


Trusting God

+
KEEP
CALM
AND
TRUST
GOD

Daily Pandemic Devotionals
2020

A dramatic landscape photograph featuring a winding asphalt road that leads into the distance through a valley. The road is flanked by grassy hillsides and is marked with white dashed lines. In the background, dark, rugged mountains rise under a heavy, stormy sky with large, dark clouds. The lighting suggests late afternoon or early morning, with some light breaking through the clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and resilient.

**You can't calm
the storm... so stop
trying. What you can
do is calm yourself.
The storm will pass.**

MyPositiveOutlooks.com

Submitted by: Judy Feather

John 11:25: *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*

I thought of this Bible verse as I was watching the Good Friday service on Facebook. It reminded me of reading *A Tale of Two Cities* for 12th grade English. Everyone always remembers the first line of the novel: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” For me, however, it was this scripture verse that appeared several times towards the end of the story, that had the most meaning. To make a very long story short, as one of the characters was awaiting his execution during the violent days of French Revolution. He remembered this Bible verse that he had been taught as a child. He said it to himself repeatedly during his final hours and it gave him great comfort. I found that very powerful and it has been my favorite verse ever since I read that novel.

So what does it have to do with the trials we are facing right now? Well, due to COVID 19, we are all experiencing changes we had never dreamed of before March 13th. For myself, I’m learning how to do online Speech Therapy, without any of the materials I have used for the past 20 years. It is overwhelming. But now, think of that Bible verse, John 11:25. Those words were spoken by Jesus 2000 years ago. They had the same meaning when Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859 and they have the same meaning in 2020. In a world full of change, it is comforting to know that Jesus’ words will remain with us forever.

Dear God, as we deal with the changes in our lives, help us to remember that you are permanent. Help us to remember your son who died so we may have eternal life. Amen.

Submitted by: Beth Keaton



Gratitude and Thanks

During this difficult time it is important to focus on God's many blessings. We need to give thanks for all that is provided for each and every one of us. It's easy to think about all that is wrong with everything going on but now more than ever we need to be grateful for all our blessings.

- A beautiful sunny morning
- A robin gathering twigs for her nest
- Pastor Tony and our church services connecting us via social media so we can feel God's presence and love
- The beautiful organ music by Jodi and songs sung by our choir members to uplift our hearts
- Deep appreciation for all the healthcare workers, emergency teams, grocery workers and truck drivers working long hours to keep food in our stores

Psalm 107:1

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.

In closing, I've been inspired by the words of a song sung by the Ball Brothers* titled "*Old Church Choir.*"

"I've got an old church choir singing in my soul, I've got a sweet salvation and its' beautiful. I have a heart overflowing cause I've been restored. There aint nothing going to steal my joy."

*You Tube Ball Brothers Old Church Choir

Submitted by: Dianne Farst

Almighty God:

Heal those who are sick with the virus.
May they regain their strength and health
through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations
from working together and neighbors from
helping one another.

Heal us from our opinions, which can make
us claim invulnerability to a disease
that knows no borders.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and
all medical professionals who seek to heal and
help those affected and who put themselves
at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, firmly hold our hand
in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus.
May they be at rest with You in Your eternal peace.
Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry
and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know Your
comfort.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering
from this illness or only a few, Christ Jesus our Lord, stay with us as
we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place
of our anxiety, give us Your calming peace.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Submitted by: Dr. Jason Royle Pastor – St Paul's UCC

Prayer for a Pandemic

Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors

Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home

**Remember those who must choose between preserving their health
or making their rent.**

**May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their
schools close**

Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips

Remember those that have no safe place to go.

**May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the
economic market**

Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home

Remember those who have no home.

**As fear grips our country,
let us choose love.**

**During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around
each other, let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our
neighbors. Amen.**

By: Penn Central UCC Climate Change



"When this is over,
may we never again take for granted;
A handshake with a stranger,
Full shelves at the store, Conversations
with neighbors, A crowded theater,
Friday night out, The taste of
communion, A routine checkup, The
school rush each morning, Coffee with a
friend, The stadium roaring, Each deep
breath! A boring Tuesday. Life itself.

When this ends, may we find that we
have become more like the people we
wanted to be, we were called to be, we
hoped to be and may we stay that way —
better for each other because
of the worst."

-Laura Kelly Fanucci

lessonslearnedinlife.com

Submitted by: Judy Feather

Ephesians 1:16 “I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers”.

As I think about the things that have sustained my body, mind, and spirit during these days of the Covid-19 Pandemic, high on the list is keeping connected to the people who are most important in my life. I am truly grateful to be spending this time with my wife Anne, both in our daily walks and meal time talks. I am also so thankful for the opportunity to Facetime with our extended family and to watch our newest grandchild, Jacob (born 2/13/2020) sleeping in the arms of his big sister. All the grandchildren have been sending us samples of their artwork which we have on display in our living room. I have been reading and writing extensively. Without interim ministry duties or an abundance of Hartman Center commitments, this really has been like a sabbatical for me. My spirit has been fed in so many ways by the amazing “on line” services we’ve experienced. We have worshipped at our home church, Christ Church, and several other communions, sometimes on the same Sunday. One special project for me, during this time, has been to WRITE ONE THANK YOU LETTER to someone each day. It’s an exercise in gratitude and prayer first thing in the morning.

Today I decided to write all of you. Dear members of Christ Church, Social Distancing has enabled me to stay put long enough to reflect on just how grateful I am for the folks that have touched my life. You definitely are on my gratitude list. When I began my two year interim with you in March of 2017, you shared openly and honestly with me the pain and the sadness of your recent past. The Consistory wisely asked for time for the congregation to heal. Together you all worked very hard in that healing process. It was a blessing to have such a dedicated staff to work with and especially, to enjoy the gifts of Kevin and Jodi as worship leaders. Slowly but surely, you began to make plans for the future. I am most grateful to you all for the willingness to embrace sharing a pastor with another congregation. When it became apparent that Tony Fields would be that pastor, I knew that not only would your partnership with St. John’s UCC be successful, but that it would also be an example for other congregations to follow. I had a good friend in ministry who on the occasion of his retirement wrote something that I have found is very true. It takes a great congregation to make a great pastor. I thank you for two really great years of ministry together and especially for being a great congregation to have served.

God’s blessing be with you all.

Submitted by: Pastor Dave Bushnell

“Pandemic”

What if you thought of it as the Jews consider the Sabbath—the most sacred of times? Cease from travel. Cease from buying and selling. Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world different than it is. Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life. Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart. Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful. (You could hardly deny it now.) Know that our lives are in one another's hands. (Surely, that has come clear.) Do not reach out your hands. Reach out your heart. Reach out your words. Reach out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly, where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, so long as we all shall live.

