are ways you can be transformational in the world?

- Get involved with an organization you admire
- Donate to a nonprofit doing good work
- Advocate for positive change to your legislature (call your representatives; sign petitions)
- Use your creativity to express your faith
- Say hello to someone you don't know (safely of course). Have a short conversation and connect with them.
- Teach children/grandchildren a life lesson today.
- Show appreciation to your parents/mentor/teachers/friends at work through an act of kindness

Transformation doesn't have to change the world in an instant. Small actions add up to great things!

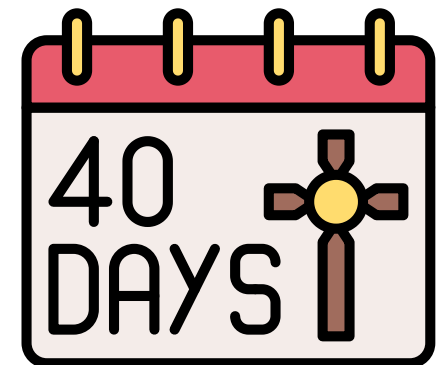
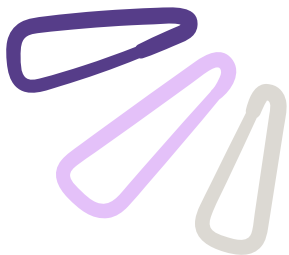
# March 25, 2024

Prayer of Endurance

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., c. 1953

"Most gracious and all wise God, before whose face the generations rise and fall; Thou in whom we live, and move, and have our being. We thank thee [for] all of thy good and gracious gifts, for life and for health; for food and for raiment; for the beauties of nature and human nature. We come before thee painfully aware of our inadequacies and shortcomings. We realize that we stand surrounded with the mountains of love and we deliberately dwell in the valley of hate. We stand amid the forces of truth and deliberately lie. We are forever offered the high road and yet we choose to travel the low road. For these sins O God forgive. Break the spell of that which blinds our minds. Purify our hearts that we may see thee. O God in these turbulent days when fear and doubt are mounting high give us broad visions, penetrating eyes, and power of endurance. Help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world, for a better distribution of wealth and for a brother/sisterhood that transcends race or color. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen."

Today the traditional media environment has been turned on its head. There is no longer a filter in place that sorts news and information for us for our consumption. Discernment is more important than ever as individuals test the boundaries of promoting misinformation for personal gain. But in the many voices that we can now hear, there may be new voices who have had different experience with their faith and culture. It is an important time to be humble, to be listening, and pray that we can also hear God's will in the voices of others that allow us to hear the unexpected ways God is calling us to grow and act.



## February 21, 2024

Romans 4:13-15  
Tom Jaeger

"Righteousness" has never been an easy word for me to internalize. Paul wrote so eloquently about Abraham and his faith. Abraham—the father of a nation, receiving the promise. Okay, but how can I apply it to my life? Recently, I participated in a group study based on the life and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One of the biblical principles that helped motivate Dr. King as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement was "justice." And justice and righteousness are inherently linked. Justice is to make right, and righteousness is rightness, especially in relationships. So, as I try to live out my faith as a follower of Jesus, I could look for creative ways to make wrong situations or relationships right again, whether at home, work, church, or in my neighborhood. I can do that.

## March 24, 2024

Palm Sunday Opening Prayer of Praise  
UMC Book of Worship

Almighty God,  
on this day your Son Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem  
and was proclaimed King  
by those who spread their garments and palm branches  
along his way.  
Let those branches be for us signs of his victory,  
and grant that we who bear them in his name  
may ever hail him as our Lord,  
and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life.  
In his name we pray. Amen.



**March 23, 2024**

Hebrews 12:1-3  
Beth Ann Velo

The Washington Post recently ran an article entitled, "Science is revealing why American politics are so intensely polarized" and subtitled, "Political psychologists say they see tribalism intensifying, fueled by contempt for the other side." It discussed research that shows that "Policy preferences are increasingly likely to be entangled with a visceral dislike of the opposition." In a world of limited resources, survival requires cooperation and identification of rivals competing for limited resources. Resources are not just tangible, but also intangibles like power and security. Humans are instinctively prone to group identification, and, as one scientist says, "the only way to define a group is there has to be someone who's not in it." Add to the mix the fact that some have figured out how to successfully exploit these tendencies and we find ourselves straying far from God's intent when He gave us a nature which seeks to build relationships.

