

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

A Spiritual Journey of Growing in
Faith:

“Giving Up, Letting Go and Taking
On!”

Spring 2015



Written By

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Introduction

Lent is a six week period (forty days minus Sundays) of devotion and spiritual discipline beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending Easter Morning.¹ It is a time of preparation and repentance during which we anticipate Easter Sunday morning when we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For some, the Lenten tradition invites us to deny ourselves some pleasure so that we can make our hearts open and ready to receive God's full measure of grace and mercy. For some however, Lent is a time to take on a new spiritual discipline, something that invites us to focus on our spiritual walk and growth as Christians.

This year we will look at some of the struggles we face in our Christian journey and consider what we might want to "give up and take on" in our walk of faith: for example we know that we are called to be a people of forgiveness but for many of us we live with bitterness and anger; or we are called to be humble and teachable but we struggle with spiritual pride. Each day's meditation begins with the Holy Scriptures so that we can explore what God's word has to say to us about: the person and works of Jesus Christ and how we are called to live our life of faith. The scripture readings are followed by a reflection and then ends with either a simple prayer or suggestions for your prayer time. You may not agree with every statement, nor may you agree with each prayer; my hope though for this study is that you walk away with questions that inspire you to dive deeper into God's word; and through God's word discover new found joys and hopes and a deeper sense of wonder of who we are in Christ.² In the Lenten season we have an opportunity for self-examination, penitence, prayer, fasting, providing works of service and love to others. This is an opportunity for us to grow deeper in our faith as we acknowledge our need for a savior. This is your study, a time for you to spend in quiet meditation once a day throughout Lent. May you be blessed as Christ works in you through this time of preparation and study.

¹ Davies, J.G. ed. The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship. Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1986, p. 229.

³ Other material used in this study: NIV and NRSV Bibles; The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminster John Knox Press; The Book of Confessions, Office of the General Assembly (PCUSA); "The Worship Sourcebook," CRC Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004.

ASH WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 18, 2015
“CONFESS, REPENT, A NEW BEGINNING”

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 51:1-17; Jeremiah 31:31-34*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Isaiah 58:1-12*

REFLECTION: Isaiah speaks of a people that have for too long acted according to self-interest more than a God-interest. Israel walks with the Lord and then forgets God’s commands and turns away from their responsibilities to care for the orphan, widow and foreigner in their community. Israel moves between living in the way of the Lord and then doing what the “evildoers” do; they walk in righteousness and then in sin. They have focused too long on their own desires and overlooked God’s desires for the Israelite community. Disobedient, sinful and self-righteous, they stand in need of admitting their sin and finding grace. Each time Israel failed to follow God’s commandments they were called by the prophets to repent- to literally turn around and go in the opposite direction. The prophet continues to call the Israelites out for their quarreling among themselves, for the practices of empty worship, and for their unwillingness to share with the hungry, help the homeless, clothe the naked and offer hospitality to the strangers in their midst. The prophet reminds them that their repentance is what will bring them back into relationship with God. Repentance is key! The root word of repentance is simply “to turn.” Israel struggles though to live repentant lives. For Israel and for us there are times in which we have chosen to walk in the ways of the world remaining in our sin instead of following after God’s ways. The people were called to confess their sins and offer up their repentant hearts to God and to strive once again to follow the law- the Torah. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that it is only through God’s power- God’s writing a new covenant on our hearts that this repentant life can be fully accomplished. As Christians we believe that this new covenant was made possible only in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we can come before God as repentant people learning to turn around and go in another direction even as we continue to stumble and fall short of God’s glory. Jesus Christ has made a way possible for us to live into a new covenant, a new life, a new way of being: or as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17- “Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons” (*From Eugene Peterson’s: “The Message”*). Our work as Christians is to repent, to come before God and Jesus Christ and confess those areas of our lives that we have not turned over to God and seek Christ’s help in turning around and living repentant lives.

CLOSING PRAYER: In this prayer reflect on those areas that you need to confess to God. Spend time thinking of those ways in which you need to turn from the world and back to God’s calling. Spend time reflecting on those ways that you have not followed the commandments of God and seek God’s forgiveness; then pray to Christ to reveal to you ways that you can live as a repentant believer, seeking to do God’s will. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in this season of Lent to live a more devoted life to Christ.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY 19, 2015
OUT OF THE ASHES

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Genesis 3: 1-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *John 3:1-21*

REFLECTION: “How can one be reborn when they are old,” Asks Nicodemus of Christ. As Christians our lives are “reborn” in to Christ when we accept the truth that Christ is our Lord and Savior. The Greek mythological story of the phoenix is the story of a long lived bird that is cyclically regenerated or reborn. As the phoenix approaches the end of its life the story goes that the phoenix would build a pyre nest of aromatic branches and spices such as myrrh, sets it on fire and is consumed in the flames. After three days the “birth” or as some legends say the “rebirth” of the phoenix arises out of the ashes. The phoenix obtains new life by arising from the ashes of its predecessor. The story was adopted by early Christianity as a symbol of the Christian faith, for we the people of God are “born out of the ashes” or out of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ lays down his life for his followers and then three days after his death he rises out of the tomb and ascends to heaven forty days later to live for eternity with his heavenly father. Christ’s death and resurrection ushered in a new life of hope and salvation for anyone who put their faith and trust in him. When Nicodemus asks Christ about being reborn, Christ is talking about our spiritual birth when we are awakened into new life in Jesus Christ, when the old is gone and the new has come. In one sense this image of the phoenix is a beautiful symbol for our life of faith: the old life is consumed by the God of grace and forgiveness and we are reborn out of the ashes into a life of salvation and hope in Jesus Christ. Our past sins, failures, self-destructive paths can be subsumed by Christ’s salvation and hope. In several places in scripture we see the image of the refiner’s fire- a metaphor for something being brought to a fine or pure state; free from impurities. Zechariah 13:9 says “and I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people;’ and they will say ‘The Lord is my God.’” Malachi 3 says “For he (God) is like a refiner’s fire, and like a fullers soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.” As a people of faith this idea of being refined or reborn are images of our new lives in Christ. Christ wants to refine our hearts, make us new and invites us to be changed from the inside out. We are no longer slaves to what we once were, and yet I think that we don’t believe that Christ has the power to truly change us. We live consumed with things like: guilt, stubbornness, fear, anger, spiritual pride, selfishness, greed, worry, feelings of worthlessness; shame, sorrow and we believe that we are saddled to live in this perpetual state and the only hope we cling to is that Christ will ultimately forgive and love us in the end despite ourselves. We long to be made new, but we doubt the possibility. Christ wants us to be made new, to be reborn and our hearts refined. May the rest of this journey be a journey of discovery, hope and rebirth.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer today asking Christ to reveal those areas in your heart where you need to be made new, where you need Christ’s refiner’s fire to burn away the old and create a rebirth in your heart and spirit. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work in your heart today and each day as you make this journey of learning to give up things that are not of Christ and learn to take on more of the characteristics of Jesus.

FRIDAY

FEBRUARY 20, 2015

FEAR: MORE THAN CONQUERORS

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 1:19; Isaiah 41:10; Genesis 15:1; Isaiah 43:2*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Romans 8*

REFLECTION: For many of us, (whether we care to admit it or not), we live in varying states of a “fear” based reality. We are “afraid” of not having enough, not being liked, fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of the past “catching up with us,” fear of others, fear of letting go of the sins of our past, fear of not

being good enough; fear of silence, fear of not having enough to do; fear of saying no; fear of other's response to us and judgment; fear of violence; on so on... you fill in the blank! Our reactions to fear are fight or flight. We either "fight our way through the fear or we run from it but in both cases fear persists and cannot be released if we allow it to be a central part of our reality. For Christians though we hear throughout the scriptures the words "do not be afraid" more than almost any other statement. Why? To be more than conquerors as the Romans passage mentions means that when we face the trials of life we can do so with the certainty that we are not alone. We have a mighty father who fights for us. We have a God who is with us and will not abandoned us so, we approach our fears, those valleys in life with confidence, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Why should we live in fear if God is for us? And yet if we are honest with ourselves this is one of the hardest truths to grasp. We know somewhere in the back of our minds that if we are a people of faith we have nothing to fear but fear itself? But do we live with confidence that we are more than conquerors? John 10: 27-29 says "Jesus said, My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." For if God is with us, who can be against us? Fear keeps us from loving deeply it, keeps us from giving freely and keeps us from daring to dream. Fear keeps us from risking our hearts to love and engage in relationships for fear of being hurt. It keeps us from giving freely because we are afraid of the scarcity that we may or may not experience. Fear keeps us from daring to try new adventures and live out our dreams because of the potential for failure. We often settle for the "safe, known, or the road that is the easiest" so that we don't "get hurt, lost, or are left without." When fear takes hold of our lives security and safety become our gods, not Jesus Christ. We begin to seek out the safest thing, safest place, more secure feeling and we believe the lie that it can be found in stuff, in our own power, or in our own source of strength. The truth is is that Christ is our only true source of strength and hope. In Christ we are called more than a conqueror, we are sons and daughters of a King and our inheritance is eternal life with our gracious and loving maker! WOW! Read that again, in Christ we are God's beloved children and our inheritance is eternal life and if Christ is for us nothing in life or in death will EVER be able to separate us from the love of Jesus! WOW, nothing can separate us from Christ's love and grace. If the truth is that we are Christ's beloved children then what is holding you back from living the life that Christ wants you to live? God didn't promise his children that all of life would be filled with safety, with roses and happy days every day of our life. God placed us on this earth for a great adventure with Him and if we are too afraid to step out in faith and trust, learning to give up our fears and live as conquerors then we will live a life that may seem safe and secure but will be a fraction of the life that Christ is longing for you to live.

CLOSING PRAYER: Merciful and gracious Lord we come to you today in wonder, realizing that there is so much we don't fully understand about you: your love, your grace, and your mercy towards us. We praise you that despite our own sinfulness, our own brokenness you reach down to us in love and offer us life with you. Help us to learn to live trusting in your love and grace, giving up on the fear that binds us and release us to live in the knowledge that we are more than conquerors. Help us to have deeper faith and trust in you that we might see your glory at work all around us. Give us faith to see that you are indeed always at work even when we don't understand your ways. (*Spend some time in further prayer and contemplation*).

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 21, 2015
LETTING GO OF THE "GO GO GO" AND FINDING SABBATH REST

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Exodus 23:10-13*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Exodus 20: 1-8*

REFLECTION: Sabbath is one of the most important and least practiced of the Ten Commandments, especially in our culture today. We live in a world of go, go, go with the constant pressure of do more, be more, have more ringing in our ears as a constant mantra as to how we should conduct our lives and it is precisely for that reason alone we should learn to see the beauty and importance of Sabbath rest. Remember the story of the people of Israel in Egypt? (*If not go back to Exodus 5 and 6 in particular*). Israel is caught up in an unjust system of forced labor with continual demands put on them by the power hungry, selfish Pharaoh. The one desire, one request from the Hebrew people was for a simple day of rest from the cruel hand of the Pharaoh's demands. Every time Moses asked the Pharaoh for a day for rest and worship the punishment placed upon the people was more labor, more stuff to do, more pressure to succeed to fill the insatiable request of a greedy leader. Any of those words sound similar to your experience? The truth of the matter is that our modern day Pharaoh is materialism and power. We are perpetually running on the hamster's wheel thinking that if we only fill our insatiable appetites for more stuff, more power, and more notoriety then somehow we will feel fulfilled and successful. Our unquenchable thirst for doing more, having more, being more only leads us to more exhaustion, weariness, and separated from having strong relationships. The demand to keep up keeps us constantly pursuing the things that don't satisfy. When God freed the Israelites and led them in to the promised land it was with a goal and purpose in mind, to take a day to rest, to worship and be in community with not only our maker but with one another. A God who is concerned enough to free the people from their slavery and the unquenchable thirst of the cruel Pharaoh is a God worth taking note of. God longs for his people to say no to the demands of the culture around them and say yes to the worship of God through rest, renewal, fellowship and slowing down. To observe a regular time of rest and worship in our fast-paced world demonstrates to others the importance of our relationship with God. Saying yes to Sabbath can be a witness to those around us and demonstrates to others that taking time to cultivate a relationship with God and with Christ's body is an important part of your faith journey. Is it hard to make that time? Of course, but the Gospel is not the path of least resistance, it is a journey filled with joy and hardship and a high calling. The more we follow, the more our hearts are at rest and the less we worry about the judgment of others.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in praise and prayer today for all the ways that God is in your life. Spend time in Sabbath rest go take a hike or invite a few friends over and languish over a meal without hurry or concern for the next thing; write a poem, take a nap, prepare your heart for worship tomorrow by reading some scripture, spend time in meditation or prayer giving thanks to God for His glory!