Written by: Cyndi Simpson, Minister of the Second Unitarian Church of Omaha

Submitted by: Reverend Lynn Ungar (UU)



Acts 9:31 *Meanwhile the Church, throughout Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria was left in peace to build up its strength. In the fear of the Lord, upheld by the Holy Spirit, it held on its way and grew in numbers.*

I was saddened to hear of the recent death of Pastor Gary Hackenberg. He was pastor of Christ Church during my formative years; from the time I was 2 years old, into my college days. During my 10th grade year, he lead our confirmation class. We had many discussions and I found learning about the formation of the Church to be fascinating.

I'm going to share a bit of information/advice he told us one Sunday morning. We were discussing the importance of going to Church that day. He said that it is possible to be a good person and a Christian without going to church. But, he continued, not going to church, makes it much harder. We need to be part of a Christian community not only to maintain our Faith, but to grow in our understanding.

I have thought of that often over the years, and I think of it now as we are staying home to fight COVID 19. I miss coming to 200 South White Oak St and seeing my fellow congregants. But even though we are not physically together, we are still part of a loving community of Faith. A virus can't change that. As I use my phone to watch the services on Facebook, I am thankful for the technology that allows us to be together even when we are physically apart.

Dear God: Thank you for the community of Faith-Christ Church. Keep us healthy so we will be able to worship together, physically, soon. Amen.

Submitted by: Beth Keaton

When I was Director of the Mental Health Association, I gave talks on Attitude and this is a saying I found relevant.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing; the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

-Victor Frankl

I am not suggesting that what we are going through is anything approaching the horrors of the concentration camps. But it does point out that when we cannot change what is happening around us, the only thing we can change is our attitude. We can still treat people with kindness, love and respect. We can still let people know we are Christians by our love.

Submitted by: Judy Feather



I CHOOSE kindness

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages^[a]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.” ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

I grew up in a family with two older brothers and a younger sister. When it would come time for dinner I’d often worry, “Will there be enough FOR ME?” I had always assumed my older brothers took far more than their fair share and left “just enough” for the rest of us, sometimes not enough, so other food had to be prepared or leftovers had to be reheated in place of what was on the menu that night. It wasn’t fair then, and I still worry about getting my fair share of (new food, toilet paper, daily necessities) now. I still worry, “Will there be enough FOR ME?” So, I empathize with the disciples in our story today. It’s late, they’ve just finished a busy day, and they want to send those gathered around to listen to Jesus away so that they may eat at home and so they, the disciples, may presumably eat as well. After all, we find out they only have five loaves of bread and two fish for twelve disciples and Jesus to begin with. There is clearly not enough for everyone to get

their fair share. Will there be enough for them? Instead of backing away and sending people who had gathered home with empty stomachs or trying to slice the thinnest piece of fish and smallest loaf of bread imaginable for five thousand +, Jesus inquires why the disciple can't feed them. The disciple states how much money it would cost – an inordinate amount to buy enough bread for those gathered! But then, something simplistically wonderful happens. Jesus inquires, “*What do you have*”. He doesn't ask if they have enough to feed these five thousand – he seems to already know the answer to that. He doesn't ask if the disciples would be willing to share. He simply asks, “What do you have?”

At times, especially during this time of social distancing, we tend to focus on what we don't have – the food that we have grown accustomed to restocking from certain stores (I'm looking at you Walmart brand frosted shredded wheat!), the weekly shopping trips to outlets, the visits with friends and going out to eat at restaurants. This pandemic has also caused us to turn inward and ask, “*What do I have?*” It turns out that many of us, are, surprisingly resourceful when we need to be. There have been countless posts and articles made about using leftovers in “new” ways and ways to use up things stocked away in the freezer we might have forgotten about. Using what we have so we do not have to buy surplus, and yet, many of us still getting leftovers from the “already leftover”! There are loaves and fish we were unaware of! In the story of the feeding of the five thousand in Mark's gospel, we're told that after the disciples handed out the seemingly measly pickings of five loaves and three fish, there were leftovers! Twelve baskets worth of bread and fish to spare! In this time where we are being told of scarcity of scarcity – let us reflect on the bounties we are already blessed with – leftovers and all.

Prayer

God of loaves and fishes, help me count the blessing that I already have. Leftovers and all. Amen.

Submitted by: Rev. Jessica Hainley - a lifelong UCC-er who grew up in the Penn Northeast Conference and attended Lancaster Theological Seminary where she graduated in 2018. She was ordained into the Penn Central Conference Lancaster Association in 2018 and installed as pastor at Quentin United Church of Christ in September of 2018. She enjoys baking and cooking (bread, not so much fish) and finding God in all aspects of life – especially in the breaking of bread around the table.

Special Note: This is part of a theological reflection I wrote recently in response to journal entries written by my wife, Anne, regarding her kidney transplant in 2018. I think these words are appropriate for our current crisis.

Finding Comfort

What are the things that provide you comfort? Is it a favorite place? Is it a person or pet? Is it a favorite food? Is it a special object, like a blanket or pillow?

The people of God find comfort in their faith. The scriptures remind us over and over again of God's steadfast love. The challenge for us is to let go of our ego and trust in that steadfast love. We must always remember our identity as children of God, which we receive at our baptism!

In her book *Inviting God In: Scriptural Reflections and Prayers Throughout the Year*, Joyce Rupp writes: **Belonging to God requires that I accept not only the guidance, comfort, understanding and love God offers, but also the values and behaviors that go along with being one of who is "of God."** (p. 123)

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm (178 verses). The overall theme is to have complete trust and obedience. A life of obedience is the beginning of a rich life with God. The psalmist points out that a life with God is a two-way street. God promises to love us and give us newness of life, but we also promise to trust this promise and be obedient to God's commandments to love God and love our neighbor.

Psalm 119:50 then lifts up this trust in God's promise of comfort and life. Just a few verses later the psalmist writes: ***The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words. I implore your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.*** (Psalm 119:57-58 NRSV)

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is: **What is your only comfort in life and in death?** The response, known by many in the Reformed side of the United Church of Christ, is: **That I belong not to myself, but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.**

As people of faith, this is the promise that we must cling to at all times. We are not alone as we walk through life because we belong to Christ. This is the promise we receive when we receive the bread and cup in the celebration of the Eucharist. We receive Christ and all of His benefits. We receive abundant life! That promise surely brings us comfort.