My prayer is for God to open my eyes to see when my human nature is headed in a direction counter to Jesus' example. So that instead of becoming entangled, I can take on more of Jesus' all-inclusive and loving view of the world that is rooted not in a zero-sum attitude of scarcity and fear but instead sees room and plenty for all.

**February 22, 2024**

Psalms 25: 1-10  
Ash Bunker

Trust is a covenant that comes with expectations. As children, we trust our elders to teach us well, so that we may avoid shameful mistakes. As adults, we're expected to be that model and teacher for others.

And expectations can be heavy things, the specter of shame haunting its shadow. We don't want to let down those who look to us. We don't want to fail. We fear the shame that their faith in us was misplaced. It's a lonely, daunting feeling; it surely must have been to Jesus, with the spiritual welfare of God's people on his shoulders. When the fear of shameful failure is strong, we can feel tempted to give up.

But when we trust in God's infinite mercy, are we ever truly alone?

Psalms 25 entreats God to teach and guide us, just as parents, teachers, and community leaders do; as we do for others, in time. Trust is a leap of faith, but God catches us, teaches us, molds us; through his loving guidance, our hearts are shielded from the stinging bite of shame, even as we make those inevitable mistakes. Even when we feel utterly alone, as though we stand in a wasteland bereft of companionship or support, our trust in God is met with the peace and understanding that His teachings impart. And just as a parent catches a stumbling child, God's mercy is there in our weak moments, too.

With God's wisdom in our hearts, hope can always grow—even in a desert.

## February 23, 2024

Friday Hymns as Prayers  
Take Time to be Holy  
UMH #395

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;  
abide in him always, and feed on his word.

Make friends of God's children,  
help those who are weak,  
forgetting in nothing  
his blessing to seek.

2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;  
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.

By looking to Jesus,  
like him thou shalt be;  
thy friends in thy conduct  
his likeness shall see.

3. Take time to be holy, let him be thy guide,  
and run not before him, whatever betide.

In joy or in sorrow,  
still follow the Lord,  
and, looking to Jesus,  
still trust in his word.

4. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,  
each thought and each motive beneath his control.

Thus led by his spirit  
to fountains of love,  
thou soon shalt be fitted  
for service above.

Take Time to be Holy  
William D. Longstaff (1882)  
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## March 22, 2024

Friday Hymns as Prayers  
His Eye is on the Sparrow  
TFWS # 2146

Why should I feel discouraged?  
Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely  
and long for heaven and home,  
When Jesus is my portion?  
My constant friend is he:  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me;

I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free,  
for his eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me.

"Let not your heart be troubled,"  
his tender word I hear,  
and resting on his goodness,  
I lose my doubts and fears;  
though by the path he leadeth  
but one step I may see;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me;

I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free,  
for his eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me.  
and I know he watches me.

His Eye is on the Sparrow  
Civilla D. Martin (1905)  
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## March 21, 2024

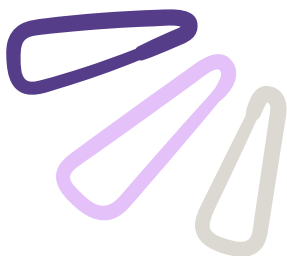
Psalm 31:1-4  
Cindy Spain

In You, O LORD, I put my trust; Let me never be ashamed; Deliver me in Your righteousness. Bow down Your ear to me, Deliver me speedily; Be my rock of refuge, A fortress of defense to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; Therefore, for Your name's sake, Lead me and guide me.

Strength is hard to define. When you hear the word "STRONG" does a muscled body builder come to mind, or an action hero, or a world leader who refuses to concede or bend? Does a warped old tree, or a rusty yet drivable car, or a widow who has faced a stage of life alone come to mind? Is a person arrested or beaten for their values representative of strength? Or is sacrifice the true measure of strength?

Jesus gave his life over to death in the greatest show of strength and love humanity has ever known. The scripture says real strength is trust in our maker. Realizing God will deliver us, save us, defend us, lead and guide us, and so much more if we have the strength to surrender.

Surrender is Strength!