SUNDAY

FEBURARY 22, 2015

Reflect on what God is teaching you in this Lenten season. Write down some things that you want to remember from this time with God. Enjoy the day for all its potential. Praise God for life and for the spring that is quickly approaching. Lift up prayers of praise for all that God is doing in your life. Remember to spend this day in a posture of gratitude. Come to worship and be filled with God's message to you.

MONDAY

FEBURARY 23, 2015

FEAR OF SCARITY TO JOYFUL GIVING

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Matthew 6:1-18*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Mark 12:41-44 or Luke 21:1-4*

REFLECTION: It is important to understand that in the Jewish temple there would have been several boxes located throughout the temple for people to give their offerings and temple tax. Every male Jew was expected to contribute each year in support of the daily sacrifices of the temple in addition to good will offerings that provided for the needs of others, for the temple upkeep, and for the poor. Other boxes in the temple were for the good will offering and were usually in the outer courts where both men and women could give their offerings freely (remember women were not allowed to enter into the inner sanctuaries of the temple—that was reserved for men only). In this story Christ applauded the generosity of the woman not because she gave as much financially to the temple as others in the story, rather because her heart and spirit were fully present in her act of giving. In the Lord's eyes this poor widow gave more than all the others put together, though her gift was by far the least given. Why? The value of a gift is not determined by its amount, but by the spirit in which it is given. A gift given begrudgingly comes often from a place of fear; maybe fear that what is given is "taking away" from future possibilities or opportunities. Christ is not keep a score card on how much you give or don't give, whether you are giving your full tithe, or struggling to give. What Christ longs for his people to do, is to not live in fear of scarcity but rather to come with joyful giving in our hearts. If our hearts have an attitude of generosity and gratitude for all that we have and we give from that place of generosity then we are like the woman in our story, we become joyful givers. I believe though that we can't give joyfully if we are living in fear. We can't give out of gratitude if we are holding on too tightly and being greedy with what we have been blessed with. Of course in all of this is prudence and wise judgment/council about our finances, our bills, etc. However I think that sometimes we are called to give and we tell ourselves that we "give enough" and we forget that Christ is calling us to let go and trust that God does take care of his people (and by care I don't mean monetarily always, but God does provide). We by nature of living in Marin in the US already have more than others in our world and yet we live in fear. Joyful giving requires of us to come to God in a spirit of faith and trust, to take stock of what we have been given and give thanks for our many blessings. Christ wants us to have a spirit like the widow who gives not what is just merely obligated, she gives from her heart, she gives because something in her is humbled by God's grace and she responds in joy and gratitude and in faith that her gift will keep on giving. How is your spirit when it comes to giving? Do you have a spirit of fear or a spirit of joy? Do you come giving to God begrudgingly because you have been "told" to do so, or is your heart open to where God is calling you to give, coming before him with whatever gift it is in hand with a spirit of joy and gratitude?

CLOSING PRAYER: Pray that God will begin to open your heart, freeing you to learn how to trust more, to give with a different spirit and attitude. Spend time reflecting on the ways in which you can be more grateful for the gifts around you and then spend time in thanksgiving.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 24, 2015
SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT: A NEW ORIENTATION

CALL TO MEDITATION: *James 1:17-21*

DAILY READINGS: *Matthew 6:19-34*

REFLECTION: In this day and age, whether spoken or unspoken we all struggle with the sense of entitlement. We feel like we are entitled to better treatment, immediate attention and service from others; for immediate gratification with our everyday needs and wants and yet the reality is that we are nothing without God. The world does not owe us anything! God does not owe us anything! We are just people like everyone else on planet earth. We are fortunate enough though to live in a beautiful part of the world, we have luxuries at the tips of our fingers every day from simple things like a variety of fruits

and vegetables to choose from (even organic, non GMO food products and so much more). We have fresh water running from our taps, bathrooms in our homes, cars that can take us on grand adventures, friends that we can share a good bottle of wine with and so much more. And yet there are many in our world who literally die from not having enough clean drinking water for their daily existence. We think that because we live in a nice community, have nice homes, drive nice cars that somehow our kids and grandkids are entitled to go to the best colleges, to get the best and latest electronic devices, that someone we should be first in line all the time and given every opportunity that comes our way. And yet the world does not owe us anything! Why should we get more than anyone else? Why are we entitled to the latest and greatest toys and supplies? We are not entitled to it and yet we are blessed to have the opportunities that we have been given. Our response then as Christians is to realize this gift and to live in humility and grace; giving thanks to God our heavenly Father for every good and perfect gift that comes from him!

Our Matthew passage today is a warning to us. When we get caught up in the idea of entitlement what we are really expressing in our hearts, minds and lives is the true nature of where our treasures lie. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” and vice versa, where your heart is that is what you treasure most. Christ wants us to give up on the notion that we “deserve” or are “entitled” to everything our hearts desire and to have a new orientation on our lives, to see that life at its basic core is a gift given to us from our maker. Christ wants us to make our faith the lens in which we see through to the world around us, to see that we are all part of God’s creation, to see that we are entitled to death but are given life through Jesus Christ; entitled to poverty but blessed with blessings upon blessings; to see that we are no better than the homeless person on the street but are blessed enough to be housed. When we give up the notion that we are entitled to fulfill our every whim and desire we can begin to take on a new perspective of gratitude, grace, and service.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer today asking God to help you have a new orientation in mind and spirit. Pray that God will open your heart to the many blessings you have been given and spend time in joyful thanks. Give thanks for all that you see around you, thanks for those in your life who have or continue to support you; thanks for the simple things that seem mundane; thanks for the gracious love of Jesus.

**WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 25, 2015
POWER OR BEATITUDES**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Luke 6:17-31*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 5:1-12*

REFLECTION: Some of the most profound statements in the New Testament come from Christ himself in his Sermon on the Mount [(Matthew)/Sermon on the Plain (Luke)]. In just a few short statements Christ flips everything upside down. Jesus begins his sermon with words that seem to contradict the understanding of the world—blessed are you who are poor (*read: understand your need for God that you can't live this life without God*); blessed are you who are humble (*read: who are kind, gentle, loving, seek to boast in God not in self above others*); blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (*read: those who seek justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God; who seek to do God's work and see his will be done in our homes, neighborhoods, community, world*). God's ways usually contradict the world's view. In the Sermon on the Mount, in particular the Beatitudes, Christ wants to teach his disciples a new way of living, believing and behaving. If you want to live for God you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world and you, almost the opposite of the cultural norms. The

world says be proud, take your power, do what you want to do, get ahead, be tough, be self-reliant when Christ says “be poor in spirit” (*recognize your need for God*); be humble in spirit, be willing to mourn and weak, hunger and thirst for those things that: bring up the broken hearted, opens doors for justice, seek truth and righteousness not your own selfish gain. Christ also calls us blessed when we are persecuted and in today’s world that looks a lot like being mocked or made fun of; put down for your different lifestyle, ridiculed for your faith. All of these Beatitudes are hard to live and pursue, especially in our egocentric, individualistic, materialistic, power hungry world and yet we will be called blessed when we try to live out Christ’s calling to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

CLOSING PRAYER: spend some time in prayer asking God to open your heart to see the areas in your life of faith that you need to focus on; maybe it is learning to be more humble, seek justice, be more reliant on God, have more mercy, etc. Spend time in prayer that God might open your heart to see the ways you can use what you are learning in your encounters today and throughout your daily life.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY 26, 2015
DEAD OR ALIVE

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Galatians 2:19-20*

SCRIPTURE READING: *Ephesians 2: 1-10 & Luke 15:11-24*

REFLECTION: Sin is the death of the soul! A person dead in sin has no desire for spiritual things. A person caught in sin becomes a slave to sin and the author of our heart becomes a heart that is dead! For many of us we don’t believe that we are truly saved and redeemed from our sin and our slavery to sin. We see the destruction of the world around us, the evil that is in the heart of people, the wars and violence that plagues our communities and we say “sin prevails!” Death prevails!” And we wonder if God is alive. The goodness of God is in converting and saving sinners and bringing the dead to life. Our faith, our conversion, our eternal salvation are all free gifts of God for a new life, a new way of being and yet we doubt that we can truly be made new. The power of the Holy Spirit is the one to produce change in our hearts and the more that we learn of God’s grace the more we become alive in God’s love. The more we realize how far we have wandered the more the free gift of the Father is overwhelming and calls us to live differently. Like the Son who takes his inheritance and runs away and is greeted with a lavish party upon his return; so we the people of God who were once dead in our sin are made alive through Christ’s amazing love and grace. But do we live in the reality of this new joy and hope? Or do we live thinking that God doesn’t have the power or the love to “truly change us” because we think deep down that we have messed up too much and there is no way that God would ever forgive us! When we doubt God’s grace and power we are living dead lives forgetting that Christ is alive, making all things new even when we don’t see it or understand it. Christ wants the author of our hearts to be Christ, to be made new and alive in Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER: Use this time to give thanks for Christ’s love and sacrifice. Spend time giving thanks to Jesus that he provided a way for all people who put their faith and trust in him. Spend this time praising God for all his mercies and goodness towards all his people.

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 27, 2015
BLAME GAME NO MORE!

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Matthew 6:7-14*

SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 7:1-6*

REFLECTION: I am not going to pass the buck anymore! I am going to take personal responsibility for my own actions. In Matthew's gospel when Christ teaches his followers to pray he teaches us that we are to "forgive others as we have been forgiven," in one respect taking responsibility and ownership of our lives for we are a people who live in God's grace and forgiveness. Our culture is very quick to try and pass the blame on to others, to make excuses for why we did what we did instead of taking personal responsibility for our own actions. The phrase that I hear a lot is: "it is better to ask forgiveness than permission." Is it? Or is that phrase a cop-out for us to not take personal responsibility for something that we probably know in our heart of hearts is not in the best interest for ourselves or others. I think often we know what is right in our heart of hearts but we want to push the limits and see if we can get away with things that appear on the surface as quick and easy. We want to move through life quickly and to gain as much power/control as we go. Often times saying "I'm sorry" or seeking forgiveness from others when we have bulldozed over them is too hard so we shift the blame to someone else. We say "oh my kids had an activity so I couldn't fulfill my promise," or "I needed to get to work so I ran all the red lights along the way," or "I deserve this extra time off because my boss doesn't pay me well, (so I steal away from work early and justify it in my mind); or "my kid is perfect it must be the teachers fault when my child hasn't been successful at something." In every case when we deny our role in our mistakes, in our misconduct, in our misperceptions, in our judgments of others we fall in to the behavior of so many in our world. When we forget to take personal ownership of our mistakes we fail to see the full forgiveness and grace that is ready for us from Christ and from others. In many ways we live a lie, a lie that is perpetuated over and over again when we fail to take personal responsibility and shift the blame others. The blame game hurts everyone; there is no healing or freedom for the one being blamed and the one pointing the finger! What would it look like if we took ownership in our mistakes, seeking justice and forgiveness? I wonder if our world would be a different place if instead of pointing the fingers at others we learn to look inside, take responsibility, seek forgiveness and then turn our fingers upwards to praise God?