Submitted by: The Rev. Dr. Christopher Rankin

DAILY REFLECTION DURING OUR TIME OF SELF-QUARANTINE,
“SAFER AT HOME,” & SOCIAL DISTANCING: Monday, March 30, 2020 “The Church & Pestilences”

It's been a good 15 to 20 years, but I used to enjoy reading stories on occasion from a fat book called *The Decameron*. I think I'll go looking for it again. I believe the title comes from Latin and refers to the book's 100 different tales, most of them love stories, both comic and tragic and many of them erotic in nature. The book sometimes comes with a subtitle attached to it as well, which is *The Human Comedy*. *The Decameron* was published late in the 1300s, so it's obviously very old. Its author, Boccaccio, wrote in Italy in the vernacular (most folks back then who wrote did it in Latin). Importantly, Boccaccio set his stories during a time of plague and quarantine. Boccaccio began his project after an outbreak of the plague in northern Italy in 1348. The premise of his story, as I recall it, is that seven young women and three young men, all of them comfortably well to do, flee the city of Florence and its epidemic to hide out in a villa in more remote hill country. They spend their time social distancing together with all the advantages of youth. They fall in love with each other in various combinations, or so I remember it. They enjoy Italy's lovely weather, eat good food, sing and dance in the evenings, and perhaps drink one or two too many cups of nice Chianti. In spite of this almost idyllic setting, boredom and routine threaten them. So one of them comes up with a plan. Each day each one of them will devise a story based upon a particular theme. In the evening, after they have dined, they will share their stories with each other, when they will also introduce the theme for the following evening's story. This is how Boccaccio frames his collection of 100 stories. As I said, some of these stories are sad, some are very funny, and some are titillating. (I love how human sensibilities about the erotic are timeless. There's no such thing as a time in which human thoughts were purer or more chaste. Even the Hebrew Bible embraces this truth. I simply wish that the early Christian writers had not been so influenced by Greek notions of the time, which viewed sexuality and the erotic as corrupting and polluting, something that has clung to Christianity like a bad odor for far too long.) I want to share one of my favorite stories from *The Decameron* with you. In it, as I can best recall, a Christian merchant has a close friend who is Jewish. He teases his Jewish friend all the time about the incompleteness of his faith and how he ought to embrace instead his own Christian faith, which he sees as the consummation of Judaism. He wishes, in fact, that his Jewish friend's business would take him to Rome, the church's capitol, where he would see the tremendous glory that Christianity has given the city with its beautiful architecture, its awe inspiring churches and cathedrals, and the astounding artwork residing within it. He tells his Jewish friend, "If you were to visit Rome, its beauty alone would convince you of the beauty and truth of my better Christian faith and you would convert." One day his Jewish friend comes to the merchant and tells him, "Guess what? Business requires me to journey to Rome, so I will get to see your fabled city after all." After his friend departs, the merchant panics. "O no," he thinks. "When my

friend gets to Rome, he'll never convert." He reflects upon Rome and its infamous corruption. He thinks about the cardinals and bishops and priests corrupted by the church's power and riches, how they keep lovers and have wives and bear countless children, even as they make vows of celibacy; how they live in palatial homes, even palaces, and eat lavishly and grow fat, while poverty surrounds them. His friend, the merchant considers, will now see how the church itself has distorted the teachings of the gospel to benefit it and its leaders, and the filth of this vile corruption will lead his Jewish friend to believe that his Christian faith is built upon lies. His friend will remain Jewish and will now have cause rightfully to mock him. The merchant now for weeks waits with anxiety for his friend to return from Rome. Finally, he arrives at his home and announces almost immediately that he, formerly a Jew, has converted to his friend's faith, Christianity, due to his travel to Rome. Confused and startled, the merchant inquires, "What happened?" The merchant's newly converted friend then relates his tale. "I went to Rome, as you have often encouraged me, and carried some anticipation with me about the great city's wonders and marvels and sights. And you were right. It is a fascinating and beautiful city. And yet, even more than the city's stunning beauty, I was shocked at the corruption of the priests and princes of the church. All of them—priests, bishops, cardinals, and the pope worst of all—were venal, avaricious, gluttonous and, loathsome in their morals, keeping young boys and girls for their pleasure, taking food from the poor so that they could dine sumptuously, dressing themselves richly and parading around the city for all to see and admire them in their colossal vanity. Before I went to Rome I could not imagine that such vile men actually existed and yet here they were, the church's leaders, all of them congregating in her capitol city. I decided to convert." Now, utterly discombobulated, the merchant stammers, "What? Why? How?" His friend gently laughs. "You see," he tells the merchant, "I realized with this collection of corrupt and greedy fools leading the church, that if it managed to survive at all, let alone to thrive and flourish, it could mean only one thing: that your faith's teachings, in spite of the corruption of its leaders, must be true. How else could an institution led by such craven louts not collapse? How else could it prosper, in spite of everything, unless it possessed the truth? And so I converted." The church, of course, even today is an imperfect institution. Up and coming generations, such as Millennials, as I have often said, think of hypocrisy and judgmentalism when they regard the church today. Its imperfection and corruption are often as recognizable today as they would have been in the late Middle Ages. And yet the church survives. How? Because the church is also simply its good people, all of you and even me. As the church struggles today—with its image as much as with survival itself as an institution—we find that we as its people, as those who profess to follow Jesus' Way, in fact, thrive. How is that possible? Because we know what Jesus teaches: that we are to forgive and reconcile ourselves to God and one another; that we are to lift each other up in prayer; that we, in loving our neighbor, are to care for her and him as the Good Samaritan cares for the injured man he encounters along his life's way; that we are to be the servant people and the servant

community of a servant God. Honestly, it's a pleasure—and my life is a constant blessing—to be able to walk this path of faith together with all of you. We learn from one another and encourage one another. We pray for our collective welfare, and we offer hospitality and welcome to people seeking something in their lives bigger than themselves. May we continue to function as a lamp that has no place beneath a bushel basket is my prayer today. Amen.

Submitted by: David Bowles

Pastor of Congregational UCC churches in Ladysmith & Conrath, Wisconsin.



God is our refuge and strength a help always in times of great trouble. That's why we won't be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea, when its waters roar and rage, when the mountains shake because of its surging waves...The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety" (CEB) - Psalm 46:1-3 and 11.

This ancient song expresses confidence in God's protective care in the midst of whatever trouble may come our way. Likewise our German Reformed ancestors, in the very first question of the historic Heidelberg Catechism, reassure us of God's comfort as well.

"What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong, both in body and soul and in life and in death, not to myself, but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ...Who takes care of me so well that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven."

Sisters and brothers, hear these ancient and historic words of assurance and comfort anew, amidst the challenges and fears of today. *God is our refuge and strength a help always in times of great trouble.* We belong, *in body and soul and in life and in death to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.* Thanks be to God. Amen.

Submitted by: Rev. Brad Walmer New Covenant UCC, Williamsport, PA



**I guess God got so
mad about all of our
fighting down here
that He sent us all to
our rooms.**

Submitted by: Judy Feather



The Peace of Christ in the Midst of Chaos

John 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

God did not create us to live in fear, but many of us spend our lives living in fear. I remember talking to my father after he had retired from the mills where he worked for more than forty years. He often worked seven days a week and was seldom home. As we were discussing his working all the time, he looked at me and said, "I was afraid to tell them No about the overtime. If I did, I was afraid I would lose my job." It was a fear that he could not face and see that there might be other options and opportunities in life. We all have given in to our particular fears at one time or another until we learn to face them.