## February 24, 2024

Exodus 20:1-17  
Julie Chapman

The verses cited above we call the 10 Commandments. They are the rules God sent to the Israelites through Moses as they left slavery in Egypt to walk towards the Promise Land. To maintain a healthy community, people need to have some set of laws, or rules, to avoid total chaos. True then and true now.

The Exodus writer does not mention hecklers in the crowd, but I can imagine some grumbling had already started before Moses read the last sentence. As we read more of Exodus, it becomes obvious that these 10 rules are intentionally ignored at times. If Moses was speaking to us now, we might skeptically listen to his "10 suggestions," form a committee, modify the language, and schedule a gathering to debate the pros and cons. If we ever reached a consensus, some folks would still choose to ignore the parts they didn't like. Sometimes I am tempted to "bend the rules" about speed limits or healthy habits or other aspects in my own life. Perhaps you are too.

Look again at the 10 Commandments. How do they apply to 2024? The first 5 are about our relationship with God. Priority. Respect. Honor. That's possible. The next 5 address our relationships with others. Do those who annoy me also deserve respect? God says they do. Ouch, that's more challenging. What about the 5 commandments that allow me to choose whatever I want? Hmm, I don't see those listed.

## February 25, 2024

Luke 23:39-43  
Michelle Hettmann

Thin places are often described as moments and spaces where heaven and earth feel closer, making it easier to encounter the Spirit of the Divine.

I was fortunate enough to go to Ethiopia for 5 weeks during my junior year of college as part of a study abroad program. I experienced some of the thinnest places I ever have during my time in Ethiopia. Between sharing meals with the locals, being invited to baptism celebrations and birthday parties, and working with children at a preschool who had such grace and an eagerness to explore the goodness of the world, I experienced hospitality in a way that truly felt "radical," – a type of hospitality I had been told was expected at churches before but had never been offered in its fullness.

As we read through the story of Jesus' journey to/through the cross, we come across this moment in scripture where he is being questioned by the people labeled as criminals on his left and his right and reassures them that things will turn out okay saying, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." I imagine this was a thin place for these people, knowing that even at the end of their lives, there was still good news from this Messiah they had just met.

Thin spaces come when we least expect them sometimes. I have experienced thin places both while traveling abroad and while hanging out with friends in my own hometown. I've encountered the Divine through strangers and through my closest family. My hope for us as a collective community and as individual people of faith is that we may continue to be on the lookout this Lenten season. May our hearts and spirits be open to pausing and resting in the thin spaces when they appear.

## March 20, 2024

Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas  
UMC Book of Worship

"Give us, O Lord,  
steadfast hearts, which no unworthy can drag  
downwards  
unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can  
wear out,  
upright hearts, which no unworthy may tempt  
aside.

Bestow upon us also, O Lord our God,  
understanding to know you, diligence to seek  
you, wisdom to find you, and faithfulness that we  
might finally embrace you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."



## March 19, 2024

1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
Michelle Hettmann

Lent calls us to revisit the essence of our faith, especially amid the complexities of social justice.

During the Lenten season, we're urged to embody Jesus' radical love by challenging oppression and advocating for justice. As we break bread and share the cup, we're called to recognize our interconnectedness, recommitting to creating faith-based spaces where all people feel welcomed, affirmed, and loved. The communion table symbolizes radical hospitality and reconciliation, inspiring us to create spaces where love transcends boundaries.

My campus minister while I was a student at VT Wesley, Rev. Bret Gresham, used to tell a story often about a time when he was serving in a local church as a young pastor. He was having a conversation with a parishioner about the meaning of Holy Communion and described the sacrament as "Big Love." A child overhead and she eagerly replied, "I want big love too!!!"

Don't we all want big love? The good news is that Jesus models what it looks like to love big for us. By including those who have been pushed to the margins of society, feeding the hungry, listening to the lonely, and always advocating for a better way, Jesus teaches how we, too, can spread big love in our world today.

This Lent, let's recommit to Christ's radical love, challenging norms, and striving for a world where all are welcomed and loved. As we remember Christ's sacrifice, may we be empowered to be agents of transformation and healing. This Lenten journey invites us to embody the radical love of Christ, working for justice and peace in a world hungry for both. Let's embrace this season as an opportunity to live out our faith boldly, bringing big love to a world in need.

