

EASTER 2020



CHRIST'S AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

This might sound odd, but my devo starts back at the beginning of Advent. Yes, the season of Advent is what leads up to the celebration of Christmas. And yes, I know we are starting the season that leads up to the celebration of Easter.

This past Christmas season I spent some time on social media focusing on how the advent candles, among other Christmas traditions, could help point us to Jesus. In my first video, I mistakenly said we were in the season of Lent. It was a slip of the tongue that gave many a laugh. However, one of my friends pointed out to me that at Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus and that is only important because of what He did at Easter. So, Advent really is the beginning of the season of Lent!

Now that we are in the 40 days (and six Sundays) leading up to Easter known as Lent, I want to talk about what that really means. For many, Lent is a time to give up something in our life to spend more time focused on our relationship with Jesus. Maybe that is a food fast, maybe a break from technology, or even a chance to break a habit of something you know shouldn't be a part of your life in the first place. This idea comes from the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert focusing on His relationship with God.

We may think, "I have been through Advent, Lent, even Easter plenty of times. I worked on my relationship with God \_\_\_\_ years ago. I don't need to give extra time now." The truth is, we are all in desperate need of connection to Jesus. None of us are perfect and can ALWAYS benefit from strengthening the most important relationship we have.

No matter how you celebrate or focus your life during this Lenten season, my prayer is that these next 46 days through this devotional and the time we choose to give to Jesus will change us in a way that brings us and others closer to the Savior we will celebrate on Easter Sunday.

May the Advent/Lent season begin!

Can I make a true, honest confession? I HATE laundry. Like hate-hate-hate-double hate-loath-entirely-hate laundry. Give me a sink full of dishes – two sinks full even – and I would rather do that then start a load of laundry. It just seems to be the chore that is always ongoing, takes all day long, and still never is actually finished. Did I mention I dislike laundry?

But, how blessed am I to have the ability to do laundry! To have clean, running water (indoors mind you) to wash my clothes. To have a new set of clothes to wear each and every day. To literally have baskets full of clothing each week that have helped keep my family safe, warm, dry and let's be honest... one of us is always looking stinking adorable in her little outfits. I am BLESSED to have laundry!

This has been something that God has put in front of me through conversations with friends, blogs and posts on social media, and devotional readings. I have recently realized that I have to stop myself when I find myself thinking, "Ugh, I don't want to do another load of laundry," and remember that this is not a chore - it is a blessing.

Most of us are very fortunate to have a roof over our head, running water in our homes, gas in our cars, food in our refrigerators, and money in the bank. But there are those around the world, and even right here in our own community, that don't have these simple every-day necessities. It can be easy for us to take for granted the things we deal with and enjoy every day. But let us not forget to give thanks for all of this.

***I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. (Psalm 9:1)***

***I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High. (Psalm 7:17)***

***Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. (Psalm 103:2)***

***Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20)***

*Lord, even in the seemingly mundane and uneventful areas of our lives, may we be grateful for what you have given to us. Let us not take these "small" things for granted, but let us instead give thanks. Help us to remember that all things are from you and to rejoice in your generosity.*

***Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)***

Scripture is full of passages about prayer. Paul writes in I Thessalonians "Be joyful and continually pray".

As a young Christian, it was a challenge to read and meditate on God's word. I didn't pray that often, perhaps once a day. That was the depth of my faith. I didn't understand how I could have a close relationship with God. I began attending a Bible study and I asked the leader this question, "How do I get more faith?". Unfortunately, he never really answered the question. But the answer is quite simple, your faith grows as you study His Word.

Our faith is tied to the Word of God. As we study the Bible, we mature and through the Holy Spirit we develop a faith that brings about a closer relationship with God. Daily devotions become a necessity. We eventually get to a point where we innately know that God loves us. Our thoughts through the day become prayers; prayers for help, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for forgiveness, for divine intervention, for direction, and for healing. Our thoughts are also praise and worship to our Father. We know that He is with us, even in the mundane routines of daily living. This mindfulness of God's presence at all times leads to peace and joy in our hearts. It's an ongoing conversation with our Creator. Joyce Meyer sums it up in one sentence, "Pray your way through the day."

Is your daily walk an ongoing conversation with your heavenly Father? Are you pursuing the close relationship that your Father wants to have with you?

*Father God, I am grateful that you are always with me and that you care about the details of my day.  
Thank you that your peace and joy are a constant in my life.*



The Holy Spirit spoke to me. Now that may sound a little odd to many of you, and I even had to hear it from a person nearby, but it WAS God speaking to me. He was there to reassure me.

For many years, I have coordinated a group going to the Dominican Republic. Every year I go through the same thing in my mind...will we be prepared to give a lesson, will the donations that we take get there properly, will everybody remain well in their health while there, will we get along, will we be received, and will we have enough funds to do all that we want? And every year God reassures. He says to me, "I've got you. I've got the group. I've got this. Remember, you're doing it for me. I'm with you on this." But, every year, I still fret and worry.

I was standing at the grocery cart in the gym Sunday morning when people brought in donations for the Dominican. A huge box labeled Play-Doh was put in the cart. I stood there and I stared at it. But then I went on to what I was doing. Then I just needed to go over to the cart and open it up. What was in that big box? Was it really Play-Doh or was it packed with school supplies or socks or something else? Well, when I opened it, there were 36 full size containers of Play-Doh. I opened one of the containers to stick my finger in to see if it was soft and fresh. It was perfect! Perfect Play-Doh in large containers. You see, one of our activities in the Dominican will be for the youngest children at the Joe Hartman School to use Play-Doh to learn about how special they are to God. Our theme is Identity. They will take that Play-Doh and put their thumbprint in it to see that God has made each one of them different. Then they will take that Play-Doh and outline their name because they are special and their name is special to them but more to God.