The disciples were no different. The body of Christ was not in the tomb, although some thought he might be alive, others were uncertain. But they were sure, they would be accused by the religious leaders and suffer the same fate as Christ.

The thickness of this fear and anxiety could be cut like a knife. The fear gripped the disciples and would not let go. Behind locked doors in darkness, they hid, wondering if the next knock on the door would be to arrest them. You know the feeling.

There was not a knock, there was not a window raised, but suddenly Jesus appeared and his first words were "Peace be with you." I have both witnessed and experienced fear that grips one like the disciples. Working with families in trauma hospitals whose lives have been turned upside and often ripped apart by the unexpected trauma. But I have also witnessed God's peace coming over them in ways that regardless of the outcome, God was with them. It is not easy, our fears do not just disappear, but we must constantly face them, so they do not gain power over us. When fear gains, power it paralyzes us or causes to hate the thing we fear. I like what Nelson Mandela says about fear. "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave person is not the one who does not feel fear, but the one who conquers fear."

Our fears about COVID 19 has caused some to panic, some to accuse and blame others. We need to be cautious not fearful. As such, we can become empowered to overcome our fears as we live into the power of the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. Stay safe and May God grant you the peace that passes all understanding. Encourage one another, while we continue to shelter in place.

Submitted by: E. Dean Luther Chief of Chaplains, Lebanon VA Medical Center

Gods Got this
Exodus 14:13-14

13 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14 "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

Whenever we are faced with situations that seem impossible to conquer or when our backs are against the wall and life seems to be closing in around us, it is in those times that we must remind ourselves that “Gods got this!”

He had for Israel after leaving Egypt, facing impossible situations. On their back are the enemies marching to overtake them. On their left and right are towers of rocks and desert, while on their front is the Red Sea. They are literally surrounded by big problems and they have little time to think and find the solution for their escape.

In the middle of this pandemic we fret and lose our composure, we stop trusting in God, we start running helter-skelter in every direction forgetting that God says in Exodus 14:13 “Fear not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today. For the Egyptians (Pandemic) you see today you shall see them again no more forever. For the Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace!

IN OTHER WORDS GOD IS SAYING “I GOT THIS” We must remember to remind ourselves that no matter what “Gods Got This.”

Submitted by: Rev. Dr. Aaron Willford Jr
Pastor - Bethlehem Baptist Church
York Pa



And Jesus Sang!

By Kevin Biddle

Matthew 26:30 tells us *And when they had sang a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* I never really thought about it before, but **The Bible** is telling us that Jesus sang! As a singer and choir director my first thought had to be, “Was Jesus a tenor or a bass?” because I am sure his voice was simply beautiful! I think this is a great lesson for us during this time of quarantine and the Corona Virus/Covid 19 pandemic. Jesus was facing betrayal and death, and he chose to sing!

Right now people are facing uncertain personal, financial and even health issues. Essential workers are stressed and worried about their jobs, as well as their families, too. As Christians we must take this time to pray more, worship more and to SING! Your song doesn't have to be pretty, or even loud, but sing! It's exactly what Jesus did when he was facing trying times.

PRAYER: Father, there are some days when I feel like I am sinking into a dark pit. I know you have promised heaven, but sometimes the situations I am facing here on earth can feel overwhelming. Help me to remember to use my voice everyday- to pray, to worship and to sing! Amen!

Submitted by: Kevin Biddle



Let's Sing!

Clinging Through Crisis

By: Nicole Massie Martin from *Leaning In, Letting Go*

Psalm 39:9-10: I am silent; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it. Remove your stroke from me; I am worn down by the blows of your hand.

“God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good!” The call and response from my church rang out, as it did every Sunday with exuberance and joy. But this time, I struggled to add my voice to the congregational chorus. For just a few minutes before, I learned that one of our members had just lost their child. We rejoiced together when their prayer for pregnancy was answered. We cried together when the child entered the world. We believed together at the baby’s baptism. And now, we grieved as the future we envisioned for this child had been cut short. How can we declare God’s goodness in the midst of suffering from God’s hand? It was God Who gave this child and God Who took this child away. As I wrestled with the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people, I confessed my anger at God Who allowed such heartache.

David was also familiar with this kind of heartache. In this Psalm, he cried out to God for mercy, know that the suffering he experienced came only from God. Yet, in the midst of this pain, David did the only thing he knew to do: he clung more closely to God.

No matter how painful our suffering may be, God still invites us to come closer. Our instincts may lead us further away, but the wounds of Jesus remind us that He is intimately aware of every pain. There is no pain we experience that God cannot understand and heal.

During times of crisis and pain, Jesus presents us with an opportunity to cling more dearly to His wounds by letting go of our pain. As we understand why Christ suffered, we will gradually proclaim that God is, indeed good all the time, and all the time God is good!

PRAYER: God, I need you to draw me closer, especially my places of pain. Restore my weary heart and bring peace to my soul. There is no one I need more than you! Amen.

Submitted by: Kevin Biddle

In the last 20 years, scientists have learned more about our minds than in all the years before. Prior to our current pandemic and state of affairs, it was already believed that 60+% of visits to primary care providers were stress related, research showing us that 75+% of mental and physical illnesses stemmed from our thought lives.

Max Lucado once said, life plays “in a minor key with major concerns.” For a lot of us, this pandemic is our biggest concern to date. I’m here to tell you our ability to cope, to be resilient, to thrive and not just survive, begins in our head.

Both science and scriptures agree. A quick Google search on cognitive behavioral therapy will give you a glimpse into the science. Perhaps a good starting point in scriptures would be Romans 12:2 which tells us to no longer be conformed “to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

At any given second, your head has a thought, that results in an emotion, that in turn causes a behavior. Most times, we jump from thought to emotion without even realizing it. And it isn’t until we are physically sick with fear, anxiety, or sadness, verbally lashing out at loved ones, or obsessively checking and rechecking the news or social media apps, that we fully comprehend the extent of our thoughts and emotions.

It has been said our greatest spiritual battle is being fought in our heads. Satan is described as “a liar and father of lies” and comes to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 8:44, 10:10). Many often picture Satan attacking us in a big, theatrical way, but just think, all he must do is plant one thought in your head and sit back, watching it fester and multiply, doing most of the work for him.

One of those crippling thoughts planted in our minds is “what if.” I imagine “what if” is flashing like a neon sign in your head right about now, hanging over things such as health, wealth, and need for control. It certainly has been edging for a front row seat in my mind as of late. I challenge you to take a moment and think to yourself, what fear filled thoughts are currently threatening to suffocate you?

Now comes the beautiful and exciting part where we take steps to shut down that toxic thinking. Consider yourself the air traffic controller, your mind the airport. You decide what thoughts land and what thoughts continue on by in the sky.