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer opening your heart to Christ: ask the Holy Spirit to reveal those areas in your life where you need to take personal responsibility, where you need to ask for forgiveness or where you need to stop pointing the finger at others. Take time to ask for God's forgiveness and ask God to shine light on those areas in your life where you need to step up and take responsibility.

SATURDAY

FEBRUARY 28, 2015

"SABBATH REST"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Exodus 20:8-11*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 11:25-30*

REFLECTION: "If you read the Bible, you'll find a lot of physical imagery used to explain God- even though He is spirit and is beyond flesh and bones. But, in order to help us flesh-and-bone folk understand our Creator, the biblical writers talk about God's hands, His eyes, even His wings. But you won't find a single verse using this image: the sweat glands of God. That's because God doesn't sweat. He doesn't get tired or suffer from aching muscles. He never gets stressed out, despite the size of a task. He doesn't enter his mansion after a hard millennium's work and say, 'whew-boy, I sure could use a hot shower, a couple of Advil, and a mentholated rubdown from an angel.' God is superhuman, tireless and all-powerful. Yet what did He do after creating the world? He rested! Let that sink into your brain. God rested! He didn't need to rest, but He purposefully took the time to step back, cease working, and enjoy

his creation. If an all-powerful being made time to rest, that should speak volumes to us mere mortals. As a member of the human race, you need to rest occasionally. You need to focus on “human,” once in a while, and not so much on “race.” You need to take time to recover physically, emotionally and spiritually from life’s demands. You need time to take stock of where you’ve been, where you are and where you are headed. You need quiet, reflective, and restful moments- away from stress and to-do lists. You need to take the time to be a friend, a parent, a child of God.”ⁱ Each of us needs a Sabbath rest in order to be accessible to life, to God, to love, to family and friends. Make a commitment to begin to carve out Sabbath rests for you and your family. Spend time once a week thinking about/reflecting on God and doing things together that are simple, restful and fun. The more we take time to say no to the busyness of the world around us; the more refreshed spiritually, emotionally and mentally we will feel. There is a holy reason that the 4th commandment in Exodus 20 is to honor the Sabbath day and make it holy!

CLOSING PRAYER: Wherever you find yourself today, lift it up in prayer: if you are comforted and assured give praise and thanksgiving for this wonderful gift; if you are skeptical, questioning, concerned ask God to move in your heart to reveal more of his truth. Pray for those who are also on a journey— pray that God will reveal himself to them in a deeper way today.

**SUNDAY
MARCH 1, 2015**

Spend time with your church family today in worship. Come ready to lift up your voice in praise as we sing; your heart as we pray; and your mind as you hear the word proclaimed. Give God your full attention today, seek to see Him in all your interactions today. Seek to take time to be in fellowship with someone, connecting on a deeper level than just the standard greeting “how are you?” without the true desire to find out. Do something that you haven’t done in a while or find some time to engage in a spirit of quiet listening. Live this day fully!

**MONDAY
MARCH 2, 2015
ENVY/COMPARISON: BLESSED/GRATITUDE**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Proverbs 14:30; Philippians 2:3; 1 Corinthians 13:4*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *James 3:13-18 & Matthew 5:1-12*

REFLECTION: I am blessed. My value is not found in my possessions, but in my relationship with my Heavenly Father! We live in a world that is constantly in comparison mode. We are jealous of those who have what we don’t have and it begins at a very early age. Envy is one of those things that slowly takes root in our hearts and then holds tightly on and its power can be destructive. We see what others have and we want it, we strive to have it: the latest iPhone, the best High Def. TV; the Tesla in the garage; our child in a prestigious school; a bigger and better house; nicer clothes; more money in the bank; the family that on the outside appears to have it all together; the higher status quo; the lengthy acronyms behind our name proving that we are more learned than others; and the list goes on! The danger in focusing on what others have that we don’t is that it communicates a lie to our own hearts. We only see a fraction of what others have; what others have done; what others are doing in this life—we have a skewed understanding of others successes for we see only in part. We don’t see the sacrifices, the heartache, the destruction, the tough choices that have been made in order for the other to get what they wanted; all we see is what is presented to us. Envy is evil; it takes over our minds, hearts and vision and distorts the truth. Envy blocks truth and makes us see only what we want to see which, is normally a distortion of truth. What God wants us to learn to see is Him! To see the many blessings we have and to

give thanks! When we learn to have a heart of thanksgiving, we begin to see the truth more clearly. When we begin to focus first on Jesus and give him praise and glory then we learn to be less concerned about what the other has. When we learn to give thanks in all of God's gifts we begin to see the world through a different lens, a heart that is fuller, wiser, stronger because it knows the truth first and foremost about God and it worries more about what God thinks and less about the world around us. When we are freed from the bondage of envy and learn to live as God's beloved children we aren't as concerned about what may be lacking in our life, the judgment of others or the fear of not having enough and we become more concerned with how to live our life daily giving glory to God. As Judy Garland once said "Be a first rate version of yourself, not a second-rate version of someone else."

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time today thinking your relationship with Jesus and the world? Are you more concerned about what you don't have, more concerned with comparing your life to others or are you concerned about what Jesus thinks? Are you living a life that is filled with envy and comparison or are you focused on Jesus, spend time in prayer asking God to be with you today!

TUESDAY
MARCH 3, 2015
GOSSIP AND NEGATIVITY TO PRAISE

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 150:1-6 and Hebrews 13:15*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *James 3:1-12*

REFLECTION: James is speaking on the warnings of gossip and I would argue negativity! Gossip and negativity breed more gossip and more negativity. Think about it, have you ever been around someone who constantly talks about all things that are negative; or the person who calls you on the phone simply to get the latest information from you for the gossip chain? In both cases neither individual is desiring a true and honest friendship. In the first scenario the person is so focused on the negative as to draw attention to themselves "woo is me!, look at me, oh my life is so horrible have pity on me and shower me with praise and love because I can't find it in any other way." This behavior is tolerable only for short periods of time especially if this is one's constant modus of operandi. In the second scenario the person only wants to use you to glean information from you and thus the friendship is not genuine or honest, you become a means to an end. When you step back and think about that, how does that make you feel? Probably not good! As a kid I heard the rhythm "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" As a kid that was an idealistic hope that somehow the words that are biting, hurting, painful, will "fall off" me with great ease and I will not be effected. And yet I think that we all have been hurt far more deeply by others words than by any broken bone. The broken bone heals over time and while you "remember" that it was painful, you don't truly remember the actual pain. Words however lodge themselves in our hearts, souls and minds and can take over if we are not careful. Words that hurt can begin to erode our self-confidence, our joy or the truth we tell ourselves. Gossip and negativity can destroy people's reputation, can ruin marriages and friendships, can tarnish communities and erode trust. Gossip while we think at times is a way to "get in with the in crowd" or make friends, it can do just the opposite in the long run. People are less trusting of us, less willing to open up and share with us if we are known as the town gossip or cranky pants! I challenge each of us today to shout words of praise when we hear negative talk; or when gossip starts to remove ourselves from the situation and send a word of praise to the person who is being talked badly about (don't tattle or explain yourself simply send a note of joy). When we learn to give praise to God and to others our hearts are strengthened and our spirits become more aligned with God's heart. We should be a people of joy and praise but it is hard to praise God when we are bad mouthing others!

CLOSING PRAYER: Merciful Lord we pray today that you would curb our tongues! Help us to turn words of negativity into words of praise, words of destruction into words that life others up. Help us to know when to be silent and refrain from gossip that another person's dignity is kept in tack. Help us also to know how to speak words of truth in love when others need to be confronted. May we be ever mindful of the ways we speak about others. Help us to be a people of praise and glory; a people who spend more time lifting each other up with our speech instead of gossiping and being negative. (*Spend time in prayer for whatever God is placing on your heart*). Amen

**WEDNESDAY
MARCH 4, 2015
"REDEEMER"**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Job 19:25, Psalm 19:14*

DAILY READING: *Isaiah 41:14, Isaiah 43:1-3 & Isaiah 44:6-8 & 24-*

REFLECTION: As we make our way through some hard lessons it is important to remember that Christ is our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer! We are called to give up many things: envy, pride, jealousy, doubt, fear, anger, resentment and to take on gratitude, humility, joy, peace, hope and yet it is hard for us to do all of this on our own. It is important then to take a step back and remember that Christ is our redeemer. To redeem means to "buy back, to exchange, to pay off, or to get back." What does it mean that God is our redeemer? The scriptures remind us that we are not our own, we have been bought with a price through the sacrifice of Christ. The wages of sin is death and yet we receive life because Christ "redeems" us by exchanging his life for ours. What we deserved because of the sin that we are enslaved to is set free because of Christ. Christ "bought us back" with his life, he exchanged his life for ours on the cross, he paid off our debts—which is our sin with his offering. The God of our creation redeems us his children because he LOVES us, not because of anything we do, any gift we offer, any amount of "good deeds" we perform; only because he LOVES us! God as redeemer means that he takes on the debt of our sins and exchanges what we are owed with nothing but grace and mercy. The wandering wayward people of God are brought back into life with their creator because he is our Redeemer! All the things that we struggle to do, Christ redeems, buys back! All those times we have tried to stop gossiping and failed, Christ can and does help us to start over again! The people of Israel tried throughout the centuries to do what they could to restore their covenant relationship with their heavenly Father and it was not theirs to do on their own it was God's alone to do. God redeemed us by becoming human and offering himself up as a sacrifice on our behalf. Christ our redeemer! What does that mean to you today?

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend some time today in giving thanks to God for his free gift of grace and mercy. Pray for those who you know or don't know who may need that message today.

**THURSDAY
MARCH 5, 2015
"ROCK"**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 32:4 Psalm 19:14 & Psalm 62:1-2*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 7: 24-27 & 16:13-20*

REFLECTION: In the midst of this journey it is important to remember who we cling to in the good times and in the hard times of life; in the easy things that we can give up and the harder things for us to tackle. Who do we cling to? Jesus our Rock! One of my favorite places to visit growing up as a child and still today is Yosemite National Park. Living in the central valley provided us with numerous opportunities to

travel to the park each year to spend the day out in God's creation hiking, picnicking, playing tour guide and resting in the natural surroundings of God's beautiful handiwork. One of my favorite spots in the whole park is one of the lookouts coming in to the park from the south entrance off of Hwy 41. As you come around the corner of a great bend there is a lookout where you can stand and see both Half Dome and El Capitan in the distance. The majesty of both of these huge rock formations standing before you is impressive. Even from a distance you feel small in comparison to their greatness. These two rock formations are, in the eyes of child, indestructible! When we say that God is a "rock" or the "rock of our salvation" I think of these two formations- immovable, indestructible, stands the test of time, solid, a firm foundation! Christ wants us to understand that his love, his message, his grace is one that is immovable, indestructible, stands the test of time, it is solid, and a firm foundation in which we can place our hope and trust; even when the skeptics try to tear it down and poke holes in the Christian faith, Christ's message is solid and firm like a rock! When Christ tells Peter that he will be the rock of the church he was entrusting Peter to be solid in his faith and endurance when Christ was gone. We know the story of Peter- he betrays Christ three times, the one who was supposed to be immovable in their faith falters; the one who was supposed to stand strong for Christ, failed! And yet he is known as Peter the Rock. What is wonderful in this image is the hope for all of us that even when we move, when we falter and fail, and when we aren't firm in what we believe—Christ still uses us to be his representatives here on earth. Christ is the rock that we put our faith and trust in, he is the one who is immovable and indestructible, and even when we mess up he still stands strong. Next time you are standing on a rock stop and think about what it means that God is our Rock. Or if you see a rock pick it up and look at it with wonder, think about it, look at it and reflect on Christ as the Rock of our Salvation—what does that mean to you?

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer giving thanks for our beautiful creation. Think about where you live and what a blessing it is that we can: breathe clean air, drink clean water, soak up the sun and enjoy God's handiwork. Simply be in praise today.