It is close to our departure for the D.R. and I am really frugal when it comes to spending any last-minute money; I was trying to figure how I was going to get Play-Doh at a good price. Nobody knew I needed Play-Doh. I don't even know if the team knew that this was one of the activities. But here it was, laid in front of me. I said to Don, who was standing next to me, "I have Play-Doh!" He looked at me a bit puzzled. And then I told him that nobody knew that I needed Play-Doh, NOBODY! And Don said, "Somebody does know. God knows that you needed that."

So you see, God can speak to us in the weirdest and the most unexpected times. He spoke through Play-Doh. That's not a coincidence. That's God. The Holy Spirit spoke to me to tell me and to reassure me that not only do we have a good lesson to present to the children, but that He's got us. Of course He has us covered!!

***And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (Matthew 8:26)***

***Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)***

*Dear Lord, watch over our team as we head to the Dominican Republic. Watch over us while we are there and open all of the hearts that we are ministering to, young and old. May they know that these are your thoughts and words that we are delivering. Thank you for choosing us to be your hands and feet. It is a privilege and honor to serve you. In your most precious and holy name, Amen.*

# Is He Worthy?

Deb Trojak

March 2

Revelation is one of my favorite books of the Bible and every time I go through it, I learn so many new things about God and Who He is. My favorite chapter this time through is Chapter 5. John has been taken up to heaven and is dazzled by God on His throne and the worship that is happening continuously. And then he notices a sealed scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne.

A search commences to find one who is worthy to open this scroll. And no one in heaven or on earth is found that can. At this point, John weeps.

Why? It's just a piece of paper, right? Oh, but it is so much more. This is the title deed to the earth. If no one can take the scroll, open it, and redeem it, then the world continues as it is — in the clutches of sin. And so, John weeps.

But then! One of the elders approaches him and says,

***'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne...He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.***

***(Revelation 5:5-7)***

Around the time I began studying Chapter 5, Laura introduced the song "Is He Worthy?" to our congregation. I honestly cannot sing this song without crying because it is such a beautiful expression of this passage of Scripture.

*"Is anyone worthy?  
Is anyone whole?  
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?  
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave  
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave.  
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?  
Of all blessing and honor and glory  
Is He worthy of this?  
He is."*

*(Lyrics: Andrew Peterson and Ben Shive)*

Why is He worthy? Because He is God. Because He became flesh and dwelt among us. Because He lived a perfect life. Because He paid the price for our sins with His blood. And the best part is that He will someday return to redeem and restore what is rightfully His. May we be eagerly awaiting and preparing for that day.

It's been a challenging year. Full of big decisions, uncharted waters, health concerns and family pain.

Wouldn't it be easy if we all thought the same, loved more, had grace?  
I guess we wouldn't need God as much.

I wonder on any given Sunday how many people in the sanctuary are in pain—silent, real, hard, scary, sad, gut-wrenching pain. Sometimes we might know a little from the prayer chain or our small group about some's struggle, but I suspect most often we haven't a clue.

If the Holy Spirit puts someone on your heart, check on that person, pray for that person, love that person, and don't judge or pretend to understand.

I made a mistake this year (one? who am I kidding?!)—I allowed my issues to consume me and ignored someone going through something much worse. Jesus wants us to be there for each other.

And the fascinating thing is that often helping someone (even confidentially) can give the greatest blessing.

So, when in doubt, reach down deep, get out of yourself and call, send a note, drop by, invite someone for lunch or respect his or her "no" and pray. Just don't ignore.

And please don't forget our pastors and staff and their families—a little less judgement and a lot more love!!

***Truly I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me.  
(Matthew 25:40)***

# A Redeemer from the Most Unlikely of Places

Michael Freeman

March 4

If you haven't read the book of Ruth in a while, I would encourage you to set this devotional aside for the 15 minutes it takes to read its four chapters and reacquaint yourself with this story. It will be time well spent.

The book of Ruth is set in the rebellious time of the Judges, where "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Sound familiar? Ruth is a story of deep loss, deep love, deep humility, and deep faith.

At the end of Chapter Three, Ruth has already asked Boaz to be her redeemer...an honor she has every right to claim. Now, with this request made, she goes home to wait. Boaz has promised to return. She knows his character and trusts that he will do what he promises. Her fate is entirely in his hands.

We all have experience waiting...waiting to get a test grade back...waiting for a tax return...waiting until we are allowed to hunt the Easter eggs...waiting on the birth of a child...waiting for a loved one to take his last breath. In fact, hospitals and doctor's offices have special rooms just for waiting. Waiting is a common part of life...but not all of us face waiting the same way. Some people are patient as they wait...others become agitated. Some people worry...others accept there is nothing they can do to change the outcome. Some prefer people around them to distract them from the waiting...others prefer to be left alone. No matter how we choose to spend our time waiting, waiting is inevitable.

In the story of Ruth, she also has a time of waiting to see what her fate will be. Will she get to marry Boaz or will a nearer relative take that honor from him? However, her waiting was not in vain. Through Ruth, God hints at the larger plan of redemption He has in store. God takes this gentile woman, weds her to the son of a Canaanite prostitute, and draws them into the family line of both King David and of Christ Himself (Matthew 1:5).

Through God's provision for Ruth, He shows that He always intended redemption to extend beyond the borders of the Jewish people. What good news for those of us now grafted into His family.

During this season, as we wait for the Good News of Easter, we can reflect on the story of Ruth. Our Redeemer has gone to secure our future. He has promised to return.

We are Ruth... the church is Ruth, waiting for our redeemer to return to claim us as His own. Like the citizens of Bethlehem, this world too is watching us while we wait. How we act during this time of waiting says as much about our faith in our Redeemer and our belief about His trustworthiness as it does about our own character.

Our Redeemer can be trusted; His word is law. God has provided a way to redeem our lives and add them to His story. We too can point to a redeemer from the most unlikely of places...our testimony is how we wait for His return.