An anecdote to your what if statements: God is. God is with me, God is for me. He will sustain me in both my brightest and darkest moments. God will give me strength to endure. These experiences are not good, but God is good. I can see his goodness all around me. Our days are numbered, but God is the God of all time and eternity, very much alive in me. I do not know the future, but I know the One who does. I am physically alone, but God is near.

This twisting of our thinking is the core of cognitive behavioral therapy. Change your thoughts and you change your mood. Sound too much like a cliché? Ah, but it’s not. Easier said than done perhaps, but worth all time in the world. For out of

positive thinking and meditation stems improved health, better sleep, and greater resilience to name only a few. Consider an athlete in training, building muscle. So is it with our minds. Put in some mental training and reap the rewards.

Take some time to dive into Romans 8 and refresh yourself on Philippians 4:8. Notice how the mind set on the flesh leads to sin and death and how the mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace. Then hop over to the story of Peter in Matthew 14. Recall how Peter walked on top of the stormy sea, on top of the waves (not in or under the waves), because of his singular focus: Christ.

My prayer for you is that rather than wringing your hands, you bow your knees. Because all the health, money, or news in the world will not satisfy you or bring you peace. In a world seemingly spinning out of control, you can control your thoughts, words, attitude, and actions with the help of the Almighty. In a world swirling with uncertainty, you have all the certainty in the world. God was, and is, and is to come. Amen.

Submitted by: Amy Bauer, Counselor - B.S. Degree



The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
He descended into hell;
on the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of Saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

Submitted by: Rev. Tony Fields, Sr.



Just Plain Faith

By: Genevieve and Herman DeHoog from *Devotions for Choirs*

John 3:16-17: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Recently my husband, Doc, and I retired from our positions in the church and moved to our present home in the northeast Georgia, right in the middle of the mountains. When I first looked at our log home, it was the mountains that captured my heart and Psalm 121 quickly came to mind- *I lift my eyes to the hills- where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord!* We have made our home into a small bed and breakfast everyone who visits us has a similar feeling of God's presence surrounding this place. It has been much more difficult to provide a living income than we had anticipated. There was a great deal of repair work to do, as well as reconstruction we need for the bed and breakfast. Even though there are times we are not sure we will be able to stay, we know that as long as our faith remains in the Lord, His will for our lives will be worked out. Knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts and souls and trusting fully in God's constant care, we greet each new day with joy and love in our hearts, ready to serve however God asks. God has given us many wonderful opportunities to serve wherever we are.

When you can fully commit your life to Christ in all areas of your life, you can understand the peace and joy that this commitment will bring. For God so loved the world (us) that He gave His only son Jesus Christ that whoever (you and me) believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (including a full and joyful life now). THANKS BE TO GOD!!!

PRAYER: Gracious God, help us always to trust in your love and guiding hand in all we do. Sometimes we try to take control for our lives from you and do things our way. Help us, Lord, to know that you are always there to guide us in all areas of our lives. Help us also to be the servants you would have us be. As part of your church, we seek only to do you will in sharing your Word with your people. Be with us now in Jesus', our Lord and Savior's name. Amen!

Submitted by: Kevin Biddle

JOURNEY
OF
Faith

Excerpt from Common Sense, written in 1776 by Thomas Paine

I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon ... if I can. I seek opportunity ..., not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen, humbled and dulled by having the State look after me. I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I refuse to barter incentive for a dole; I prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence; The thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of Utopia. I will not trade freedom for beneficence nor my dignity for a handout. I will never cower before any master nor bend to any threat. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid; to think and act for myself, To enjoy the benefit of my creations and to face the world boldly and say: "This, with God's help, I have done." All this is what it means to be an entrepreneur.

One of Pastor Tony's favorite Scriptures

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

I have written on my mirror in my bedroom

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him Who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.

Submitted by: Rev. Tony Fields, Sr.

Rough Times

By: Henry V. Gerike from *Christ in Our Hearts, Christ on Your Lips*

Luke 21:29-36 *He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*

Life can get rough. Sometimes the burdens we bear seem to get a little heavier than usual. Competition at work or in the neighborhood, over-involvement in the rush of living, anxieties over questions of food, clothing, shelter, concerns over what and whose standards we are living up to—all these can get us down and overwhelm us. Neither bumper sticker pep talks nor sweet nothings of nice moral thoughts will help get us out of our doldrums of despair or the diabetes of depression. Christ never promised an insurance policy against depression or wrote prescriptions for happiness. He did say that He came to give us life - His life. Because of the cross on which He died and because of His empty tomb we live in the great assurance and conviction that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. When storm and crisis, disease and despair, loneliness and fear confront us, we sing to one another with encouragement. "Stand up and lift up your head, because your redemption is drawing near."

PRAYER: O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may live and abide forever in Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever. Amen.

Submitted by: Kevin Biddle



Technology Burnout and Our Need for Sabbath

By: Rev. Matt Young from The Calm of Christ Online Devotional

<https://www.wpclubbock.org/blog>

“I’m getting Zoomed-out ”That’s a phrase I’m hearing more and more as churches and small groups are moving to online formats for preaching and connecting. For many of us we have also shifted to a screen-mediated means of working, homeschooling, socializing, etc. And I think, with everything going on, we are starting to feel burned out. Here in Lubbock, Texas, we have been in lock-down for what feels like forever. Really it’s only been about 3 weeks or so. But many of us are feeling burned out. And this burnout is not something that just an ordinary nap can fix.

This kind of burnout we are experiencing is a soul-deep-fatigue. Why is it that we feel this way? We feel this way because we have forgotten and neglected to Sabbath. Genesis 2:3 says – “So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

Up until this point in the timeline of events, God had been creating everything. He made the universe; He made the earth; He made the lights in the sky and the orbital patterns of the planets; He formed the oceans and mountains and all the creatures and living things that made their homes there. And most of all, God made Adam – humanity – male and female. Then God rested from all his labors.

Now, God didn’t need to rest. He’s what we call omnipotent. That is, He’s all-powerful. But it’s more than just power. God is, in and of Himself, completely, totally, unceasingly, self-existing. God relies upon nothing for Him to exist or display any and all of His characteristics. He is because He is. So God didn’t need to rest. But He does.

Why? To reveal to mortal, finite, small, tiring, human beings the reality that we must rest on a regular basis. Rest is not optional. Sabbath wasn’t something that we could figure out on our own. We couldn’t look at creation and see that we needed a day of rest. God had to reveal it to us, this 6-1 work to rest ratio, so that we might regularly experience rejuvenation, restoration, and most importantly, a hint of the ultimate rest which is to come in Christ’s second coming and renewal of all things.