FRIDAY
MARCH 6, 2015
"LIGHT"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *John 9:5*

DAILY SCRIPTURE: *John 8:12-30*

REFLECTION: Light- we all know the importance of light. It illuminates our path on a dark night; it runs our computers and cell phones, it reveals beauty and colors, it brings us warmth, helps plants grow and more. Light exposes the shadows and pierces the darkness. When Christ makes the claim that He is the light of the world it is not by accident. Christ is the one who reveals the darkness that is in our hearts, the darkness of a life that is immersed in sin and separation, and exposes the truth with the light of his life. Without Christ's salvation we would be a people immersed in a life that would be forever darkened. Christ's "light" exposes the darkness and provides us with a saving relationship with the Lord of the universe. Christ exposes our jealousy, greed, anger and attitudes that keep us from living out our faith fully. Christ, in exposing the dark places of our hearts and minds to the light opens a way for us to understand his glorious love, grace and mercy. He pierces our darkness with the light of His love. Christ also reveals to the world that God is in control, that the darkness of the things of this world cannot overcome the Lord of the universe. Even though we still experience pain and suffering, even though there is still evil in the world, it cannot and does not have the final power or say in life. Christ as our Light overcomes the darkness, for darkness can only be darkness without light and if Christ is our light then darkness is overcome. Christ is the one who shows us the beauty of God's love and the possibility of a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father. It is through Christ's love and life that we can see the

hope of the future. It is through Christ's birth on that Christmas morning so long ago that God pierces the dark hearts of people and reveals to us a new way of thinking, believing, and living out our lives in community with one another and with the Lord of the universe.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer today asking Christ to reveal those areas of our hearts and minds that are still living in darkness. Pray that Christ who is the light of the world would bring his light into those places and help you to walk on a new path- a path that is in the light and not hidden in the darkness. Pray that Christ's light will also pierce the darkness in our world and that his peace would reign here on earth. Pray that world leaders, parents, children, and nations would look to as the supreme example of how we are called to live our life of faith.

SATURDAY

MARCH 7, 2015

SABBATH REST! DO I UNDERSTAND THAT GOD MAKES A BIG DEAL OF THIS? BECAUSE THE 4TH COMMANDMENT IS REAL!

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 34:1-3*

DAILY READING: *Psalm 46*

REFLECTION: In a book recently published called "HQ: The Hope Quotient" by Ray Johnston he makes many arguments for the ways that we can raise our sense and feelings of hope during our lifetime. One of these happens to be taking time to rest or in his words "replacing burnout with balance." Life as we all know it can be difficult and filled with so many things to get too, each pressing in on us crying out for our immediate attention. Often times these things present themselves as "immediately" needing our attention and focus when in reality they are often life-draining instead of life-giving. God wants us to rest, to take time to find balance in our life so that we can be both successful and refreshed. God wants us to learn a rhythm of renewal and finding our strength in saying no. Johnston says this "the least obeyed verse in the Bible, in my opinion, is Psalm 46:10 'Be still, and know that I am God.' However you picture getting the rest you need--- surfing, balancing, or something else—don't forget that God makes a huge deal of it, enough to inscribe 'keep the Sabbath' on a stone tablet!"ⁱⁱ Yes, God made the fourth commandment of resting, rejoicing and worshipping our creator one of the top commandments we are called to keep. God knew that we would need to rest physically because our health (spiritual, mental and physically) suffers when we don't. We need to refocus spiritually by resting—getting in touch with God. Yes watching a football or baseball game is fun and can be restful, it won't give you a new perspective on life but getting in touch with God will.ⁱⁱⁱ In Sabbath we recharge emotionally as well. Solitude and being with people you love can and does recharge us if we make an emphasis on spending quality time with both God and with one another. This may mean learning to say no and feeling okay about putting up boundaries in our life. It may mean we miss out on some opportunities or are faced with making some difficult choices about what are our priorities in this life. And yet when we say no, when we learn to be okay with sometimes missing out on things to find rest and renewal we learn that God is always there with us and that our renewed strength and joy can and does spill over to those around us. This Sabbath day make time to recharge, refocus and renew. Take time to soak in God's commandment to rest and see what happens.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend some time today in giving thanks to God for his free gift of grace and mercy. Spend today in an attitude of prayer and rest.

SUNDAY

MARCH 8, 2015

Spend the morning in worship. Spend time doing something meaningful and enjoy the Sabbath day, make it a holy day, a day about God and others, a day of rest and a day of joy.

MONDAY
MARCH 9, 2015
GUILT TO FREEDOM

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Romans 8:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Corinthians 3:17*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *1 John 1:5-9; Psalm 103:8-13*

REFLECTION: Many of us are plagued with guilt. We wrestle daily with the “I should have, I can’t believe I didn’t, what if I am not good enough;” kind of mentality. We tell ourselves that we should have been a better friend, should have straightened the house better when the guests arrived; we can’t believe that we didn’t do a better job at work or we let someone down because we had to say no. Women especially get caught up in the cycle of guilt and we live struggling between the shoulda, coulda, woulda’s of life instead of living in the freedom of God’s love. Guilt is one of Satan’s biggest weapons against the children of God. It tears us down, makes us feel unworthy, and robs us of our faith and confidence in Jesus Christ. We have to be careful, there is a difference between the sorrow that leads a person to repentance for those things that we have truly done that are wrong and the sorrow that mentally and emotionally beats us over the head with the “you’re not good enough” guilt and shame. The first sorrow is one where we recognize and take ownership of those mistakes we have done and we seek forgiveness. The second sorrow of guilt and shame happens when instead of repenting and moving on we re-live those mistakes/sorrow over and over again and we continually dwell in and think about how badly we have messed up and so on. We tear ourselves down, question who we are and how good we are and we live in this perpetual cycle of guilty and shame. Despite the good news of Jesus that we are forgiven we live with the stronghold of guilt that holds us hostage instead of living a full life in God’s freedom and amazing grace. The process of letting go of guilt is often a process greater than just asking God to change you over night. Often it takes a lot of learning to receive God’s forgiveness as we learn to forgive ourselves. If sin has been confessed, repented of and forgiven it is time to move on. Sometimes it is also learning to let go of the voice in our head that says we aren’t good enough, haven’t done enough and learn to let those thoughts be filled with the glorious love of God that says your sins are forgiven and you are set free to live as God’s beloved children. This may be a process and may take a while to learn how to let go and let God but if we continually reflect on the goodness of God’s mercy, soak in his abundant love and grace then we can begin a process of healing and living in God’s freedom and not caught up in Satan’s work of guilt and shame.

CLOSING PRAYER: Pray that God would fill your heart today to hear the message that you are his beloved child that your past sins are forgiven and you are set free. Pray that He would open your spirit to seeing that you are indeed a wonderful child and are made new through the person and works of Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY
MARCH 10, 2015
DOUBT TO LOVE

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Mark 12:28-34; John 3:16-17*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *1 John 4: 7-12 & 16b-19*

REFLECTION: Love is one of those words that we casually throw around in our society. “I love pizza, I love going to the movies, I love...!” In other languages love is often found in multiple forms, for example

in ancient Greek there are four ways of describing love. First is: **storge** (or affection, fondness for something or someone); second is: **philia**- (a friendship love between friends- a bond existing between people who share common interest or activity); third is: **eros** (where we get our word erotic) a romantic love, loving someone or being loved by someone, it is deeper than just sexual activity it is a love between two people that encompasses the emotional connection with the physical desires; and finally **agape**: (unconditional love). This love is the greatest love and is a specifically and uniquely a Christian virtue because it is based on God's unconditional, sacrificial love that he has for his people which is shown through the person and works of Jesus Christ. This type of love goes farther and deeper than any of us can ever fully comprehend. I think that we would say that we would sacrifice our lives, things, etc. for those that we love and those things that we love without condition, our children, our family, etc. And yet would we be willing be a sacrifice everything for a stranger? Do we ever really love fully without condition? I think if we are honest with ourselves we would have to say, no! We can certainly live out aspects of sacrificial and unconditional love in our daily lives and interactions with family, friends and others however I would adventure to say that we don't do it 100% of the time and most likely would be hesitant to live it out with a stranger. In that way then, the love of God is hard for us to fully fathom because while we can live out those ideals occasionally we cannot do it all the time, on our own without God's help. Only God can live out agape love 100% of the time and that is why I believe his love is SO amazing. Without fail, without judgment, without question God loves us all the time, anywhere and sacrificed himself for us and would do it all over again to prove to us once again his love and grace for us. God's sovereign love then is a mystery beyond the reach of our human minds and beyond our ability to fully grasp and comprehend. Often we live in doubt wondering if God truly loves us, a sinner. We doubt that this amazing God could and does really love us. We doubt that we are worthy enough to be lavished upon with this sacrificial unconditional love. We doubt that God's love is truly big enough to envelope us. God longs for us to learn to trust that his Love is BIG enough, STRONG enough, LARGE enough for each of us! God longs for us to be freed from our doubt so that we might fully experience his amazing love.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend today in prayer asking God to remove any of the doubt that you have in your heart about God's love. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlarge your heart that you might trust in God's love and be freed from any doubt. Ask the Spirit to show you a sign of God's love today or in some way over the next few days and that your eyes might be open to see that gift from God.

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 11, 2015
BROKENESS TO WHOLENESS

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Mark 1:40-45*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Mark 2: 1-12*

REFLECTION: Healer! Christ as healer has a lot of implications imbedded in this small little world. The word heal/healing/healer implies that we are not whole. We know that we live in a broken world; nothing is perfect all the time. Children are born with birth defects; parents are unable to conceive; families are torn apart by anger and jealousy; people are judged by the color of their skin and not by the content of their character; people's bodies are ravaged by cancer, terminal illnesses, depression, emotional scars from abuse and so much more. All of creation needs healing and as a people we seek out those professionals to help us: doctors to tend our physical illnesses, psychologists/counselors for mental and emotional healing; city/state/national laws to help provide an even playing field; and ministers for our spiritual healing. Healing can be both an individual and a community activity. What is healing really about then? Healing in one sense is a striving towards becoming all we are meant to be,

becoming fully alive. Healing is an activity that moves an individual or community towards wholeness. And for Christians healing is not about how much faith one has or doesn't have, it is about learning to trust that Christ as our Healer is working to heal each of us in all areas of our lives. It is hard for us as Christians at times to understand healing especially when we pray over and over again for a miraculous healing that never comes; or when we strive to mend broken relationships with friends and loved ones to no avail; or when we work for causes that bring wholeness to our communities and at times we feel like we have made no progress towards reconciliation. In the midst of it all we say that "Christ is our healer!" And yet what does that mean? I think sometimes we think of healing as everything being made right, all the wrongs corrected or that we are restored emotionally and physically and are no longer limited by the illnesses we suffer. Christ as healer though is about learning to trust in the midst of our struggles that God has a plan even when we don't understand it. We are called to learn how to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us; to find strength in the midst of heartache and pain because Christ is there with us; to find comfort in the uncertainties of life and learn how to become people who are fully alive in Christ because he is our Lord and Savior no matter what is ailing us in this lifetime. Healing may not come in the form that we wish or pray for; it may not happen on this side of the cross and yet I firmly believe that when we learn to trust more deeply, to pray fervently, seek God more earnestly, our hearts are changed and in that moment of change we are being healed/transformed by Christ. As Christ works on our hearts and spirits even with pain and suffering, we are able to live more fully in relationship with Jesus Christ and it is through that relationship we find healing and wholeness as we rest in the assurance that we are never alone. Christ calls us to pray, to seek him and to ask for healing and in those moments when His will is something other than our hearts desire to trust that he is still at work, still in the business of healing and working miracles and to open our hearts to trust him and see him at work in his mysterious ways. Healing may never come the way we long for and yet it doesn't mean that Christ isn't present, he is, he is always at work even when we don't understand.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer today asking God for healing, what kind of healing do you need today: healing for relationships that are broken, healing of heart and mind and spirit for things that are distressing to you, for physical healing and restoration of body? Healing for our world, for people in other parts of the world who experience heartache, violence, poverty? Spend time seeking Christ as our healer to come and heal our land.