## February 26, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:19, 25  
Marilyn Harris

Worn and sagging as our cardboard box buildings, we kids were hot and thirsty. We were fading as fast as the afternoon sun. Suddenly, the older sister of my neighborhood buddy piped up, "Hey! I've got an idea! I'll get us some chocolate milk!" She and a friend headed next door, whispering and giggling.

Dinnertime was near, but I knew chocolate milk wouldn't be on our menu. Surely Mom wouldn't care if I had a few quick sips. The two girls returned, balancing a tray with clear, fat glasses filled with the chilled chocolate treat. Surprisingly, Suzanne served me, the youngest, first! As I eagerly lifted my glass, a voice shouted, "Wait! Don't drink it!"

A gritty mixture of water and freshly dug dirt sloshed out as I jumped back. Suzanne glared and scolded her sister, my best friend, who'd warned me just in time. I was thirsty, so focused on what I wanted that I was easily fooled.

We adults might encounter "chocolate milk" occasions too. We may trust convincing words or ideas of acclaimed popular speakers, authors, celebrities. The messages may appear spiritually sound, even compatible with our faith. Some may describe truth as relative, all religions as similar "cultural constructs," or "all paths" as leading to the same God. Do such descriptions reflect God's wisdom or humankind's? John 14:6 (NIV) quotes Jesus saying, "I am the way, the truth and the life..." For centuries the apostle Paul, and millions more have accepted Jesus as exactly that, with lives transformed as countless others still are today. Their voices, as ours, should sometimes call out, compassionately, "Wait!"--- because no other spiritual "glasses" contain Christ's genuine, sweet power to quench a soul's thirst.

## February 27, 2024

Psalm 19: 14  
Jane Wilson

We often hear the words from the 14th verse of Psalm 19 as the Pastors begin their sermon each week:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer"

The Pastors pray to be guided by the Spirit so that the words spoken that morning are what God wants the congregation to hear.

This was brought alive to me several years ago at a Healing Service we held at BUMC. During this service, there was time for a person to come forward for prayer. The person told the small group about her prayer request. Then a leader prayed while a small group silently laid hands on the person. The prayers that came forth extemporaneously that evening from Rev. Judy Fender were so beautiful and so on target for each individual – I was awed.

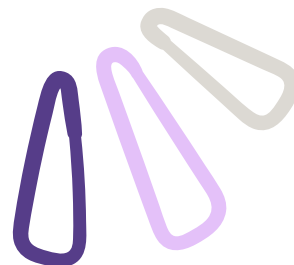
After the service I asked Rev. Judy what classes she had taken to learn to pray so meaningfully. She said, "I pray for the Spirit to give me the words that the Lord wants the person to hear." And that's what happened.

I have taken that to heart. In my life, when I have an important conversation to have or I'm in an awkward situation, I pray that the Spirit will give me the words that God wants me to say. As long as I listen, the Spirit never lets me down.

## March 18, 2024

The Wesley Covenant Prayer, to be read alongside  
Isaiah 50:4-9a

"I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."



## March 17, 2024

John 19:28  
Rev. Evelyn Archer-Taminger

### "I Thirst"

The Gospel of John is often called "the spiritual Gospel." The author uses rich symbolism and imagery to paint the story of Jesus' life. The author of John's Gospel is always clear that Jesus is more than just another man; he is Divine. And yet, the Gospel shows us a very vulnerable, and very human moment as Jesus' life came to an end. As Jesus hung on the cross, his body failing and his breathing labored, he called out for a drink. Two words: "I thirst" were all he could muster.

After hearing his pleas, the scripture tells us that the Romans gave him "sour wine". Many people interpret this as the soldiers mocking Jesus; giving vinegar to a thirsty, dying man. But it's also possible that this cheap, sour wine was something the soldiers drank themselves, to quench their own thirst.

So maybe the soldiers were not mocking him; maybe they took pity on a fellow suffering human being, and came up with a creative way to get him something to drink. We may never know the true answer.

But if the soldiers were truly sharing their rations with a "criminal" condemned to die, then this is a show of mercy and compassion that we so rarely see, even today. So, how can we show mercy to each other?