So getting back to technology and all of us feeling burned out – Sabbath is something that doesn’t just apply to our work the way we think of work – a set number of hours each week we work in exchange for money. “Work” in the biblical sense, I think, applies to all the stuff we do throughout the week – yard work, house work, driving work, work work, school work, screen work, etc.

God calls us to substantially rest from that normative activity we do six days out of the week so that one day a week we might experience His rejuvenation of our souls. And that applies to our screen time.

Our screens are now the means we have to conduct work, school, fellowship, etc. We are totally inundated with screen time. So in order for us to rest from that work (the emailing, zooming, facetimeing, etc.) we need to come up with a plan where we will trust in God, set down our phones, emails, and social media platforms, and rest. If I'm honest with you, I don't know what this looks like for me yet. But here are some things for my life that I'm seriously considering:

- 1) Set up my (and our family's) phone to disable all the apps except for text and call on Sundays.
- 2) Set a reply-back email for Sundays, alerting people that if it's an emergency (there always are and we need to tend to those out of faithfulness) to call me, otherwise I'll get back to them Monday or Tuesday.
- 3) Limit screen use around the family in the evenings.
- 4) Limit my use of screen time on Sundays to fellowship and worship. Watch the sermon, fellowship with our Sunday school class, and then spend time catching up with family abroad. But be wise and spread this out.
- 5) Take a nap, like a real nap, after worship and Sunday school class as a family. We all know we need it.

I pray that this finds you and that you feel a sense that you can, by God's grace and the empowerment of His Holy Spirit, that you can truly rest and unplug in appropriate ways during this time when we are all inundated with screens. I praise God that we have these means to even stay connected during this time, but just like too much of anything, we can get burned out and our souls desperately need Sabbath, even from technology.

What are some of your ideas of how we can Sabbath from our technology in these times where it seems we are glued to it all the more?

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, help us to decompress, to be still and know that you are God. Now more than ever we need to honor the Sabbath Day in order to rejuvenate, renew and re-energize for our new normal. Help us, O Lord! Amen.

Submitted by: Kevin Biddle



“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”. (Philippians 4:8-9)

It is important during this time of being home and in quarantine that we keep our minds from wandering to the negativity and the fear that is expressed by many in these times. We also run the risk of wasting our time and being unfocused in our calling or focus of energies. This Bible passage is a helpful reminder of the focus we should be about in these days and all days. Listen to those words again: noble, right, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, and excellent. May these words be on your mind and heart as you live through this time. We are still able to connect with one another in living these out, but we have to be a little more creative and attentive to how we are doing that in this time. Pick up the phone and call someone, write a letter to someone, send a card. We are able to find bodily rest and mental rejuvenation in this time. Use this time as a time of jubilee and worship so that you can be your best self through this time and in the days and ways you will live into as what is next unfolds.

Prayer: Dear God, refine our focus to what builds up and what brings out the best in us; in this time to serve and share. Your people and church have been lead through sicknesses and pandemics like this before, they have been through times of distress and struggle, but you O God are faithful and sufficient, may we be of a sound mind in this time, remembering that your ways don't just give peace at the end of times like this, but your gospel message helps to provide peace amidst the struggle and difficulties of our days. AMEN

Rev. Nathan Druckenmiller
Dreisbach UCC, Lewisburg, PA

God never stops teaching us by example. We humans can learn much about living and serving Him if we take time to observe His creation and to meditate on what we see. Take for example a flock of migrating geese. We notice a plan to their formation, a structure to their leadership, and an objective to their flight. They are on the way to a specified goal. Now what lessons can we learn from that observation?

By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds 71% more flying range than if each bird flew alone. As each goose flaps its wings, he creates an “uplift” for the bird following. Here is demonstration of distribution of energy. People who share a common direction and sense of community can get to where they are going more efficiently because they are traveling on the thrust of one another. Good stewardship of resources at hand.

The geese depend upon their leadership in the front of the “V”. If a goose falls out of formation, he suddenly senses the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone. He quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the birds immediately in front. If humans lose fellowship with the heavenly Father their leader they need to scramble to regain it. Here is lesson of reliance on and trust in the Creator.

The geese belong to a flock which has a common destination toward which they are traveling. They are bound by a mutual purpose and they share responsibilities along the way. When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back in the formation to a less responsible position and another goose flies at the point position. It is essential to take turns doing the hard tasks because the flight is long and tiring. Interdependence yields acceleration of movement toward the destination. Many wings lighten the stress of flying.

All the other geese in formation assist from behind by honking to encourage those near the front to keep up the pace. It must be honking of inspiration, not complaining. Hold the criticism from behind for it will impede progress.

If a goose falls ill or wounded, two others will drop out of formation and follow their fellow member down to earth to help provide protection and assistance. They stay with this member until he is able to fly again or passes away. They they may launch out on their own with another formation or try to catch up with their own flock. No one suffers alone. No one flies alone. The principle of the Good Samaritan exemplified here.

We need to pause daily and reflect on the many other Christian attitudes which can be gleaned from migrating geese as well as all the lessons to be learned from our natural surroundings.

If we use goose sense, we will become a Body of Believers flying in formation to her our Master’s, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Submitted by: Janet Bucher



Matthew 6:1-4

Giving in Secret

Remember when we had a little freer life. Businesses like coffee shops and snack bars is the presence of a “tip jar.” A tip jar is a small container so that customers may be encouraged to leave a small gratuity for the server/worker of the shop. In restaurants, servers get to see the tip you leave them on the receipt or they hear it as you ask them for your change. But at these service counters, the server may be busy making your coffee or scooping your ice cream. The question is, if you’re the customer, should you make sure the server sees you putting something in the tip jar? If they see you, maybe they will give you better service or a little bit more ice cream! Or if they see you, they say “thank you” a bit more sincerely than it just being an expected phrase. This is similar to Jesus teaching about generosity and giving our passage today. Should we seek recognition for our giving or should we just be giving because it is the faithful response to which God calls us? When we see a business make a big presentation of a donation to charity, we know they are partially doing it for the good publicity it gives their business. In these times of the pandemic, it is great seeing people make masks or raise money for those who need it. But I know they are doing because they are posting about it on social media or are being interviewed by the news, receiving attention for their generosity. I don’t want to doubt their motivations, but with the videos or posts, that question always lingers in the back of my mind. But as people of faith, that should not be our motivation, Jesus says. Generosity is one of the “fruits of the Holy Spirit” Paul writes about in Galatians 5. It is a gift that flows from us being a person inspired by the Spirit. Our faithful giving should always and only be between God and us. We shouldn’t be worried about getting some “likes” on Facebook or the server or any recipient making sure we get any other special recognition, even if it means getting a little more ice cream.

Prayer

Loving God, you have blessed me so that I may be a blessing to others. May I give only to give you glory and honor in gratitude for all that I have received. Amen.

Submitted by: Rev. Dwight C. Hein

Salem United Church of Christ, Campbelltown, PA

Isaiah 64:6

“Yet, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou art our potter. We are all the work of Thy hand.”