***...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24)***



***Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)***

I am reminded of this proverb in a new ritual we have with our grandsons Mark and Gabriel. Each morning while we are waiting in the car at the bus stop, we pray for and with each child. This began a few weeks ago while my wife Rocky was on jury duty. She took Mark to the bus stop because I had to take Rebecca (my daughter) to work. She then sat there with him and prayed with him. Later I did the same thing with Gabriel and we have been keeping up the tradition with both boys.

As Christians, I believe we have the responsibility to mentor our children and grandchildren so that they become firm in their faith as new believers.

*Lord, show us how to train up our children and grandchildren,  
and let us be good examples of how to walk with God.*

## Compassion on a Coconut

### Carl, the Coconut Custodian

March 6

Hi, I'm Carl. Perhaps some of you don't know me yet. I've been attending CABC since June of 2019. For those of you who don't know my story, allow me to share it briefly.

I was going down the road one day when I fell into a ditch and found myself hurt, unable to move, and desperate for help. Day after day people passed by on the road, but none stopped to help. Finally, one day, a teenager saw me, stopped and picked me up, and brought me into CABC. He cleaned me up and gave me a smile (not to mention helped get me a job and Facebook followers too!).

Now, I don't mean to sound harsh, for I know perhaps I was just honestly unseen by many who passed me by (after all it is hard to spot a coconut in a ditch while driving even at the posted speed limit), but I still cannot help but think of the parable of the Good Samaritan even as I write this. At the end of the parable, Jesus asks a question.

***"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37)***

Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to this parable in one of his last speeches and said, "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Compassion. We are all called and commanded by Christ to go, love our neighbors, and have mercy on others. I am grateful for the teen who had compassion on a random coconut lying in a ditch and gave me a new meaning and purpose in life. I have seen countless members of this church have compassion on the various ministries and personal needs that are put forth on any given Sunday morning. Even the children in this congregation show compassion by bringing in their own allowance money to give as offering to benefit other children around the world. I applaud the work of this church to live out this command from Christ. And I encourage you all to continue to not only live out that compassion, but to seek out opportunities to show it. There just may be another "coconut" waiting to be found, cleaned up, and made new.

Do you ever feel in a fog? Have brain fog? Overwhelmed by everything you need to accomplish? Foggy about details regarding a certain interaction or task you are to complete?

Well, recently I was in a literal fog. So incredibly thick, I could see only a few feet in front of me. I was driving in to work at church after dropping my dear offspring at school and I was in a complete fog! The sun was trying to press through, and I knew it was forecasted to be a beautiful day, but the fog where I was driving was overwhelming. As I was driving, I began to slow down to be able to calculate my driving better and anticipate what was ahead that I could not see. With the sun trying to press through, I kept anticipating the moment when I would have a clear view of the road again. I could not see more than a minute ahead and did not know when it would be clear again.

Driving through this fog, my mind went to one of my favorite verses of late:

***For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)***

Even though I was driving through fog, I thought about how that was just my current circumstance. In five more minutes, I was climbing a hill, watching the fog dissipate and looking out over one of my favorite countryside views! Sun was shining and the fog was far behind me! How often do I get absorbed in my current circumstance that I forget, as I press through, there can be beauty on the other side? Far too often, if I am honest. God has the BIG picture!

I am a recovering controller. The Lord has worked in mighty ways to release the desire to control and even manipulate my circumstances. And much of that is due to my awareness that I truly do not have the control I once thought I did.

***For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:6)***

God has led me to a wisdom and understanding that I am not in control of my tomorrow, let alone the next moment. Will we give Him the control or will we try our own way of handling the struggles in our lives? A life fully surrendered to Christ may sometimes look like you are driving in fog, but you can trust He sees the fog and all that surrounds it. And remember, the view from outside the fog is breathtaking, so don't miss it! Press on and see what He has on the outside of the fog.

***Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)***

# Mourning By Morning

Chris Thomas

March 10

My husband passed away three months ago after a year-long battle with cancer.

**Mourning:** I feel...dispair, anger, fear, lonely, hurt, overwhelmed, anxious, alone, shattered, distorted, betrayed, detached, darkness, forgotten, lost, left, conflicted, scared, broken-hearted, tired, numb, physical pain, nothing.

**Morning:** God is...Faithful. He is my Comforter, Abba Father, Healer, Savior, Companion, Confidante, Rescuer, Friend, Helper, Refuge, Protector, Warrior, Strength, Future, Joy, Love, Freedom, stronger than my pain, keeping my heart beating, working all things for my good.

It's amazing how God reminds me all of the time that He is with me through this devastating time in my life. Sometimes it seems that I'll never make it and, just as I'm ready to give up, He sends miracles, both large and small. The small miracles happen all the time and are so precious to me. They are just little bits of love that make me smile when I realize what He's up to and that He's watching over me. The big miracles are His Angels on Earth. They reach out to me, pick me up, and remind me that I don't have to do this all by myself. Thank you to those sweet brothers and sisters in Christ! You have no idea what a blessing you are.

Don't you love it when you hear a song and you think that song was played just for you at exactly the right time in your life? A couple of songs I cling to are "Just Be Held" by Casting Crowns and "Tell Your Heart to Beat Again" by Danny Gokey. They, and many more, remind me of the promises that give me hope.

All of His blessings show up at the precise moment I need to be reminded of His perfect love, His great faithfulness, and His strong arms. I guess it's true and I need to keep telling myself that "It's OK if I'm not OK." Just for now.

Great is Thy Faithfulness, Mourning by Morning His mercies I see.

***Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.***

***They are new every morning;***

***great is your faithfulness.***

***I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion;***

***therefore I will wait for him.'***

***(Lamentations 3:22-24)***

For some reason, the article for this Lenten devotion has been harder to write than previous ones. Not sure why...maybe too many other distractions. But as I have read various portions of Scripture dealing with the Easter story, one phrase in Matthew 28 sort of stood out.