THURSDAY
MARCH 12, 2015
FEELINGS OF UNWORTHINESS TO WORTHY

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 139:13-16; Romans 5:6-8*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *1 John 4:1-21*

REFLECTION: "One man's trash, is another man's treasure?" Have you ever heard that statement before? When you go to a yard sale often the seller will price an object at a higher value than the buyer is willing to pay. In other words, the price paid for an object establishes its value. In fact every buyer subjectively attributes worth to his or her purchases and the purchase price often reveals the buyer's personal opinion regarding the value of the object being purchased. Of course there are many things where the value of something has been set by standards outside of the buyer's control: example the gold standard; diamonds, gas prices; etc. However the buyer has a choice to purchase an item or not to and by purchasing something they are agreeing that the value of that item is worth the sacrifice that was made to purchase it in the beginning. Many of us when we think about our faith and our Lord and Savior feel "unworthy" before our creator's eyes. We hear the message, know the story that Adam and Eve messed everything up and now we are a people who live in sin and darkness. We wonder if we are "worthy" of God's immeasurable grace and mercy. We wonder if our life somehow can really/actually be

redeemed by Christ because we: mess up daily, do things we don't want to do, say things we shouldn't say, hurt people instead of building them and we wonder—am I really worthy of God's unconditional love and grace? The answer is yes! We are worthy! Christ paid the biggest price for us, he gave his life for us because he valued his creation, his people. He wanted all of us to know that we are worthy. He purchased us with his life, because of who HE is and HE IS LOVE. He redeemed us/bought us back with his life so that we might know in our heart of hearts that we are worthy! If the worth of something is in the eye of the beholder then we are rare treasures indeed for Christ loved each of so much that he paid the ultimate price to win us back to the heart of God. Our value, our worth is measured in the gift of life we have been given through Jesus Christ. May you know that nothing in all of creation will be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:28 paraphrased).

CLOSING PRAYER: Look in the mirror at some point today and tell yourself that you are a beloved child of God, worthy of Christ's love! Pray for peace in your heart that you may know in your soul that are worthy, beloved, cherished and praised as an adopt son/daughter in the Kingdom of Heaven. Pray that any doubts you have may slowly fade away as you draw near to Christ.

FRIDAY

MARCH 13, 2015

"ALPHA & OMEGA: THE BEGINNING & THE END!"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Hebrews 13:8, Revelation 22:13*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING *Revelation 21:1-7*

REFLECTION: Do you ever wish that things could simply stay the same? Just when you figure out how to deal with your two year Old's temper-tantrums, she/he moves into the terrific threes and you look up and wonder: who is this little child that is mimicking me and repeating all of my phrases? Just when you get settled in your new home and neighborhood, you get transferred and have to begin to pack and look for another new home; just when you have booked the perfect dream vacation the hospital calls and a loved one needs your constant care; just when you think you can enjoy your retirement years together you get the news that your loved one has cancer/dementia/Alzheimer's/etc. Wearily you lay your head on your pillow and lament "doesn't anything every stay the same?" Or "why can't life be simple and not complicated?" An ancient Greek philosopher said, "There is nothing permanent except change." But in the midst of life; if you listen carefully you can hear the voice of God saying "I am the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The wonderful reminder is that while life speeds past us, as our children grow and leave the home; though our job situations may change; though our parents/partners have failing health; though circumstances may be unsettling around us; the one thing we have is that God is constant! He is and was and will be forever our Lord and Savior. He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He bookends time. He is able to provide stability amidst the transitions of life. God's character never changes, his love never fails, his power never wanes, his presence is always with us, and he NEVER changes! We can trust that the God who started everything, the one who is the creator of the universe will finish what he started!

CLOSING PRAYER: "Gracious and holy Lord you are the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end. In you we have our life, our hope, our being and even in death we are united with you forever. Merciful Lord, thank you for being our constant source of hope, the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Help us Lord to look to you in all circumstances of life in all of its changes and all its ups and downs. Help us to know that you are the one who loves us, cares for us, and guides us in all things!" *(Spend time in quiet reflection and prayer in the ways that the Holy Spirit is moving in your heart!)*

SATURDAY
MARCH 14, 2015
"LORD OF THE SABBATH"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Exodus 20: 8-11*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Genesis 1:1-2:3*

REFLECTION: The Sabbath day is a gift, a gift to us from God to rest: to rest in his love, his grace and his mercy. It is a gift to humankind to spend time sharing in the joy of the day and in the joy of our merciful Savior's love for us. Remember the commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:8-10a). Our challenge as Christians is to find ways to enjoy the Sabbath day. "The love of God is broader than the measure of our mind; and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind." Frederick W. Faber, 19th Century Catholic Poet. *Spend time today in Sabbath and then time: reflecting on God through a hike; with a good friend over coffee; relaxing and saying no to busyness; with a good book and no to electronic devises. Spend this day doing something out of your normal routine.*

SUNDAY
MARCH 15, 2015

Spend the morning in worship. Reflect on what God is teaching you in this Lenten season. Write down some things that you want to remember from this time with God. Enjoy the day for all its potential. Praise God for life and for the spring that is quickly approaching. Thank God for all the reasons you have to be thankful.

MONDAY
MARCH 16, 2015
RETIREMENT TO SERVICE

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Ephesians 4:1-13*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *1 Corinthians 12: 1-26*

REFLECTION: As long as you are still breathing, you are here for a reason. You have a purpose to influence others for Jesus Christ. That does not come to an end until the day we die. For many of us as we age and we pass certain mile stones in our lives we think to ourselves "been there, done that" let others take over. And yet that is exactly the temptation we should fight against. Our life's work doesn't end when we "feel" like we are too old to do something! We are called at all ages and stages of life to be engaged with the community of faith. If you are retired and have the luxury of doing things, then why not teach a Sunday School class, spend time praying for our community and for people to come to faith, serve in the leadership of PCN, start a new ministry, volunteer to help with the youth, or be a table parent on a Tuesday night? If you have lived here in this community for any length of time then you should be actively engaged in what is happening in our community, taking an interest in helping serve others, getting involved in community groups, or taking time to be aware of what some of our current issues facing Novato; if you are a parent and your child/ren are in college it doesn't mean that you stop advocating for youth, it means that you are invited in a new way to engage with the PTA or organizations like the youth center to continue to help our youth find meaning and hope in our community (not every student goes to college so maybe start a ministry for young adults). We are called to serve Christ all the days of our lives, to live as the people of faith ministering to the world around us. We are called to use our unique gifts and talents to continue to not only grow personally in faith but to serve others so they can grow in faith as well. When we baptize and infant or an adult we make the commitment as a faith community to shepherd that individual in their walk with Christ. In other words

we are called to shepherd one another in faith throughout our journeys in this life together. How are you serving today? How does your heart/mind need to change in order to be more like a servant?

CLOSING PRAYER: Ask God to place a hunger in your heart to share your gifts with the world- what does that look like, what do you need to do today to respond to God's grace?

TUESDAY
MARCH 17, 2015
EXCUSES TO MINISTRY

CALL TO MEDITATION: *2 Corinthians 3:1-6; 17*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *1 Corinthians 12:1-31*

REFLECTION: Many times at a dinner party or gathering when we are about ready to pray someone will turn to me and say "you are the professional prayer, will you pray for us?" The snarky part of me would love to reply with something witty and funny response and yet too often I succumb to the request and will offer up the prayer. What we don't realize though embedded in that statement is an excuse of "I am not a professional, or not equipped, or gifted" to lead in prayer and yet our scriptures today remind us that we are all gifted through the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the truth of the gospel. All of us are uniquely gifted and equipped to be ourselves and to represent the gospel to those around us. Every one of us should be ready at any moment to give testimony to what it is that we believe about Jesus, God our Father and our faith! We are each ministers of the gospel of grace to the world around us and God uses us with our varying gifts and abilities to speak truth to others. Yes, pastors get paid to be professional truth tellers, and yet we are one among many in the body of Christ. The wonderful thing about the community of faith is the fact that all of us with our quirks, our stories of faith, with our nervousness, our confidence, with our basic understandings are equipped to be the people of God. Christ wants us to put away our excuses and to learn that we are together ministers of the gospel of grace. We are equipped with our own story to share and it is through sharing, through openness, honesty and humility that the Holy Spirit works. We aren't "in charge" of another's response to the gospel, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are charged to be the hands and feet of Christ and are called to share that message of hope with people everywhere. We plant the seeds, God through His power waters the seeds and makes the seeds grow! Second Peter says "But YOU are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2 Peter 2:9).

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time just listening today for God's Word to you. What is God trying to say to you? Take some time to just be still and quiet. Don't ask for anything other than God to be present and to reveal himself to you. Ask God to reveal those excuses you are making for not growing in faith. Ask God for courage in sharing your faith with others. Ask him to help you release those fears you have about sharing Jesus love with others so that you may feel comfortable in being the minister that Christ is calling you to be. May God's Word for you today be nothing but love and grace.

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 18, 2015
WORRY TO LETTING GO

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalms 105: 1-5*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 6:25-34*

REFLECTION: We cannot read this passage enough! Worry is probably one of the biggest epidemics of our modern world. Why? We have technology at our finger tips, we are in constant communication, we have abundance of food and water, we have endless possibilities and yet we worry. We worry about what may or may not come tomorrow. We worry about whether or not we will be good enough, possess enough, be liked enough, smart enough, successful enough and so goes the list. But what does worrying gain us? Nothing! More than likely it causes: heart disease, headaches, ulcers, tooth decay (grinding our teeth away), stress, anger, frustration, depression, loneliness and more. Often we hide from our true selves and from allowing others to really get to know us because we are worried: worried about what they may think of us; worried about them finding out that we have a temper or a past; worried that they won't like us because we really aren't that "interesting, etc." What does this create: surface relationships with ourselves, others and God. Worry is the enemy and learning to let go is freedom! In Disney's movie "Frozen" one of the main characters, Elsa has a magical secret- she can create ice with her hands, mind and emotions. When she is a child she accidental hurts her younger sister—Anna. For years she lives in fear and worry of this power and its potential to hurt others. Elsa closes herself off from her kingdom and her sister. She fears that if anyone discovers her "true" self she will be considered a monster and feared instead of loved. In many ways it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When her powers are exposed people are afraid of her and she finds herself fleeing from their glares and cries of fear, into the surrounding hills. As she is leaving her home she sings a song called "Let It Go." The higher she climbs into the hills the more freedom she finds. Elsa sings of letting go of her past, letting go of the fear and worry and finally being able to be whom she was created to be. At first this new person though is still alone and fearful that her powers can hurt others and while she is free in her ice castle by herself she still worries that if anyone finds her she won't be able to control her magical powers. It takes the rest of the movie for her to truly let it go. The beauty in the end of the movie is the discovery that the worry and fear that held Elsa hostage were far more enslaving than the fear of letting people understand who she really was. When Elsa learned to let it go, she was freed to live as her full self. In many ways this is what God longs for his people to realize, when we are enslaved in worry and fear we are not free to be fully alive, fully ourselves. God wants us to be a people who let go of the worry and to fall in to the loving arms of our Savior, to find our identity and hope in Him and to not worry about what others think. When we learn to rest in God's goodness and realize that we are beloved children, adopted into his glorious kingdom we are free to live as the people of God in better relationship with our heavenly creator and with one another. This is probably one of the hardest things to give up! So challenge yourself today to begin to let go of the worry and fall into the loving arms of our Savior.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend some time asking God to help you in those areas of your life that you are caught in worry. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you ways that God is always present in your life and that the worry you are holding on to can be let go. Ask Jesus to free your heart from worry so that you might be freed to live a fuller life. Then think of one thing that you can let go of today, this week, this month so that you might be freed to experience joy in God, joy in fellowship with others and joy in some time for yourself.