The hymn, “Have Thine Own Way” by George Stebbins, rang in the grandmother’s ears one winter morning. The melody ran through her mind as she went about the morning chores. Next the words began to filter in, one phrase at a time until she found herself singing softly as she worked. “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”...these words made her realize that it was not HER OWN way, but HIS. Her prayer at that moment had to be “as You see fit for me.” She stood quiet for a moment and began to assess how self-centered she had become, thinking that she was solely in charge of her life. She needed to surrender her will to God.

“Thou are the potter; I am the clay”...Forces outside herself had been molding her ideas, her motives, her very actions. What were those outside influences that were making such an impact? Were they a desire for prestige among her peers, for wealth and possessions, or matriarchal control? Was she becoming cynical and bitter? She needed to pause and reflect...Were they the false gods she worshiped? Furthermore, was she still malleable, able to be a re-molded into the person the Potter had envisioned?

“Make me after Thy will”...Did she really want to change? This might mean an entire make-over, unlike those promised on the TV daytime shows. Would it mean that she could find the best in others without being critical of most around her? It might mean that she would have to attend church worship more regularly or to assume an active role in her church. She might have to volunteer for community service. It could even mean that she would be moved to do Bible study to find what God’s will would be for her at this stage of life. Could she face this challenge to change?

“Fill with Thy spirit till all shall see Christ only, always, living in me”...along with her we all need to stop in our daily routines and pray that the Holy Spirit come fill our lives with Christ-like deeds. We are called to make God proud of His handiwork. Will others see Christ living in each of us?

Prayer: O God, make us willing to yield ourselves to Your will. Search us and try us; touch us and heal us, Saviour Divine. Amen.

Submitted by: Janet Bucher

John Wesley an eighteenth-century theologian, evangelist and Anglican preacher who led a revival movement branded as Methodism, was known to begin small group by asking participants, “How is it with your soul?”. It invited both accountability and self-reflection. As a United Methodist clergy, I have asked this question many times, when on visits and at meetings. I have used it to begin a sermon and have also used it as a greeting. On more than one occasion I have reflected on this question to assess how I am feeling at a particular moment. These moments have been marked by instances of celebration and joy but also anxiety and uncertainty. Attempting to answer this question in light of experiences lived is always challenging. In the end, the practice has helped to remind me of the genuineness of faith. Not that I, by the grace of God, have it but that faith, or trust in God has always proven to be trustworthy.

Recently, as COVID-19 a highly contagious disease began to wreak havoc in our country, my heart grew heavy when I heard about the number of persons that began to die from it. The most vulnerable were senior citizens. Then to make matters worse, we learn that one did not have to present any symptoms to be a carrier of this virus. An individual could infect others even when they were not themselves sick with it. I was overwhelmed by that fact to the point that as time passed, I began to make myself sick from it. Physically sick. I felt blindsided by the fact that this pandemic had temporarily robbed me of my inner peace. I reminded myself that I was doing everything in my power to stay well and keep others safe. I practiced social distance, diligently washed my hands in order to minimized contagion to myself and others and began to minimize leaving the home for non-essentials in order to flatten the curve of the spread. I started ticking off all the things I, a control freak, was doing and then it hit me. Somewhere along the way this pandemic became everything I saw and thought about. Even in my sleep. I remembered John Wesley’s question and was sad and even a little embarrassed to admit that no, it was not well with my soul. One thing was to be overwhelmed by factors or circumstances outside of my control. But my current state of mind and health was my own doing. I resolved then to recall Words from Scripture that have given me life over the years.

Isaiah 26:3 “Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you.”

Lamentations 3:23-24 “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

And finally, the encouragement of 1 Peter 1:3-9 that reminded believers who were suffering because of their decision to choose Christ of the mercy and the salvation/victory over sin and death they had attained through Jesus Christ. A hope, an inheritance that no power could destroy or tarnish. It was a hope for the future that came with an assurance for the present experienced in newness of life. The writer of 1 Peter wanted to assure believers that they could trust God for their future because of what God had accomplished in Jesus Christ in the past. That is our hope for today too.

“Gracious God, I praise you for you are trustworthy. In your Son Jesus Christ, you have given us newness of life and a living hope that is incorruptible and unfading. God you have always kept your promises. Forgive us when we allow the circumstances in our lives rob us of the peace we have in Jesus, the assurance that you are always with us. In Jesus name.”

Submitted by: Rev. Tony Fields, Sr.

Written by: Rev. Wanda Santos-Perez
Charlton City United Methodist Church

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” ~ Psalm 46:1-2

I have never experienced a pandemic, have you? Have you ever felt an earthquake? Have you ever seen the destruction of a hurricane? It's powerful! Maybe you have had to run to a safe place when tornado sirens went off. Now that's scary. Natural disasters make us feel vulnerable. We feel so helpless. There's nothing to do but shelter in place and wait it out. It's no secret that everybody feels afraid. That's why Psalm 46 is worth reading again and again. It's a reminder that any time nature seems angry, our heavenly Father is in control. God is bigger than the biggest wildfires, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, and pandemics. Sometimes the troubles of life come to us as a personal “storm”. Disappointing relationships. Problems at work. A sick child. Loss of a loved one. Life can often rock our world. When everything seemingly falls apart, we feel frightened and insecure. But listen to this great news: God is always with us. Wherever we go, He goes. Wherever we are, He is. The Lord is strong enough to help keep us safe. No matter what!

Prayer: Lord it's easy to forget that you are right beside me when I read the news or hear the sirens sound. Thank you that you keep me safe. Thank you for being stronger and bigger than any trouble.

Submitted by: Rev. Kim Kendrick, M. Div.
Chaplain, Bethany Children's Home



Scripture: Mark 7

How often we have heard the phrase, “Put your money where your money is.” Jesus said it a bit differently and much more effectively. It appeared that the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were often looking for ways to trap or discount what Jesus was teaching and what His disciples were doing. They were bent on keeping tradition, no matter what the circumstance. Mark’s gospel, chapter 7, speaks about age-old practices about which the Pharisees were very strict. Two of these were concerned with thoroughly cleansing themselves before ingesting food and also with cleansing the vessels in which food would be prepared. Traditional methods were of utmost importance in keeping the Temple law. They questioned Jesus as to why His disciples did not live according to the traditions of the elders. Imagine, they ate without properly cleansing themselves. Not relying only on His own authority, Jesus referred to the prophet Isaiah as His response:

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men”

Jesus confronted them and in turn confronts us with a rather pungent Old Testament reference. He told them that they put more emphasis on keeping the traditions of their elders than on keeping the commandments of God. Jesus challenged their ways of doing things. It was difficult for them to accept someone who questioned their actions. Does Jesus not challenge us in the same manner to keep God’s law of compassion, love, and service rather than to stress methods of carrying them out. Here Jesus was hinting at what defiles (makes unfit) a person.