***The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you. (Matthew 28:5-7)***

As I read this, I thought "Great Commission." Jesus has just risen from the dead and emerged from the tomb. He is no longer there! The first words from the angel at the tomb were, "He is not here; he has risen...go quickly and tell his disciples." (Matthew 28:6-7) And then Jesus met his disciples in Galilee and told them further down in this chapter, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

Are you starting to get the picture? Angels tell the ladies at the tomb to go and tell that Christ is risen. Jesus shows the disciples that he is risen and tells them to go and make disciples. Tell the world that He is risen.

Have you done your part? As a disciple of Jesus, have you told "the world" that He has risen and what that has meant for you as a follower? Use this Easter season to recommit to telling the world about the risen Savior.

*Father God, give us a bold spirit through your Holy Spirit that we may speak  
of your risen Son and how that new life in Him has brought new life to us.  
Bless our Church this Easter season.  
Give us the boldness to "go".*



# Where Do You Come From?

Keith Bortner

March 12

One of my hobbies involves countless hours of reading about dead people. Death certificates, obituaries, census records, newspaper articles/clippings, old letters from family members. I find them all fascinating. Genealogical research might not be something that everyone is interested in but I love the challenges of finding old documents that map out family connections.

Nearly all of my family came to this area of Pennsylvania from Germany in the early to mid 1700s and most were farmers. It's incredibly interesting to me to see where my family has come from, seeing who has come before, where they lived, what they jobs they did. Who had aging parents or grandparents living with them? If someone had made different choices about where to work or go to church or which farm to purchase many years ago, it's possible that I wouldn't be here today!

It's also interesting to see what our spiritual heritage is. Who led you to Christ? Did you come from a family where a relationship with Christ was important? Were parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles involved in shaping your faith? How many Sunday School teachers, pastors, and other church leaders influenced you and who you've become today? So many people have come before us in the church, and if someone many years ago had not decided to walk with Christ, would you be where you are, spiritually, today?

2 Timothy 1:3-5 reminds us of this. I hope that my children, grandchildren, and maybe great-grandchildren will someday be able to look back on my life and see a life of sincere faith and love. I hope that generations beyond them, even though they won't have known me, will be glad for a spiritual heritage that we are a part of building today. We have the opportunity today to make a difference in future generations, both in our families and the families around us.

Let's cling to the faith that we have that began 2000 years ago with our Lord and a cross and an empty tomb and continue to keep it alive in our relationships today.

***I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2 Timothy 1:3-5)***

***If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself. (2 Timothy 2:13)***

This past fall I was studying 1 & 2 Kings along with the major and minor prophets. These are not the easiest books to read because they chronicle the downward spiral of the nation of Israel and the inevitable judgment that followed. However, as I was reading those books, it became so apparent to me how steadfast God is.

In the midst of Israel's continued fickleness, God was ever-present, compassionate, and He did what He said He was going to do. God doesn't change.

***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)***

He is who He has always been and always will be. How comforting is that?!?! As a human, change is inevitable both physically and spiritually. I change all the time. (I can change my mind about 20 times in five seconds...just ask Josh what it's like when I'm trying to decide what outfit to wear.)

As a Christian, it is necessary for me to change. If I am to become more like Christ, I can't stay the same sinful person that I am. Growth requires change. To top it all off, sometimes life just happens. Circumstances around me are constantly shifting, in spite of my best efforts to keep everything copacetic.

Yet through it all, He is faithful. I can rely on the fact that He is never going to be different. God is always going to be a loving Father who is in control regardless of how chaotic my circumstances seem. He will never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). And I can be assured that He will remain faithful to His promises.

It might be nutty... but hear me out. During my brief time at CABC, I have had the opportunity to observe how people interact around here and we're not as different as you might think.

Coconuts are known for being a bit hard on their exterior...a bit rough around the edges...designed, purposefully, to keep people out. If, in a moment of weakness, you have ever tried to crack into one of us, you will find that it takes a bit of work. We don't open up without a fight. And, if we do open up, it may get a bit messy.

I have found some people are like that too. They may have an outside that tends to keep people at a distance. People may look hard on the outside. From the outside, some people may not look worth the effort.

True, it may take some work to get to know them. But outer appearances don't tell the whole story. It reminds me of something Samuel once said, that "man looks at the outer appearance." Now, I know he was talking about a good, strong-looking outer appearance but the same can be true about a gruff outer appearance...or a "fine" outer appearance. "I'm fine, you're fine, she's fine, we're all fine!" A "fine" exterior can just as easily hide a broken and searching heart as a strong or gruff exterior. You see, our gaze doesn't always penetrate the way God's does. Samuel went on to say that "the Lord looks at the heart." What we show to the world isn't all there is to us.

That brings me to the second point. You know what else is true about coconuts? Under that rough, hard exterior lies a sweet core. Like the sweetness inside each coconut, every person in the whole world is made in the image of God. What's more, every Christian carries the spark of the Holy Spirit in them. To love others is to love God. Jesus says that loving each other is the way that the world will know that we are His disciples.

***A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 12:34-35)***

So the next time you run into someone who is difficult to love, remember your good friend, Carl the Coconut Custodian. We are all worth the effort to love. In fact, the Master commands it.

***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)***

I don't know about you...but I think the best way to honor Christ's sacrifice at Easter is to do our best to live like Him...to love others in such a way that they don't see us but see Christ within us.

***If anyone says, 'I know Him,' but does not keep His commandments, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone keeps His word, the love of God has been truly perfected in Him. By this we know that we are in Him: Whoever claims to abide in Him must walk as Jesus walked. (1 John 2:4-6)***

# Am I Listening When God Speaks?

Deb Seibert

March 17

I like to take notes from sermons then record some of the teaching points in my journal as a reminder. So one day last summer I was recording some of these notes from our pastor's sermon, "What part of my life shows that I love Jesus?" The corresponding verse was 2 Corinthians 5:14, which tells us the love of Christ controls or compels us—His love fuels our passion and motivates us. I finished my writing that day, asking God to work through me to help others. Then I was on to a day of errands, a long list of things to accomplish.