## February 28, 2024

Disturb Us, O Lord  
By Archbishop Desmond Tutu, adapted from a prayer by  
Sir Francis Drake

Disturb us, O Lord  
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves  
when our dreams have come true because we  
dreamed too little,  
because we sailed too close to the shore.  
Disturb us, O Lord  
when with the abundance of things we possess,  
we have lost our thirst for the water of life  
when, having fallen in love with time,  
we have ceased to dream of eternity  
and in our efforts to build a new earth,  
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.  
Stir us, O Lord  
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas  
where storms show Thy mastery,  
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.  
In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of  
our hopes  
and invited the brave to follow. Amen.

## February 29, 2024

Call to Action:  
Mindfulness

Find a quiet space.

Close your eyes.

Focus on your breathing; in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Then, focus on your hands. Where are they laying? What do they feel?

Focus on your feet. What surface are they on? Connect with the ground.

Finally, focus on your heartbeat. Place your hand over your chest.

*God made you uniquely and wonderfully. You are made in the image of God. God is with you. You are not alone.*

## March 16, 2024

Psalm 71  
Linda Lavery

I've trusted in God all my life, and have called to him to provide help, protection, and comfort when I've needed them. In fact, one of my earliest memories is such a time when I was four years old and nearly drowned. On Easter Sunday, right after church, a neighbor friend and I followed a dog onto the ice-covered river near our house. Ironically, we were afraid it would fall through and drown, but it was I who went through the ice. I can still remember holding onto the edge of the ice and calling on God to help me, as my friend screamed for help. A high school-aged Sea Scout crossing a bridge nearby noticed us and ran to help. He managed to shimmy out onto the ice and got me to safety. I believed in my heart that God had heard my prayer and sent him.

So many times over the years I have prayed to God when I was afraid or in danger, or someone close to me was. His answer hasn't always been exactly what I asked for, but it hasn't lessened my trust that God hears my prayers, and will support and comfort me. It's the same now that many years have passed; God's love for us is everlasting. But, as the psalmist wrote, God wants us to acknowledge his "wondrous deeds." I talk to God in my head whenever I feel the need, but I always end each day in prayer. I try to include expressing gratitude for the big and little things that have made the day a good one, along with asking for various blessings for myself and others. And, when singing with the choir at practice or during services, I listen to the words we are singing and hope that God hears them and knows I mean them.

# March 15, 2024

Friday Hymns as Prayers  
This is a Day of New Beginnings  
UMH #383

This is a day of new beginnings,  
time to remember and move on,  
time to believe what love is bringing,  
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

2 For by the life and death of Jesus,  
God's mighty Spirit, now as then,  
can make for us a world of difference,  
as faith and hope are born again.

3 Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,  
step from the past and leave behind  
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,  
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

4 Christ is alive, and goes before us  
to show and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings;  
our God is making all things new.

5 In faith we'll gather round the table  
to taste and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings;  
our God is making all things new.

This is a Day of New Beginnings  
Words: Brian Wren; Music: Carlton R. Young  
copyright 1983, 1987 Hope Publishing Co.

# March 1, 2024

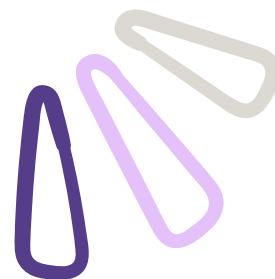
Friday Hymns as Prayers  
Change My Heart  
TFWS #2152

Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart Oh God, may I be like You.

You are the potter, I am the clay,  
Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.

Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart Oh God, may I be like You.

Change my Heart O God  
Eddie Espinosa  
copyright 1982 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing



**March 2, 2024**

Ephesians 2:10  
Marilyn Harris

I've always liked whimsy, from arranging flowers in a baseball mitt to finding unique gifts. A shopkeeper described one such find as "...our special clay angel feet! Don't you love them?" I loved them enough to buy several sets, each one handmade. The square-ish feet looked almost like mottled brownish bricks with carved toes. Angled carefully together, heel to heel, a pair could hold a small planter, or just stand intriguingly empty.

I couldn't wait to give some as gifts. After wrapping all but mine, I needed the perfect spot. Suddenly I noticed my set had two mismatched right feet! I had no exchange option. I'd taken all the sets at the shop, which was hundreds of miles away. I decided that those two right feet didn't look that noticeable anyway, but I had nothing for them to hold, safely.