**THURSDAY
MARCH 19, 2015
WORRY TO LETTING GO PART 2**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Mark 10:13-16*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 6:25-34*

REFLECTION: This topic is so important that I think it needs another day devoted to its discussion. I recently read a great thought on this topic by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and thought that it was important to include in this study. Here is Dietrich's thoughts on learning not to worry about tomorrow:

“Possessions delude the human heart into believing that they provide security and a worry-free existence, but in truth they are the very cause of worry. For the heart that is fixed on possessions, they come with a suffocating burden of worry. Worries lead to treasure, and treasure leads back to worry. We want to secure our lives through possessions; though worried we want to become worry free, but the truth turns out to be the opposite. The shackles that bind us to possessions, that hold us fast to possessions, are themselves worries. The misuse of possessions consists in our using them for security for the next day. Worry is always directed toward tomorrow. In the strictest sense, however, possessions are intended only for today. It is precisely the securing of tomorrow that makes me so insecure today. Today’s trouble is enough for today (Matt. 6:34b). Only those who place tomorrow in God’s hands and receive what they need to live today are truly secure. Receiving daily liberates us from tomorrow. Thought for tomorrow delivers us up to endless worry.”^{iv}

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time asking God to deliver you today from worry. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what those things that you are worried about. What do you need to be delivered from—addiction, depression, relationships that are broken, illness, etc? What are those worries that seem insurmountable? Ask God to help you give up those worries and take on a new hope, a new joy. In those prayers ask God to show you how he is delivering you today—whether it is peace of heart and mind, new strength to face problems, a melting of stormy relationships, a new perspective, and ask God to take the worry and fear that you might freedom to live without worry.

FRIDAY
MARCH 20, 2015
PRIDE TO HUMILITY

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 25: 4-10*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Proverbs 2:1-10 and 3:5-7*

REFLECTION: John Calvin wrote this: “As the surest source of destruction to men [people] is to obey themselves, so they only have of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God.”^v In Calvin’s estimation the path to destruction is pride, spiritual pride, or any aggrandizing of the self above the knowledge of and worship of God. This may seem like a problem “others” have and yet I wonder if there are not things in your life that you hold on to out of principle because you haven’t taken time to “examine” (ever or in a long time) the principle by which you are living? Have you taken your life and run it through the lens of scripture? Have you listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit, seeking counsel or wisdom from a body of people both friends and acquaintances or do you live your life without much reflection or thought beyond what you deem is necessary? Calvin is warning against the pride of self-reliance, the pride of “sticking to our guns,” the pride of not being willing to let go of something that you once held dear to in order to make room for the holy ministry of Christ; the pride of thinking you always know best when God might be trying to speak a new word to you; the pride of “this is always how it has been done,” without caution, prayer and mindfulness that Christ might be trying to breathe new life into something and lead his people in a new direction. Humility though asks of us to put aside our preconceived notions and learn to listen; to be willing to be teachable and learn a new lesson; to have a heart that is open to the Holy Spirit’s working so that we might more fully experience the graciousness of Christ because we are willing to be freed from ourselves and open our hearts and lives to the one who is doing a new thing in us.

In a recent book I read there is a wonderful passage about having a humble heart and it goes like this: "Some Rabbis say that, at birth, we are each tied to God with a string, and that every time we sin, the string breaks. To those who repent of their sins, especially in the days of Rosh Hashanah, God sends the angel Gabriel to make knots in the string, so that the humble and contrite are once again tied to God. Because each one of us fails, because we all lose our way on the path to righteousness from time to time, our strings are full of knots. But, the Rabbis like to say, a string with many knots is shorter than one without knots. So the person with many sins but a humble heart is closer to God."^{vi} May your string be short and your heart be humble before our Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER: *A prayer by Howard Thurman (1900-1981)*

Lord, open unto me: Open unto me – Light for my darkness. Open unto me – courage for my fear. Open unto me – hope for my despair. Open unto me – peace for my turmoil. Open unto me – joy for my sorrow. Open unto me – strength for my weakness. Open unto me – wisdom for my confusion. Open unto me – forgiveness for my sins. Open unto me – love for my hates. Open unto me – the Self for myself. Lord, Lord open unto me! Amen!

SATURDAY

MARCH 21, 2015

"BITTERNESS & RESENTMENT TO FORGIVENESS"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 103: 8-14*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 18:21-35*

REFLECTION: "*Forgiveness*" (By Buechner)^{vii}

For many of us we live in bitterness and resentment about: people who have wronged us; past events that have altered our life's course; life's regrets that we now hold on to; words that have been said to us that have crushed our spirits; promotions that we were skipped over; the what if's that plague our minds; the broken relationships that we have caused or we have been hurt by; resentment over other's success; resentment that maybe our parents "loved" a sibling more (or it appeared to us that way); resentment from ungrateful children/spouse/friend/co-worker/boss; you fill it in. One of the hardest lessons though for us is learning the hard truth that bitterness and resentment only hurts ourselves in the end. By holding on to the things of the past, by allowing things to fester in our hearts we hurt ourselves. We are caught in the prison of the "what if's, if only's," and we replay the tapes in our minds until we believe that that (you fill in the blank) is truth. Holding on to those things takes up space in our hearts and minds and keeps us from learning how to move forward. The more though that we learn to let go, to forgive ourselves and others, the more we are freed to live a life of joy and peace. Fredrick Buechner says this about forgiveness:

"To forgive somebody is to say one way or another, 'you have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should call it quits between us. Both my pride and my principles demand no less. However, although I make no guarantees that I will be able to forget what you've done, and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you for my friend.' To accept forgiveness means to admit that you've done something unspeakable that needs to be forgiven, and thus both parties must swallow the same thing: their pride. This seems to explain what Jesus means when he says to God, 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' Jesus is *not* saying that God's forgiveness is conditional upon our forgiving others. In the first place, forgiveness that's conditional isn't really forgiveness at all, just fair warning: and in the second place, our unforgiveness is among those things about us that we need to have God forgive us most. What Jesus apparently *is* saying is that the pride that keeps us from forgiving is the same pride that keeps us from accepting forgiveness, and will God please help us do something about it. When somebody you've wronged forgives you, you're spared the dull and self-diminishing throb of a guilty conscience. When

you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you're spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride. For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence." Forgiveness is never easy! It isn't a simple phrase that we utter once, like 'I forgive you.' Forgiveness is not natural and often takes a lot of work on the part of the one who is trying to forgive another. Forgiveness often means that we have to choose daily to live into the practice and art of forgiving before it becomes more natural and more freeing. Forgiveness often takes a life time of hard work and is often more about you as an individual and less about the other person; it is about our own lives and not allowing another person to have power over our hearts, spirits and emotions by the way that they have hurt us. Forgiveness is a process of letting go of the bitterness and resentment so that we can be freed to live more fully in relationship with God and with those in our lives who are important. When we hold on to bitterness and resentment we are unable to fully live in the present moment with others, we can't give our hearts fully to others to love or receive love. Forgiveness is something that we are asked and called to do as the people of faith. What is so amazing is that God forgives us no matter what and while we are not God, we can begin a journey of forgiving others through his example to us.

CLOSING PRAYER: In this Lenten season give thanks and praise to God for his forgiveness. Take this time in your prayers to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you those areas in your life where you are holding on to bitterness and resentment and then seek to engage in a process of healing through forgiveness.

**SUNDAY
MARCH 22, 2015**

Spend this day reflecting on all that God has given to you. Write down some things that you are thankful for, tell someone why you are grateful for them, or spend time with someone you haven't spent time with in a while. Come to worship and continue to reflect on all that God has done for you.

**MONDAY
MARCH 23, 2015
PLEASING EVERYONE TO PLEASING GOD**

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Romans 8:5-9; Romans 12:1-2*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Mark 12:28-34; Micah 6:8*

REFLECTION: There is a temptation at times to try and please everyone: sometimes to avoid conflict, sometimes to feel better about ourselves, sometimes to get ahead, sometimes to avoid facing difficult choices or decisions. No one likes conflict. No one likes change. No one likes to be honest especially when honesty may hurt another's feelings. To avoid these uncomfortable situations we attempt to please everyone by smoothing over things, or trying to give everyone what they want. And yet we don't know what is always best for "everyone." We don't know all of the situations and difficulties that each person is dealing with in their life. We don't know all of the ways that our "attempting to be nice" might actually be causing more difficulty, more discord, and more conflict simply because we want avoid the uncomfortableness that we may be experiencing by being honest, open and addressing needs that need to be addressed. We think if we can "please everyone" then all will be right with the world. And yet in our attempt to please everyone we more often than not cause discord for everyone. I think women struggle with this more than men do at times, however many of us who are in caring professions or who have a fear of conflict often live in to this mode of trying to please everyone. What ends up happening in our attempt to please everyone is that no one is pleased! The fact of the matter is that we will NEVER be able to please all people all the time. By giving to some we are depriving others; by saying yes to some activities we will inevitably have to say no to others; by accepting some invitations we will have

respectfully decline others. Inherit in our world is a division of time, people, energy, and perfect peace. And yet we beat ourselves up constantly trying to please everyone when our focus should be pleasing our Heavenly Father. Our goal is to look to the cross and the scriptures to find the heart of Christ and to seek to do his will even if it means making tough choices that may displease some. Our goal is to learn how Christ wants us to serve Him and others and to above all do His will. We are called to look at the scriptures for our guidance and understanding, to look through the lens of scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us (even if it means learning to let go of things that we personally desire for the good of others). We are not in the business of pleasing all people all the time. We are in the business of pleasing our Heavenly Father, to spend our lives glorifying God and learning to please Him first and foremost.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend some time in prayer as you reflect on the message God has for you today. What does it mean to you that Christ is your mediator?

TUESDAY
MARCH 24, 2015
ADULT OR CHILDLIKE FAITH

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalm 131:2*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 18:1-7*

REFLECTION: Take a moment and think about a child, what are children like? They are curious, naïve, innocent, joyful, inquisitive, trusting, loyal, spirited and hopeful. Now think of adults, what are they like? As adults we become more cynical, distrusting, fearful, serious, jaded, doubting, less hopeful, and somber. As adults we become painfully aware that we are fallen. So what does it mean to have a childlike faith? I think that Jesus wants us to come to our faith with innocence, joy, curiosity, loyalty, trust and a sense of hopefulness. Christ wants us to put away those jaded feelings that we have as adults and approach him as a Father, as a loving parent, as the Savior who loves us unconditionally. Christ wants us to be like children in that we are unafraid to ask questions to be inquisitive about our faith, and to be curious enough to seek Christ's face. Children love to ask questions, "why, how, why not, how come" and for some odd reason as adults it seems almost taboo to ask questions and yet I think that is what Christ wants of us. Christ longs for us to ask questions, to be unafraid and uninhibited in our approach to faith; to not pretend to think that we "know it all" but to ask questions, to approach Christ and be honest and real with our hearts and our faith. We grow up fearful of "looking silly" in front of others, or fearful of "looking like we don't know something," or fearful of others judgments so we put on a good show when in reality Christ wants us to approach him with simple child-like trust and joy. Christ wants us to care more about our relationship with him and less about the judgment of others. Children don't live in fear of judgment when they are younger, they learn that as they go and yet Christ wants us to not be that way with him and our faith. Christ wants us to approach him as Abba Father, big Daddy, to hold our arms up and say "help me!" and receive his abundant grace without fear, judgment, or worry. How would your faith change if you approached Christ more like a child and less like an adult?