Prior to leaving, I prayed over the order of my tasks then got in my car to head to Nunda fruit farm. God arranged my schedule to stop there first so my path would cross with a dear young Mennonite mother. She was buying a peck of peaches and apples so I asked her what she planned to do with all the fruit. Her reply was that she has ten children and she was buying the fruit (seconds) merely to eat—they would go through it quickly. I said, "God bless you!" and she replied, "Thank you, we need God's blessings!" I paid for my peaches, got in my car and headed to Hanover for the rest of my errands.

But as I drove off, I heard God speak, "You have missed the opportunity that I gave you to help others." Suddenly it dawned on me...why was I just kind to this family—why did I not pay for her fruit? She has ten children! Tears started rolling down my cheeks and I wondered why the thought had not come to me sooner. I had a little money in my wallet but I thought that by the time I turned around and went back she would be gone. NO—no excuses; the Spirit was working on my heart.

Immediately I turned my car around and when I arrived back to the parking lot of Nunda, I was overjoyed to see the dear mother in her car. I felt my heart soften as I heard God say, "Give her the money that is in your wallet—ALL of it!" I approached her car, tapped on the window and said, "This morning I told God I would help someone, and you are the one He chose."

I handed her the money and she thanked me with a surprised look on her face. But she was not as thankful as I. I got in my car, thanking Him for working through me and not allowing me to miss the opportunity which He had provided to bring Him glory.

*Lord, thank you for the great example of Jesus.  
He always listened to you and did what you commanded,  
even to the point of giving it all—  
His very life—  
for each one of us.*

# **The Hope Found in the Easter Message!**

**Pastor Bob Coddington**

**March 18**

With the birth of Jesus came a Hope for mankind. As Jesus began His teaching, this spark of hope ignited a glowing flame. Then came Calvary and the day we know as "Good Friday." With this event, the flame was replaced with fear, the likes of which had not been seen before.

The darkness, which was seen by those at Calvary during the Crucifixion, could be seen in the hearts and minds of those witnessing that event.

When we are motivated by confusion and fear, we tend to lose our hope. The only thing that can restore hope and eliminate fear is the Easter Message.

Right in the very midst of the things that would bring this fear and confusion we find the Scriptures telling us, "Don't be afraid."

***For God has not given His people the spirit of fear, but He has given to them a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)***

God's message is clear, then and now.

***Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, you are mine! (Isaiah 43:1)***

Here are some additional scriptures that you might find helpful.

***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)***

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)***

***Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)***

*Dear Lord, Thanks for the Scriptures that remind us that you are in control,  
that our fear can be minimized if we but look to the Heavens  
and place our trust totally in You,  
the HOPE of all mankind.*



# What is the Meaning of Easter?

Terry Hess

March 19

Easter is an annual celebration observed by much of the Christian church, commemorating Christ's resurrection. Modern observance of Easter represents a convergence of three traditions.

1. The Hebrew Passover, celebrated during Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew Lunar calendar.
2. The Christian commemoration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which took place at the feast of Passover.
3. The Norse Ostara, or Eostra, from which the name Easter is derived. This is a pagan festival of spring which fell at the vernal equinox, March 21.

Prominent symbols in this celebration of the resurrection of nature after the winter were rabbits, signifying fecundity, which means the ability to produce an abundance of offspring or new growth. It can also mean the ability to produce many new ideas. Another symbol is eggs, colored like the rays of the returning sun and the northern lights or aurora borealis. The eggs also represent new life.

The fixing of the date of the celebration of Jesus' resurrection was the occasion of much controversy in the early church. One group insisted that the festival fall on a Sunday, since the Lord rose on the first day of the week. The opposition insisted that it be coordinated with the Jewish Passover, which might fall on any day of the week.

In AD 325, the Council of Nicaea decreed that the resurrection would ordinarily be celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox. If, however, the full moon fell on a Sunday, the celebration was to be postponed a week to avoid coincidence with the Jewish Passover. This method of reckoning the date of Easter, which is still in use, means that Easter may fall at any time within the 35 day period between March 22 and April 25.

Regardless of all this information, an easier way to describe Easter is this: Easter is the most important and oldest festival of the Christian church and it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

***In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.***

To address anyone as “Dearly Beloved” should, by grace, and due course, reveal a spray of ‘playful light’ about the text. These days, however, such an address may appear as far from an inkstand as 1976, when the term ‘inkjet’ was first coined. Within our generation pens are no more quickened, neither yielded or wielded to write much at all. Cursive writing seems cursed by the cursor and any *playful light* gets produced by some “icon” or “emoji”. And when that is mixed with a velocity so adverse to one’s being still, I can only throw fits against such wit foreign to my own. Then the Holy Spirit, once so intercessional to the letter of conversation, seems to succumb even further to my ineptitude with and dislike of electronic devices. Would I then grieve the Holy Spirit?

So I retreat to the book shelf, in search of some comfort, outside the realm of cell phones and the world of pixels. There is my Lord’s heart, as revealed to Elisabeth Elliott. She has written in the context of God’s Word on being still.

“We can know only that Eternal Love is wiser than us, and we bow in adoration of that Loving Wisdom. *Response* is what matters. All events serve His Will.” (Elisabeth Elliott, *Be Still My Soul*, 2003)

Now in all this dressage, when the Pastor and others face the congregation, quite nearly pleading for contributions to our Lenten Devotional, it behooves us to Respond.

Dearly Beloved, take the time to perhaps pen a letter. It may become your joy to share in the ministry of our annual devotional. It bolsters our growth, unity, and fellowship here at CABC.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

*In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:7-8)*

Lately in my leisurely reading there has been an underlying theme of God's grace. Maybe it's the Holy Spirit gently nudging me to extend that same grace to some squirrely kids at school, the impatient driver who was riding my bumper on the way to work, and the loved ones God has blessed me with. Grace is God's free gift of unmerited favor and love to those who accept Him. Receiving the grace of God does not mean we simply live our lives as we please, being thankful that we're forgiven. Those who accept His free gift of salvation are instructed to extend grace to others.