I finally settled them mischievously peeking from beneath a reproduction dry sink in our family room—for what purpose? Well, reactions from others usually bring questions and smiles. Those angel feet do the same for me, especially if I'm battling pesky perfectionism with anything. Isaiah 64:8 describes God as potter, us as clay. Our "potter's" creative workmanship certainly can use our "imperfections" (imagined or real) for surprisingly "good works God prepared in advance for us to do..." In fact, have you ever heard, "Oh, no! I can't dance---I have two left feet!" Ever feel that way yourself when asked to do something? Maybe that "something" is one of God's timely, purposeful, smile-invoking "good works." Whether you think you've two left or two right feet, go on, "dance! " (Or, at least hold a planter.) God can use even the most mismatched angel feet for lovely purpose!

**March 14, 2024**

Psalm 71:1-14  
Tammy Zerbo

For many years I drove my children to school or to the bus stop, and they knew that during that drive we would be praying (with eyes wide open). We thanked God for blessings, asked for healing for specific people and asked for strength and guidance for ourselves as school was very challenging. Sometimes we would encounter an emergency vehicle, a fender bender, people walking in bad weather, and we would say a special prayer for those situation. I no longer have children to chauffeur, but I still say prayers when I'm driving, often asking God for protection for all of us in crazy traffic. Some of my best talks with God have been in my car, and I'm thankful that I can pray anywhere and at anytime and know that God hears me.

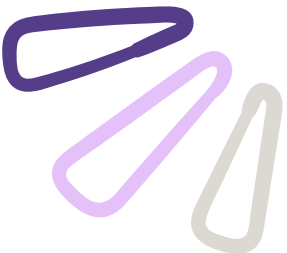
**March 13, 2024**

Prayer of Susanna Wesley

You, O Lord, have called us to watch and pray.  
Therefore, whatever may be the sin against which we  
prayer,  
make us careful to watch against it,  
and so have reason to expect that our prayers will be  
answered.

In order to perform this duty aright,  
grant us grace to preserve a sober, equal temper,  
and sincerity to pray for your assistance. Amen.

*Susanna Wesley, (1669-1742) was the mother of  
Methodism's founder John Wesley. She is remembered  
for her strong faith, and passion for praying and  
teaching.*



**March 3, 2024**

John 19:25-27

Roz Hoagland

The Church of the Dormition in Daphni, Greece is located in a peaceful location few tourists visit outside Athens. It was spared last year's destructive fires, but there has been earthquake damage to the mosaics over the years. Crucifixion (c. 1100) high on one of the walls perfectly illustrates today's passage. Rather than the crowd scene at Calvary, this moment has been distilled to only three figures on a gold background. Two people stand at the foot of the cross. Christ inclines His head to Mary on the left as he says, "Behold your son." She looks and gestures toward Jesus with tears streaming down her cheeks. Mary is unmistakable in her typical blue with a gold star on her shoulder and mantle. The beardless figure on the other side was always more difficult for my art history students to identify, but anyone reading today's passage would know that this must be John, Jesus' most beloved disciple. He looks toward us as if to say that he accepts Christ's instructions to, "Behold your mother." Jesus wants them support each other when He is no longer there. He's telling John: "Take care of my mom." In the midst of the agony and pain of the cross, we see Christ's concern for His mother in this remarkable moment. The Bible doesn't tell us what happened later, but one tradition says that John and Mary eventually went together to Ephesus where she lived out her remaining days under his protection.

## March 4, 2024

John 3:16  
Gary Pulliam

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

For many of us who grew up in church, this might well be the first bible verse we memorized, and it's a great one! It tells the gospel story in pure and simple language. But there's so much more here we should remember as well. God loved us so much, even though we had sinned and broken his heart and his laws. He gave the thing most precious to him — his only son — to make things right again. We can never doubt God's love for us given this sacrifice He made for us. And He made it so easy for us! You would think God would have required mankind to do something extraordinary given His sacrifice for us, but that isn't the case. All we have to do is just believe what He did for us. And... he made his offer — for the first time — available to everyone, not just the Jews! Whosoever believeth!

What an awesome gift and what a wonderful Savior we serve! Have a Blessed Easter everyone!