What makes us spiritually unclean is what comes from within our minds, and within our hearts. Out of the heart of a person come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. Not what we eat, nor how it is prepared, but what we harbor within makes us unclean. In other words, we are to align our thoughts, our hearts, and our actions in accordance with God’s word to be able to worship sincerely. This sounds to me like a call for sincerity in everything that we think, do and speak. This seems to say that using body washes to cleanse our 2,000 parts, or anti-bacterial lotions to rid ourselves of germs will cleanse the body, but not the soul. Spiritual purification must come from a change of heart, a right relationship with God through confession, prayer, and dedication, yielding to God’s Will rather than to our own. Yes, we are exhorted to put our entire body in alignment with the Word if our worship is to be acceptable to Our Heavenly Father...With a clean heart we must walk our talk.

Prayer: O God, help us to discern what is most important in our lives and put in priority those things which will make us sincere Christians acting out of pure motives which come from hearts, cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

Submitted by: Janet Bucher

My thought is this, in the age of COVID 19 - as Christians, we must have faith in God - that represents the emotions/feelings side of the wise mind paradigm. Rationality/reason also has a role to play in our lives - and in this time of crisis, that is represented by science; COVID 19 testing, medical science and so on. Put these two facets of the human experience together in a measured way, and you have Wise Mind. Wise Mind in the age of COVID 19 looks like this - having a strong faith that God loves us as his children and we are obedient children doing His work. This includes taking care of our fellow friends, neighbors and others by following what medical science is telling us - wear masks, engage in social distancing and so on. Doing His work is what I would call Wise Mind living. Hope this makes sense.

I have professionally and personally never seen a conflict between religion and science, although there are those that see them in conflict, and I appreciate that view when science is seen as a substitute for faith and humbleness. When science or other human endeavors take the place of God - such as greed or the other deadly sins, that is a problem.

So I guess a measure and faith-based response to the COVID 19 crisis, as well as other challenges to the human experience is to approach each and every one of them using the Wise Mind paradigm. Have faith and humility as children of God, but also use the tools that God has provided, wisdom, curiosity, and love.

Submitted by: Joseph Bene, Licensed Psychologist & Healer



In Times like These

Luke 4:18-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

We are the church. This is the best time to be witnesses of God’s blessings to his people as collaborators. Our faith contends that we live out our faith as living witnesses. In this pandemic and our periods of social isolation, it's time for personal elaboration.

Human beings are the only life on earth that has an incredible capacity to change the course of life; no other life form can do this. Every life except humans has to operate by instinct and genetic code by John Rohn.

As we live as Resurrected people our responsibility is to provide a Resurrection of Community. This pandemic does not have the last word, especially as we live as Resurrection people and coming to life. We have worked not in the kingdom of God but here on earth right here in our community.

Prayer

God, as your Spirit is on us, moving from home to home, revive us again as your resurrected people. Remind us again that the Spirit of The Lord Is upon Us to Proclaim, release, Recover, and Set free As we proclaim Good News.

Submitted by: Rev. Tony Fields Sr,
Christ Church UCC / St John's UCC Pastor
M. Div and M. Psy



“Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” Psalm 16:5-6

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”
Isaiah 43:19

Something new is being created or done within the boundary lines that God has drawn for my life. This is a common reminder for me when I feel things are spinning out of control. Since the radical and sudden changes brought on by physical distancing, crisis schooling and working from home and phone began in early March, I have said this to myself numerous times a day!

I don't yet know what new things God is working on for the world, but I know something must have needed drastic improvement. I have a lot of guesses about the broken things in our communal life, many of which I had figured out how to live with or work against and in some cases even work for me. That doesn't mean they were working for God.

God has set the boundaries for my life and goodness and mercy are promised. Right now when I am wrestling with grief and fear and loss of control, God is doing something new in the world to bring about changes that are needed for God's children to live fully into the love and goodness and mercy that is promised to us.

Friends, these are trying times. Each day presents as challenging for so many of us in myriad ways. But I know these things to be certain: God is with us, God draws the boundaries for us, and God is working in all of this.

Submitted by: Nora Foust
Associate Conference Minister for Congregational and Ministerial
Excellence

A Clear Answer

As I was reading a small booklet, Why God Gave Us Friends, I was confronted by the thought expressed in the gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 12. Jesus commanded that we love one another as He has loved us. Beyond family, who becomes closer to us than friends? I believe that He provided for us the example of choosing friends when He called the Twelve. Each had a different gift; yet each filled a special role. God gave us friends to spread His love as we develop community.

Our closest friends hold special places in our circle of acquaintances. Some provide an outlet with whom to share our inner thoughts, some can understand our frailties and shortcomings, while others impart wisdom and give advice. Loving one another yields all of these characteristics.

He knew that we would need someone to encourage us to cultivate our inborn talents so that we could live up to our best. To do this we often need steady arms upon which to lean. Friends, spouses, and children become those supports that we need while striving to reach our potential.

This verse in John's gospel pushes us beyond our small circle of intimate friends. It impels us to venture into the world to encompass ALL of God's children. In stretching out in service and love, we find a greater satisfaction.

Since life is not always an easy road, God foresaw that we would desire assistance in standing by our convictions and in pursuing dreams and aspirations or in championing special causes. He knew that we would face loneliness and sadness. Others would need us and we would need them. This pandemic has brought these convictions to the forefront. We are anxious, impatient and at times fearful. Now is a time when we need others to love and to be loved. In His plan of salvation, God has provided for that. If we enlarge our circle of loved ones, we shall find love and shall be able to give love. Recently we have all felt the need to reach out in some way. Take a moment to reflect on how God has been present in the midst of this crises. As in the past, this time of testing will

end and God will bring normalcy. Have we forgotten the joy of the Resurrection following Good Friday?

Joy is most wonderful when it can be shared with another. He foresaw that we would need praise for our diligence and partners with whom to rejoice in good fortune. God wants us to share the love He shows us. We must praise God for His abundant care, and His steadfast support. The world's needs His compassion, civility, and love.

We are commissioned to show this God-given love in service to others. Now is the time to feed the hungry, care for the sick, pray for the medical community, comfort the lonely and bereaved. Each time we find a way to express love, we evidence God's love for everyone.

Prayer: Help us, O Lord, to see beauty around us and to respond in caring and love. Thank You for friends. Amen.

Submitted by: Janet Bucher

In
God
We
Trust

Thank you to all who participated in this devotional. I hope that as you read this in your time of social isolation, you remember God's love for you.

During this pandemic in your daily reading may each reflection inspire you. Proverbs 16:24 states Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Blessings to every one of you,

Sincerely Pastor Tony

COUNT YOUR
many BLESSINGS
name them ONE
▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶ ONE
BY ONE ◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀◀

God
BLESS
you