In Max Lucado's book, Grace, More than We Deserve, Greater than We Imagine, the author describes the horrible massacre of innocent Amish children while attending the West Nickel Mines Amish School in Lancaster County, PA. As neighbors to Lancaster, you may recall the tragic event of October 2, 2006. In the days that followed, I remember watching the news and hearing local and national commentators express amazement over the Amish community's testimony of grace. They remained peaceful and composed, while extending kindness and forgiveness. Lucado writes, "Half of those in attendance of the shooter's funeral were Amish. An Amish midwife, who helped deliver several of the schoolgirls who died, prepared a meal for the shooter's family."

Our world asks, "How could they do that in the midst of great loss, hurt, and grief?"

Lucado explains, "Grace is not blind. It sees the hurt full well. But grace chooses to see God's forgiveness even more. It refuses to let hurts poison the heart. Where grace is lacking, bitterness abounds. Where grace abounds, forgiveness grows."

Lucado references Hebrews 12:15, ***See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*** The Amish community, despite the painful loss of loved ones, demonstrated God's grace to the world in powerful and practical ways.

***For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son." (Hebrews 1:1-5)***

*Jesus is everything!  
Amen*

When life seems to be a bit bumpy, I think of a line from one of my favorite songs, "even though I love this crazy life, sometimes I wish it was a smoother ride."

Life can be really hard sometimes. I struggle with the stresses of traumatic life events, everyday life problems, injustices and the unforgiving nature of today's society. I pray for peace/love and answers for the hardships in life and sometimes I feel like I am alone or that God does not hear me.

While my prayer may not be answered today, I can still see God's hand in the day-to-day life with the presence of a good friend, the beauty of the sunrise, the kindness of a stranger, or the adoration of the family pet. All of these things bring joy to my heart, reminding me that even in my difficult times He is with me and is showing himself through these beauties of life.

***So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)***

Isn't it wonderful to know that even when you feel disheartened, God is there to strengthen and lift you up? Look for him in all aspects of your life and you will find His presence, even in the smallest of ways.

# Precious Memories

Emma Turner

March 25

I feel like I've been taking a ride on a roller coaster without leaving the couch. It is amazing how just sorting through old pictures and clippings can cause such emotional ups and downs. I really want to make a family scrapbook.

Ah-h-h, I love this picture of my dad sitting there under a big oak tree, looking so proudly at that huge pile of sweet, juicy watermelons he had grown. I can almost taste them now and feel the juice running down my arm. Here's one of Jim at the age of 12, holding his baby sister. Jim always told me this picture was taken within days of his dad being killed in a car/train accident.

Rummaging again through the collection of snapshots of my life, I see the country church in which I grew up. My favorite spot was on the piano bench next to my mother as she played for services. At this church I trusted Christ as my Savior from sin at the age of eight and a number of years later walked down the aisle after church one Sunday morning to become Jim's bride.

Memories cascade around me on the couch as I remember again the day each of our children was born and so quickly they grew up. How wonderfully the Lord blessed us those years in serving Him together as a family. Then, one by one, the children were gone, on with education, marriage, and serving Him elsewhere.

The same pictures that bring so many memories of happy years with family and friends also bring tears to my eyes. How can a full life of God's abundant blessings bring so much sadness now? I feel like in looking at the pictures I relived my whole life, and so many people I have known and loved are no longer here. They have gone ahead of me. And then it hits me: the best is yet to come!

***...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)***

***As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. (Psalm 17:15)***

***Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)***

This Lenten season I'm thankful for CABC, our pastors, staff, and church family, who model grace day after day to one another, the local community, and various ministry partners. As we celebrate God's grace, may we be messengers and imitators of God's grace. May we love, accept, and forgive others, just as God did for us.

"To accept grace is to accept the vow to give it." Max Lucado



A December 2017 leaflet from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association showed a sign in Oslo, Norway that read "Truth Is Flexible". The article pointed out that Norway is a "beautiful, friendly and prosperous country", but has drifted dramatically from its long and rich Christian heritage.

So, is truth actually "flexible"? Can we truly define truth for ourselves? Can my truth be different from your truth? And finally, is there such a thing as absolute truth? Dr. James Dobson of "Focus on the Family" has said, "If we don't believe in absolute truth, then nothing is absolutely true!"

In the Bible we read that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1: 17b) and in John 17:17, "Your Word is truth." John 1:14 states "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.....full of grace and truth." Then, in John 14:6, Jesus declares, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus = Truth!

John 8:31 and 36 further state that "...you will know the truth and the truth will set you free...so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." The truth—Jesus Christ—has set us free from the law of sin and death. His sacrifice on the cross has made the way for us to be "free indeed". Dr. Tony Evans calls that "sho'nuff free"! Which translated means—yes, definitely, really and truly FREE!

As we journey through life, we can know the truth that sets us free. His name is Jesus! May we be prepared to share this absolute truth by word and action with a world searching for truth and freedom. And may the Lord bless you as you search and the study the Word (the Truth) every day.

*Father, we thank you that you sent the Word—Jesus—to earth to show us the way. We are grateful for the truth that sets our spirits free. Continue to help us and strengthen us in the truth as we journey through life. And may we be prepared to share the truth with those you send our way. In Jesus name, Amen.*

For the past six years, Tim Tebow has hosted an event called Night to Shine. It is a "Prom" for special needs adults, both young and old. This prom is held in 70 countries and in over 300 churches. The genuine love and dedication Tim Tebow has for special needs people is beautiful. His mission is to help us all realize that the life of every person on this earth is valuable.

For the past couple of years, I've been following the Tim Tebow Foundation on Facebook and I was always so moved by the pure joy on the faces of the "Kings and Queens" of the prom that I pledged to one day be a part of that tremendous event.