## March 12, 2024

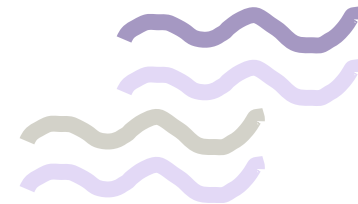
Call to Action:  
Gratitude

*Today, we focus on being grateful.*

*Take a few moments today to be mindful of your blessings. Here are some ways to do that:*

- *Step outside and take a breath of fresh air. Be grateful for the natural environment*
- *Spend intentional time with family or friends. Have a conversation about what you are grateful for*
- *Eat food you enjoy, and take time to savor it. Be grateful for access to food and clean water.*
- *Read a chapter of a book; any book. Be grateful for the ability to read*
- *Go to your favorite room in your home, or your favorite place in town. Be grateful for the feeling of safety and comfort*
- *Reflect upon a recent happy memory. Thank God for the experience*

*It is easy to get caught up in what we need to do, or what we long to have. Take time to be grateful.*





## March 11, 2024

Psalm 36: 5-11  
Cindy Spain

Heavens, clouds, mountains, depths, river of pleasures,  
shadow of wings...

When I was twelve, my family took a trip across the USA in our custom van. It was outfitted with a refrigerator, a pull-down bed, shag carpet, and brown curtains. I had just gotten braces on my teeth and my younger brother and sister were in the van, too. Are you getting a mental image? They were ok sometimes, and we saw some cool stuff.

One of those cool sights was the Grand Canyon. The colors, the feelings, the enormity. It is something that can't truly be described, photographed, even completely understood as one looks around at the majesty of our Creator. Even from the ridge of the canyon, I felt so small. It felt so vast.

The author of Psalm 36 knew this vastness, the indescribable mercy, faithfulness, and lovingkindness of our God. Our Creator is so much more than we can even begin to understand or put into words, images, even feelings. Today as you move through your space on this planet, if you feel as small (and even a little frightened) as I did peering down that ravine, let this Psalm hold you. God is the fountain of life.

## March 5, 2024

Mark 15:3-15  
Frank Esposito

Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, who has asked the chief priests to tell him what crimes Jesus committed against the Jewish church and its government, for the chief priests spoke for both. The chief priests, being afraid that they could lose ground in their roles as chief of the church and administration of government, unload a series of charges, eventually asking that the accused be executed as an enemy of the state. Over the years, Pilate's role has been hugely debated. He stands somewhere between a Coptic Saint misled by the Jews and just another crooked Roman.

In the two thousand years it took for Christians to fight the issue out among themselves and with their Jewish brethren, we may have risked losing sight of the second greatest commandment Matt 22:39: "love your neighbor." Ex president Carter pointed out that the closer Christian organizations get in their theology, the more violent their disagreements. Methodists would much rather fight with Baptists, who we just know are wrong than battle Roman Catholics or others who seem to operate in a different world. By focusing on the trivial points of disagreement, we miss the major issue. Pilate felt something was definitely not right, but his legal procedures did not help him here. He could only follow the rote instructions and crucify the Son of God.

*Dear Lord, let us focus on the forest of your love rather than the trees of our individual differences.*

**March 6, 2024**

Prayer of St. Patrick  
UMC Book of Worship

Christ be with us, Christ before us, Christ behind us,  
Christ in us, Christ beneath us, Christ above us,  
Christ on our right, Christ on our left,  
Christ where we lie, Christ where we sit, Christ where we arise,  
Christ in the heart of every one who thinks of us,  
Christ in every eye that sees us,  
Christ in every ear that hears us.  
Salvation is of the Lord,  
Salvation is of the Christ,  
May your salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.

(SAINT PATRICK, IRELAND, 5TH CENT., ALT.)



**March 10, 2024**

Mark 15: 29-36  
Frank Esposito

In his lament, Jesus has reached the last corner of his ministry. He reaches back to some words that he learned as a boy they appear in the 22nd Psalm. It is one of the most painful laments in all of the Psalms, or the Bible for that matter.

Why would He think that his Father had forgotten him? Perhaps it was because He'd had to endure multiple courts the night before, been humiliated at each turn and then physically abused. Crucifixion was popular as a means of execution not because it was efficient but because it imposed maximum humiliation on the victim. Today we shield capital criminals from whatever shame or mocking they may have to endure while being injected or otherwise executed. Not so with Jesus. The powers that be wanted him to experience all the mocking phrases that Mark tells us he heard during the crucifixion.