CLOSING PRAYER: "Come, O Holy Spirit. Come as Holy Fire and burn in us, come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within, come as Holy Light and lead us in the darkness, come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance, come as Holy Power and enable our weakness, come as Holy Life and dwell in us. Convict us, convert us, consecrate us, until we are set free from the service of ourselves, to be your servants to the world. Come Christ and reveal to your church once again how we need to serve and worship you. Reveal your Holy word to us and enlighten our hearts and minds to do your will, for it is in the name of Christ that we pray. Amen"

WEDNESDAY
MARCH 25, 2015
SINNER TO FORGIVEN ONE

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Romans 3:23*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Psalm 32 & Psalm 103: 8-13*

REFLECTION: Lent is time to reflect on how we live, including how we do not meet God's expectations. It is a time for us to once again understand that we are sinners. In our day and age we don't like to talk about sin as it seems like such a "downer" word. And yet sin is at the very heart of our understanding of our need for grace and forgiveness. Sin can refer to a specific deed that is against God's commandment for us, for instance stealing a piece of candy at the store goes against the commandment "thou shall not steal!" Sin can also mean a nagging feeling that we are not in a right relationship with Christ, with another person or even within our own spirits. We do our best to follow God's Holy word and yet we fail to live it our lives perfectly every day. Sin is part of our journey as Christians. We have to understand that we are all sinners and all of us fall short of God's glory. The ancient Hebrews believed that the purpose of the Torah, the Law, was to reveal to people God's vision for living well with Him and with one another in community. When we fall short of what God wants for his people we say—we commit sins. If we believe in Christ as our redeemer, then we believe that we are not stuck in our sins but have a Savior who buys us back from our sin filled lives and ushers us in to a grace filled love of God. God's love is unfailing. So sin and forgiveness belong together. What is clear in our passage is that the author is confident of God's forgiveness. Do you believe in that forgiveness? Sometimes we get stuck in the sin, living with the worry that we have messed up so badly that even God couldn't truly forgive us. How could God truly love us or lavish his grace upon us? And yet that is exactly what Christ offers through his death and resurrection is total forgiveness.

CLOSING PRAYER: Sovereign King, the whole universe is within your reach, and all things are ordered by your hand. You are King over all things. You have claimed us to be your people and appointed us disciples of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. As you have protected our lives, so preserve our souls and keep before us always the vision of our Redeemer that we may see and follow and give him glory forever and ever. Help us Lord to give our lives to you and trust that you are still leading and guiding your people today; may we remember to let you rule in our hearts and lives today and always. For it is in the name of Christ that we pray, Amen.

THURSDAY
MARCH 26, 2015
CHRIST AS MEDIATOR

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Hebrews 12: 1-12 & 1 Timothy 2:5*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Hebrews 9: 11-28*

REFLECTION: A mediator is one who acts as an intermediary between two parties working with both parties to bring about a settlement where there is a dispute. A mediator attempts to influence a disagreement between two parties with the goal of resolving an issue in the most gracious of terms. It may sound strange that Christ is our mediator. What do we need him to mediate on our behalf? What is the dispute between God and humanity? Sin! Sin is anything that separates from God and one another. When we attempted to be "like God knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5), we rebelled against God allowing our pride/ego/selfish desire to separate us from the Lord who created us. So what is the

dispute? Sin! Our sin is what stands between us and our creator God. The punishment for sin is death. Nothing we can do on our own would ever be sufficient enough to mediate ourselves back into relationship with God. That is where Christ comes in as our mediator. Christ is the one who stands between us and God as an intermediary to settle the dispute or our sin and separation from God. Christ is the one who was reconciling us to God through his own life. In this case the “issue is resolved” through Christ’s death and sacrifice on the cross. It is because of Christ the mediator that we are now able to stand before God clothed in righteousness. Christ “influences” God and resolves the issue of sin by offering himself in our place.

PRAYER: *Based on a prayer by Geraldine Mosley*

Dear Gracious Lord, Show me the miracle of your Love in all situations of life, because I only see resentment and hatred. Show me the miracle of your healing, because I cannot stop seeing what is diseased. Give me the miracle of your release, because I am afraid to let go. Bring me the miracle of your faith, because I am overwhelmed by doubt and confusion. Show me the light of you love because too often I feel alone and lost in the darkness. Show me the miracle of your vision, for I see myself and others with eyes of judgment and quiet condemnation. Show me the miracle of life, because I have been fighting and do not trust it. Be the miracle in my life, Amen

FRIDAY

MARCH 27, 2015

“WHO/WHAT IS YOUR CORNERSTONE: WORLD OR CHRIST”

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Isaiah 28:16-17 & Ephesians 2:20*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Mark 12:1-12*

REFLECTION: What is a cornerstone? The cornerstone comes from the ancient building practices where the principle and usually the largest stone was placed literally at the corner of an edifice. This stone was the most solid stone and was usually the most carefully constructed of any of the stones in the foundation. It is the stone that unites two intersecting walls and is fundamentally the most important part of the structure. Today we often have ceremony’s marking the origin of a buildings placement with the first “stone” (or cornerstone/foundation stone) being placed as a building project begins. The cornerstone is the guide post if you will for the construction of the rest of the building for each stone placed thereafter will be based upon the placement of the first stone. When Paul says in Ephesians that Christ is the cornerstone he is indicating that the person of Christ is who we are called to build our house of faith upon- nothing or no one else. If the cornerstone is the “guide post” for the rest of a building so too then is Christ—he is our guide post for our faith the one whom we look to for guidance in our lives and where we find our point of reference. It is no accident that Paul sees Christ as the cornerstone, for Christ is the central act of salvation for all who put their faith in him. Christ is the one who makes it possible for us to have a relationship with God and the one in whom is our foundation of faith. Without Christ our hope is centered on nothing and therefore is nothing but shifting sand. “Our faith is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness, I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand” (Hymn: My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less- # 379 in our blue Hymnals). So the question is who/what is your cornerstone? What are you using as your instructions for life? Who are you looking too for wisdom, guidance and hope? Is it Christ himself or are you looking for advice from the world around you? Are you seeking to make Christ central in your life or is the worlds’ standards your guide post for your measures of success, wealth, happiness, hope? If you are looking more for assurance from the world than from Christ I challenge you today to give up on the world as your guidepost and seek Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time today in prayer asking God to reveal those areas in your life where you need to make Christ more of a cornerstone. Where are you putting your hope: in material possessions, money, securities, careers, family, exercise, etc.? Ask Jesus to help you see how you need to make Christ the center of all you think, say and do.

SATURDAY
MARCH 28, 2015
“SABBATH”

CALL TO MEDITATION: Exodus 35: 1-3

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Deuteronomy 5:12-15*

REFLECTION: In our busy world today we don't carve enough time out in our schedule to rest in the Lord and say “no” to more activities. We don't make time for listening, being quiet, and resting in God's grace. I think we are often afraid that if we aren't busy we will “appear” to be lazy or unambitious, or “falling behind” those around us who are moving forward. And yet I wonder if our mental, physical and emotional health is suffering because we don't take time to simply breathe, be quiet, and rest with God, friends and family. My charge to you today is this: carve out an hour or two today to do NOTHING. Maybe just go and sit outside in your backyard, take a nap, say no to the dinner invitation and go out as a family, go for a hike as a family and give thanks for the creation around you, take a drive out to the coast and sit on the beach and allow the waters to wash over your feet, watch a movie and laugh, or turn off the tv and play a game, listen to the radio, share stories with one another or just BE. Try to fully experience this Sabbath rest! Try to be fully present and not worried about the next thing that is coming. Cancel all obligations and just rest! Don't feel guilty, ashamed, worried about not “doing” anything. Just be and at the end of the day check in with yourself—how do you feel? Is this something you want to try again? How are your interactions with others, with yourself?

CLOSING PRAYER: Take time to do “nothing” but relax and at the end of your couple of hours, or at the close of the day reflect on your experience, give thanks to God for what you experienced in your Sabbath practice, give thanks for moments when you are stop and breathe; spend time giving thanks for all the luxuries you are blessed with: home, shelter, food, water, etc..

PALM SUNDAY
MARCH 29, 2015
HOSANNA

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalms 118:1-2 & 19-29*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Mark 11:1-11 or John 12: 12-16*

REFLECTION: On Palm Sunday the people were shouting Hosanna and singing praises to Christ as he entered into Jerusalem. The city was alive with shouts of praise as the people greeted their long awaited King and Messiah. The people were hopeful that this man sitting on a donkey who was riding into Jerusalem would lead a revolution that would overthrow the Roman government and set Israel free from the tyranny of bad leadership. There was great hope that everything was about to change! And change was coming, yet not in the form and in the fashion that the people were hoping for. By the end of the week those voices that shouted in joy and praise would change to shouts of anger and rebellion; shouts of joy and hope to shouts of “crucify him.” In a few short days the people went from great hope and joy to mutiny as this long awaited King did not fulfill their expectations. Their long awaited King did not act in the manner they had expected; rather he came humbly to serve those who were unworthy: to

bring the marginalized into the community; to lift up the lowly; to bring justice for all those who the world mistreated; and to welcome into God's kingdom anyone who put their faith and trust in Christ. Palm Sunday marked the beginning of the end for Christ's life here on earth; and on this day the crowds are ready to cheer and praise him not knowing what really lies ahead.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time lifting up praises to God for all that he has done for you. Praise him for the ways that he continues to work in your heart and life. Spend time worshipping him today.

MONDAY
MARCH 30, 2015
"CLEANSING THE TEMPLE"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *1 Corinthians 4:1-13*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 21:12-17*

REFLECTION: The moneychangers in our story were taking advantage of the people of God. People came to the temple to seek God's forgiveness and would purchase items for a sacrifice as part of their confession, so the money changers set up shop to "make sure that people got what they needed." They were making the temple more about money, about material things and less about the act of worship. There are many times when we allow the church, our faith and Jesus, to play second to everything else in our lives. We, like the money changers have lost our focus and our way. We have allowed the secular, material world to come between us and our worship and relationship with Christ. When Christ walks into the temple his heart breaks because he is seeing a wayward people, a people who are trying to make a profit off of others without regard to the holiness that was the temple. They had forgotten to look to God and to be a people of worship, of giving and of true sacrifice; instead they were using the temple as a common market place. When Christ calls us to remember that his "house shall be a house of prayer," he is calling his people to remember what their primary responsibility as God's children is- to worship the Father, to make space and time for their relationship with God, and to not forget that they are called to be a faithful people. Christ is asking us to think about our own relationship; are we putting him first in our lives like the widow who gives all that she has; are we spending enough time in worship, in prayer, in service, in study that we might be a people of faith; or have we lost our way and our focus? Are we a people giving out of our whole hearts or out of our leftovers?

CLOSING PRAYER: Seek release of any need for control over those things in your life that take precedent over your faith and your relationship with God. Literally open your hands before God in a gesture of release, then offer those things that have a hold of your heart back to God; seeking God's help ask Him to help you focus on him and ask God to show you ways that you can continue to grow and serve him today and always. What might be one thing you could do the rest of the year to serve someone and practice releasing those things that have a hold on you?

TUESDAY
MARCH 31, 2015
"THE WEDDING BANQUET"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Psalms 98:4-9*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 22:1-14*

DAILY REFLECTION: In our passage we are surprised at the ones who ultimately are invited to attend the banquet. Those that the King originally invited had "better things to do." They did not take seriously the importance of this invitation (even the man who attended with rags on did not take seriously the

importance of the invitation). What is the point of this story? Jesus is eating at the home a Pharisee. He is challenging his host to invite to his own banquet the very people who are unable to repay him for his hospitality- the poor and the physically impaired. Jesus wants to teach this host that hospitality in the Kingdom of God is far greater and far more reaching than those in our immediate circles. We are called to go out and invite people of every race, every nation, every economic background, every ability to join us in the good things of God. Jesus is warning us to not be too preoccupied with our lives and too cluttered with the things of this world to accept his invitation. Each excuse may seem like a good one as to why we don't engage in our faith, live out the gospel each day, hesitate to show hospitality to the stranger around us, etc.- nevertheless it is finally only an excuse that keeps us away from the celebration of Christ's glorious message of love and hope. What is so surprising to us at times is who we find at the glorious banquet table of God's presence. God's kingly reign extends beyond what we think or imagine; his arms of love and grace are for all who would believe in him. God's invitation is generous and broad- even to those who we judge "would be unworthy or unacceptable at God's table." God ultimately has the right to invite and to judge who should come to his feast- not us! And yet our responsibility as a the people of God is to: 1) provide opportunities to the world to hear the redemptive message of God, 2) to accept the generous offer of Christ by putting our faith and truth in him, 3) live in God's kingdom grace in the here and now and not put off the invitation to come and, 4) to reserve judgment about who is welcomed in God's church and kingdom and focus more on spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in our community and in the world beyond.