Well, this year I did. My middle granddaughter, a friend of most of us, Nathan Renoll and I participated as "dates" for the prom guests. All I can say is WOW! You can see the photos and videos of these events on the TTF Facebook page, but nothing compares to seeing in person the love, compassion and care that the over 300 volunteers at our local event showed each and every one of the guests as they were heralded in on a red carpet and then participated in a variety of events throughout the evening. The entire night was covered in the showering of God's love. Those of us who have volunteered at the CABC Down Syndrome Camp understand and appreciate the effect special needs people have on us all.

To see the smiles, the laughter, the dancing, the uninhibited expressions on each face is so humbling. I looked at each guest (over 100 showed up!) and felt a little sad for the lives they have to live, but realized that they are living good lives. They are happy, protected and alive! It was the simplest treats that brought them the most joy. Joy. That's the best word to describe the evening. And that's their mission to us—to show and remind us to seek and to hold on to the amazing joy in our lives.

***I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:14)***

## Are You Prepared to Give an Account?

Laura Courtney

March 30

I thoroughly enjoy quotes. I have a special notebook dedicated to my favorites that I have heard or read through teachers and professors, friends and family, books and movies, songs and poems, scriptures and pastors, etc. & etc. There are two that have continued to come back to my mind over the years. Both are related to the same idea and yet are from two completely separate people, places and times.

The first is from a professor I had in college, Dr. Mary Ann Meiners. She would routinely start each class with a short devotional. One day she said, "When God takes our breath back, we will be accountable as to how we have lived with it." (And yes this is an exact quote because I loved it instantly and of course wrote it down in my notes and later transferred to my quote journal.)

The second comes from Jeffrey Dahmer. "If a person doesn't think that there is a God to be accountable to, then what's the point of trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges...I have since come to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God, and I believe that I, as well as everyone else, will be accountable to Him." He stated this in a news interview, after having come to faith while in prison.

Both, in my mind, reflect this simple verse in scripture:

***So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12)***

Genesis 2:7 states that God "breathed into [man's] nostrils the breath of life, and [he] became a living being." Yet one day, when we "all stand before God's judgment seat" (Romans 14:10), we will have to give that breath back to him. And we will have to be prepared to give an account and accept responsibility for what we've done with that breath.

I won't start a theological debate as to where Jeffrey Dahmer—having committed some of the worst crimes in history, yet finally proclaiming his faith and acceptance of Jesus as his Lord and Savior—is currently spending eternity. But I often think about this question: If a person like Jeffrey Dahmer can acknowledge and fully expect to be held accountable for the actions he committed in his life, am I ready to give an account of what I've done?

Are you?

*Heavenly Father, you breathed your own breath into us and gave us life.*

*Now please, dear Lord, help us not to waste it.*

Very early in the morning, when the women in His life found the stone but not the body of the Lord, there first was heard in a vision: "He is not here, for He has risen." And more glory came, remembering His Word.

Then Peter's heart, burning inside him, with the 'sifting' coinciding, ran to see what he could not yet understand. 'Til Jesus broke bread with thanksgiving, they could not tell he was living. There the joy of every Gospel song began.

I will sing.

'Twas later on, that very day, nearly seven miles away, two would share within the company of the Lord. He restored to them their vision. They saw who had been risen. And more glory came, remembering His Word.

Did not their hearts burn there inside them, when the Master walked beside them, whose Holy Face they could not recognize? Until He broke bread with thanksgiving, they could not see He was living. There the joy in that He opened up their eyes.

I will sing.

So now we also have today, where by grace we have been saved, through our faith unto the glory of the Lord. "Peace, be with you!" our commission. To tell all that He is risen. And more glory comes, remembering His Word.

Do not our hearts burn here inside us, while the Master walks beside us—as we wait to see His promises fulfilled? Until we break bread with thanksgiving, in the Kingdom of His living—where the life of every trusting heart is willed?

I will sing!

# What's in My Cup?

Pat Bentzel

April 1

I love this analogy!

You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and bumps into you or shakes your arm, making you spill your coffee everywhere.

Why did you spill the coffee?

"Because someone bumped into me!!!"

Wrong answer.

You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup.

Had there been tea in the cup, you would have spilled tea.

*Whatever is inside the cup is what will spill out.*

Therefore, when life comes along and shakes you (which WILL happen), whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it, until you get rattled.

*So we have to ask ourselves... "what's in my cup?"*

When life gets tough, what spills over?

Joy, gratefulness, peace and humility?

Anger, bitterness, harsh words and reactions?

Life provides the cup, YOU choose how to fill it.

Today let's work towards filling our cups with gratitude, forgiveness, joy, words of affirmation and kindness, gentleness and love for others.

***May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)***



We consider the United States Constitution to be the foundational document of our democracy. The fact that it exists is a great example of unity, teamwork and agreement on a key belief at that time in history—willingness to sacrifice and fight for freedom. Thirteen separate states sent 39 delegates to create this historic document in September 1787 and upon completion, the voters in those different states ratified our constitution in 1789. That this was accomplished is an amazing feat.

All people found common ground as they worked together through countless debates, discussions and compromises. In the end, the result was something from which all citizens benefited—including the many generations that followed. Writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul wanted to stress the importance of spiritual unity and working together for the cause of Christ.

***Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2: 1-3)***

As I think of the many ways we serve together here at CABC, we too experience that chance to come together for a greater purpose—thanking God for what He has done for each of us and honoring Him by allowing His will to be done through us. He has brought our many varied gifts together and through much prayer and the direction of the Holy Spirit, He will combine those gifts in ways that will benefit His kingdom. As we combine and share together the different passions, viewpoints, talents and perspectives our Body possesses, we can allow ourselves to be used for the purposes our Lord has ordained as most vital.