Even as he faces unspeakable ridicule and pain, his loyal disciples had all fled him one had betrayed him. It would seem that just about everyone around him had given up.

Many people, both then and now, would say that the Son of God would have had nothing to fear. This ignores the human part of Jesus, the part that asked for the cup to be passed from him on the night before. It is precisely this very human reaction that makes us understand the full force, beauty, and power of the gift God gave us. He didn't send his son to passively observe and rebuke us. He sent his son to serve share with us. Finally, to sacrifice for us. He felt every bit of that pain and frustration. May we never forget it.

# March 9, 2024

Isaiah 42:1-9  
Julie Chapman

The first 4 verses of Isaiah 42 describe the divine agent who is going to fix our world by bringing Justice. There is a shift in the tone in verse 5, however. It is as if the scripture has turned from describing the Divine Servant to addressing us.

You and I are in a covenant with God. We are called to be a light to the nations because of who we are. Jesus says something similar in Matthew 5:14. How can we interpret this poetic language?

When a storm knocks out the electricity, we search for a cell phone, flashlight, or candles & matches. Or we ask someone to help us find them. We don't function well in total darkness. Isaiah reminds us that there are many dark places in this world. A sense of God's Light, God's Presence, is needed to break the darkness. We are called to shine God's Light into each dark spot. That seems way beyond our capabilities, an impossible task for folks like us! Yet - we can spend time with a person in distress. We can offer a word of encouragement or support. We can listen. We can lend a hand. A little discipleship can make a difference. A huge floodlight is not necessary in a single dark room, because a small flashlight is enough.

May we each find ways to break a bit of the darkness around us. Together we can be a Light to the Nations.

**Check in with yourself today, as we're a few weeks away from Easter:**

Where have I seen God at work so far this Lent?

Have I taken a deep breath and a moment to pause and reflect today?

Who and what situations are in need of extra prayer this week?

What are your hopes for your time of reflection for the remainder of this Lenten season?

*Got down your thoughts here!* 

## March 7, 2024

Psalm 119: 11,15,18  
Marilyn Harris

I have hidden your word in my heart...I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways...I will not neglect your word. Psalm 119: 11,15,18 NIV

"Oh, no! What's happening to Mary Lou?" I cried to my friend, Jeri. We were playing at my father's business complex, near our home. It included a shed and large fenced area for our first pony, Mary Lou, a gift from my Grandpa Young. He said my brother and I could save money for college by helping care for her and any future offspring, as well as learn valuable lessons about both animals and people. One early lesson, frightening at first, taught me about a bit about certain "hidden treasures." That memorable lesson unfolded the day we found Mary Lou lying on her side, writhing in pain!

"We've gotta get Dad! I cried to Jeri. "He'll know what to do!"

Of course he knew, happily explaining, "Mary Lou's having her baby! Come on. You can help!"

We watched, wide-eyed, as sweet foal "Ginger" made her debut. We'd "helped" by gently stroking and softly assuring Mary Lou, just as Dad calmly did. Growing up in a large farm family of the early 1900's, Dad needed no instruction book by then—just compassion and wisdom, "hidden treasures" that always complemented his knowledge and way of generously helping pets or people.

Dad clearly also treasured a special "instruction book:" the Bible, God's word. He "hid" its' "treasures" in both mind and heart. They helped him through multiple, serious life challenges—like near death from blood poisoning, as well as other more common life challenges. His Bible "gathered no dust" on the table by his chair. He and Mom made sure I studied and memorized Bible verses.

I pray I'll always "mine" those "hidden treasures" they helped me discover. It's amazing how often various Bible verses uncannily come to mind, giving fresh encouragement, guidance, strength. God's Holy Spirit can continually, freshly reveal Scripture "treasures" with perfect timing. My responsibility is to keep studying, using, and sharing them--- for God's purposes not just mine.

## March 8, 2024

Friday Hymns as Prayers  
Sanctuary  
TFWS #2164

Lord prepare me  
To be a sanctuary  
Pure and holy  
Tried and true  
And with thanksgiving  
I'll be a living  
Sanctuary, oh for You

Sanctuary  
John Thompson and Randy Scruggs  
copyright 1982 Whole Armor/Full Armor Music