CLOSING PRAYER: *Based on a prayer by William Laud (1573-1645)*

"Gracious God, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is weak, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son our Savior."

WEDNESDAY
APRIL 1, 2015
"CRUCIFY"

CALL TO MEDITATION *Psalm 22:1-5*

SCRIPTURE READING: *Luke 23:13-24*

REFLECTION: On Palm Sunday the crowds shouted praises to Christ their long awaited "King." Many in Jerusalem believed that Christ was the one who would help deliver them from the cruelty of their Roman occupiers. Their constant prayer as a people was for deliverance and a delivery to conqueror the Romans and freeing the people to return to worshipping Yahweh as their ancestors had done before them. The hope of Sunday would turn to shouts of crucify him by weeks end. How did this happen? What triggered the movement from overwhelming joy to an embroiled people shouting out a death sentence to an innocent man? On Palm Sunday the people were shouting Hosanna and singing praises to Christ. There was great joy in the city as the people welcomed their long awaited King and Messiah. The voices changed however by the end of the week. They went from shouts of praise to shouts of anger and rebellion; shouts of joy and hope to shouts of "crucify him." In a few short days the people went from great hope to almost mutiny as this long awaited King did not fulfill their expectations. In one fell swoop the people went from praise to anger. What an astonishing transition in such a short period of time. Who would have been able to predict that the many who claimed to be loyal to Christ would abandon him in his hour of need to an angry mob seeking his death? And yet have we not been a fickle people as well? Don't we at times swing from shouts of praise to shouts of anger when things don't go our way? Or from shouts of joy when life seems to be moving along smoothly and then shouts of

abandonment when the bottom drops out? We are no different than the crowd at times. And the good news is..... Jesus loves us through it all.

CLOSING PRAYER “Most holy and merciful Father: I confess to you that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word and deed; by what I have done and what I have left undone. I have not loved you with my whole heart and mind and strength. I have not loved my neighbor as myself. I have shouted too many times crucify Him by my inaction, my prejudices, my unwillingness to help others in need. I have not forgiven others as I have been forgiven. I turned a blind eye to the need around me. Help me Lord.”
(*Spend time in confession and prayer*).

THURSDAY
APRIL 2, 2015
“THE SUFFERING SERVANT”

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Matthew 26:26-30*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *John 13: 1-35*

REFLECTION: On that last night with his disciples Christ took the position of a servant, washing the feet of his disciples and calling his followers to do the same in his name. Christ knelt before his disciples in a manner of a slave, washing the road-wearied feet of those who had followed him for three years. Gently he lifted their feet and began to humbly wash them, an action reserved usually for the lowliest slave in the household. Our Lord and Savior knelt down and acted as slave to all. Christ is the servant to the church, for he kneels before the church in humble love and adoration and sets an example for the church to live out. The church is called upon to commit its service to the work of every form of human well-being (including becoming a servant to one another). We are called to get dirty in the name of Christ, to do the work that others would not want to do; to go where others are afraid to go; to serve Christ in his name so that others might come to know Christ in a real and personal way. There is no greater gift that we can give to Christ than to give ourselves to his ministry and work. When Christ got down on his knees, picked up the dirty, nasty, road-wearied, filthy, feet of his disciples he humbled himself and took a position of love and service as he prepared them for the cross that was yet to come. The stains of walking everywhere in sandals, the dirt from the roads, the filth from the streets of Jerusalem in an instance are washed away- the disciples are made clean; there is a sense of wholeness and healing in the touch of Christ. Christ the servant does that for all who believe in him: the sin of our life is washed away through the healing touch of faith in Christ. I have always loved this passage and thought about how wonderful it is to wash the feet of another; however I didn't begin to fully understand the depth of that love until with tenderness and love I washed my infant child for the first time. The joy and love of tenderly caring for another person whether a son/daughter; an aging parent; a client in the hospital; a friend/a stranger is never more real than when we tenderly clean them. This is the immeasurable love of Jesus Christ for each of us- he is reaching down and cleansing us today and we are called to go and do likewise. May we the church be on our knees seeking to serve Christ as Christ has already served us.

CLOSING PRAYER: “Almighty and ever-living God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this congregation. I pray Lord that we would be a people on our knees in prayer seeking your wisdom and guidance in all things. I pray Lord that we would be on knees in service- going out into our community and our world with your word firmly planted in our hearts and minds that we might be a voice of truth to those who need to hear your Good News. Strengthen us to have the courage to serve you in all times and places. Inspire us to be a people who are actively engaged in our faith and our spiritual lives and help us O Lord when we are apathetic or become complacent in our trust in you.

Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”

GOOD FRIDAY
APRIL 3, 2015
“CHRIST’S DEATH: GOOD FRIDAY”

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Philippians 2: 5-11*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 26:31-75*

REFLECTION: Good! What is so good about death? In fact death and good do not seem to go together. Death conjures up separation, loneliness, loss, sadness, permanence, heartache, pain! Good conjures up those things that are enjoyable, pleasurable, happy, things that make us smile, and things that remind us of memories that are filled with love, and so on. Good Friday! What is so good about a Friday when we reflect on Christ’s death? We know the story of that day: the sky goes dark, the heavens open and in a moment what was hopeful is now surrounded in fear, sadness, and desperation. The once band of 12 is now dispersed and cowering in fear as their leader hangs on a cross and one of their own has betrayed them. Everything that is not good has happened—betrayal, death, heartache, fear, loneliness. And yet we still call it Good Friday! Why? It is the Friday where God redeems the unredeemable; where God lays down his life for the life of all who put their faith and trust in him can have eternal life; a day where all darkness is shattered by Christ our light who conquers death through his own sacrifice; a Friday where the worst happened and is made right through the cross. It is good because what man intended for evil God made righteous, good and holy. We no longer have to fear the great chasm between God and ourselves left after the fall of humanity because we are set free for a new life in Christ. Christ stretched out his arms on the cross and provided a way over the chasm back into relationship with God! It is good because we no longer have to fear our enslavement to sin because we can have life with Christ. It is good because God made it right for us, his beloved children.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer and reflection of the offering that Christ gave to all of us who believe in him.

GREAT EASTER VIGIL
SATURDAY
APRIL 4, 2015

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Matthew 12:40*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Matthew 27:1-66*

REFLECTION: *Holy Saturday*

“Something strange is happening on earth today, a great silence, and stillness. The whole world keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: ‘My Lord be with you all.’ Christ answered him: ‘And with your spirit.’ He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: ‘awake O sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will give you light.’”^{viii}

In the protestant tradition we have often neglected the sacredness of Holy Saturday; a day in which the followers of Christ sat in morning wondering what was to come of the death of their beloved leader. Time stood still, darkness prevailed in the hearts of men and women, all seemed lost and confused as

the promised savior lay in a tomb, shut in darkness, dead to this earthly life. What we forget is that during this time of sadness, of confusion, of darkness Christ had descended into the depths of hell to conquer death's sting; to once and for all take on the sin of humanity, the evil of this world and bring about eternal hope and salvation for all. Christ went to the depths of hell so that we wouldn't have to do it ourselves. He conquered death so that we might have eternal life and abundant life in God. He stood before the gates of hell so that when we came to our final judgment before God himself we would stand blameless in his sight because Christ took on the shame of the world. But in order to bring us into the resurrection life he had to descend, to go the furthest lengths of hell to purchase us so that we might be a redeemed people. The holiness of this day is far greater than just the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; it is day of sacred remembrance for Holy Saturday turns out to be a day in which "confinement turns into concentration; illusion transmute hope, death changes into resurrection."^{ix}

CLOSING PRAYER: "Merciful Lord I come in praise and awe of you for you went to greatest lengths possible so that I might have life and have life in you. Merciful Lord on this day when darkness seemed to prevail help me to remember that you conquered death, you on this holy day went into hell itself so that all who would believe in you would be forever changed. Help me to learn more about the fullness of this sacrifice that you have made for me and for all who would turn to you in belief. Help me Lord to not squander this day or this life. Help me to serve you in this moment and every day." Spend some time in reflection, praise and prayer for anything that the Spirit is leading you to pray about.

EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 5, 2015
"JESUS CHRIST OUR MESSIAH, OUR SAVIOR"

CALL TO MEDITATION: *Romans 3:23*

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING: *Genesis 3:1-13, Mark 8:27-30 & Luke 9:18-21*

REFLECTION: The best title for God is the one reserved for Easter Sunday morning! Christ our savior, our messiah! What does it mean that Christ is our Savior? What does he "save us" from? We understand in the Christian faith that we are not without sin, we are all in need of redemption and salvation from the sin that so easily entangles us. Christ then is the one who saves us from sin and death- eternal death. Romans 3:23 reminds us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Sin then is anything that separates us from a relationship with our heavenly Father and with one another. In other words, pretty much all of our human nature is at odds with either God or with humanity itself. We know that we are not perfect, we know that our world struggles with acts of violence, intolerance, hatred, selfishness, greed, power, ingratitude, and so much more. All of creation is in need of redemption, healing and wholeness but we are powerless to accomplish salvation on our own. We need a savior because we cannot save ourselves. We need a savior because we are incapable of redemption without Christ. That is where Christ who is our Savior (messiah) enters into the picture. Christ is the one who ultimately took on the weight of the world's sin in his perfect state and offered himself up on our behalf so that we could have a restored relationship with God the Father here and now and for eternity. Through Christ's death and resurrection we are ushered into God's grace because Christ walks before us so that when God looks at us, he sees us through the perfect sacrifice- his lamb, his son, our savior Jesus Christ. God no longer sees us as we are, but rather as a forgiven and redeemed people because of Christ. Yes we will all die, our bodies will wither away and we will no longer physically be here, however our spiritual lives of faith will be forever united with God and Christ because of Christ's gift on the cross. The salvation of God is offered through Christ who comes to us in the form of a child which we celebrate each year during advent. Without a baby in a manger there would be no cross at Easter.

CLOSING PRAYER: Spend time in prayer today for those in your midst who don't know Christ, for those who have wandered away from the faith, and for those whom you don't even know: pray that they will come to know Christ. Pray that you will have boldness and courage to invite people to church and help them walk through a journey of discovery as to who Christ is. Pray that Christ will use you to be the hands and feet to those around you in such a way that when people see you, they see Christ in you.

ⁱ Hafer, Todd, editor. "God Always Has a Plan B." Hallmark Licensing, Kansas City, MO, Hallmark Publishing, © 2009, p 10-11.

ⁱⁱ Johnston, Ray. "The Hope Quotient: HQ: Measure It. Raise It. You'll Never Be the Same." W. Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2014, pg. 123-24.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, pg 124.

^{iv} Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "I Want to Live These Days with You: A Year of Daily Devotions." Translated by, O.C. Dean, Jr. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2005, pg. 6.

^v Parsons, Burk, ed. "John Calvin: A Heart For Devotion, Doctrine and Doxology." Reformation Trust Publishing, © 2008; pg. 1

^{vi} Evans, Rachel Held: "A Year of Biblical Womanhood." Thomas Nelson Publishing, Nashville, © 2012, pg. 301.

^{vii} Buechner, Frederick: "Beyond Words." p. 118-119.

^{viii} Peterson, Eugene. "Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness." Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, © 1992, p. 94-95.

^{ix} Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, p. 91