The writers, participants and creators of the United States Constitution experienced a time of coming together for a cause greater than themselves. In our time on this earth and at CABC during these days, we have the opportunity to share the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, with those who need to know of his gift of everlasting life.

We recognize, at this Easter season, the incredible gift Jesus has given mankind through his love, sacrifice, suffering and resurrection. May we show our gratitude and honor Him by coming together, esteeming others better than ourselves, and laboring together for His kingdom work.

*Dear Lord, help me to celebrate the gift of eternity with you by allowing you to direct my path. I thank you for my brothers and sisters here at CABC and I pray you will use us in ministry together—joyful ministry that will impact our local community and in the places where you will lead us. Amen.*

Lori and I find ourselves in a chapter of life where beginnings and endings are intersecting. Within the past twelve months, we witnessed the beginning of life for two granddaughters. During this same time, my mother has continued in the physical and mental decline that takes her closer to the end of her days. From this unique vantage point, I have noticed a few things.

Waiting holds a prominent place in the experience of both beginning and end. The last few weeks and days prior to birth are often filled with an anxious anticipation. So much has been prepared—clothing, furniture, work and home schedule changes. Now, the family waits for things to get started. When will this baby arrive? Waiting is a reality for the end of life as well. Tasks that can be performed quickly and independently become few and far between. Less mobility results in an increase of times when one must simply wait.

A second factor common to both beginning and end could be summed up in the phrase “hard work required.” As it is often remarked, there is a reason the birth process is called “labor.” Mothers know there are feelings of relief and joy with the beginning of this new life, coupled with the feeling of being run over by a truck (a first-hand report I heard during the past year). Hard work continues at home, as feeding, sleeping, and changing schedules may overlap and mix together in the first few weeks. Conversely, approaching the end of life demands hard work of a different form. Formerly simple tasks can take on a level of complexity that results in fatigue. It takes hard work to remain positive and keep trying when the activities that were taken for granted are now challenges nearly beyond ability.

***He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.’ (Revelation 21:6)***

The above verse from John’s vision in Revelation reminds me that God is Lord of both beginning and end. Just as He will bring this world to an end and establish a new heaven and earth, so, also, He is present with us throughout the span of our lives. I can trust that He will bring to completion all of the loose ends of this world, including those in my life.

Will you trust Him with your beginning, end, and everything in between?

2019 was a challenging and change-filled year for our family. High school graduation for one, college graduation for another, second-guessing choices, new starts, old frustrations, job searches, health concerns, heart concerns. More often than not, when someone asked, "How are you?" my reply was, "Holding steady."

I think of that and wonder if I should have been more positive. Maybe. But the truth is that our year was filled with unrelenting, unyielding, and unmoving situations, and only the passing of time affected them.

Did my reply of "holding steady" indicate a lack of faith in God's faithful provision, care and unceasing love for us? Did it reflect a lack of appreciation for all the good and positive moments in the year? Were my words reflective of a negative heart attitude?

And yet, what really fit, when asked how I was doing, was that I was holding steady. It was (and still is) an honest reply. As I continue to think about this, and pray about it, I understand that there is an underlying strength that is in my reply. And it is not my strength.

My stress, worries and fears might have been in my mind, but my "holding steady" was (and is) a profession of faith and a verbal confession of steadfastness from my heart. But not in myself, not in my circumstances, and certainly not in my ability to affect a thing.

***You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. (Isaiah 26:3)***

***He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.  
(Psalm 112:7)***

***My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul.  
(Psalm 108:1)***

I think it is okay to hold steady, if we are holding steady to the One who never changes, who loves us more than we will ever truly understand, and whose faithfulness is great... Immanuel, God with us.

*Lord, help us to see not what our circumstances may be, but that You are with us through them. Please restore our hope when things seem hopeless and secret your joy in our hearts, that we may continue to step forward in faith, to attend to the tasks that you bring us each day. Amen.*

***When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34)***

God has led our daughter, Sara, to have an active faith. Not too far from her home in New York City, she is volunteering for an organization that works with immigrants. She accompanies them to court where they try to get a court date in order to stay in this country permanently. She doesn't know how they came to be here: work visa, tourist or illegally. She just knows they want to call America their home.

If you walk a few blocks from Sara's apartment, you can look out in the harbor and see the Statue of Liberty – there, welcoming all who want to come. I look and see our Father saying, "Come." We are reminded that all are foreigners in this land but He continues to welcome us in. He doesn't care who we are, what we've done, or where we've been. He stands with open arms, wanting to love and care for us. We just have to come.

Like Jesus, her work and her joy is to be a friendly face. To show them that someone cares. To extend a hand of comfort and a heart of encouragement.

*Father, in these troubled times, let us stand with open arms  
and welcome in those who are foreigners (by culture, race or land).  
Let us help them know someone cares, that we are a refuge from the storm. Amen.*

Ever since Pastor Todd did several sermons about Psalm 23 last year, I have started to read more about sheep and how the shepherd cares for them. The analogies of how sheep are cared for by the shepherd has given me a better understanding of what my Lord wants me to know and do. I really enjoyed the story of a bummer lamb from author Sheila Walsh in her book, Loved Back To Life:

Every once in a while, an ewe will give birth to a lamb and reject it. There are many reasons she may do this. If the lamb is returned to the ewe, the mother may even kick the poor animal away. Once an ewe rejects one of her lambs, she will never change her mind. These little lambs will hang their heads so low that it looks like something is wrong with its neck. Their spirit is broken. These lambs are called "bummer lambs." Unless the shepherd intervenes, that lamb will die, rejected and alone.

So, do you know what the shepherd does? He takes that rejected little one into his home, hand-feeds it and keep it warm by the fire. He will wrap it up with blankets and hold it to his chest so the bummer can hear his heartbeat. Once the lamb is strong enough, the shepherd will place it back in the field with the rest of the flock.

But that sheep never forgets how the shepherd cared for him when his mother rejected him. When the shepherd calls for the flock, guess who runs to him first? That is right, the bummer sheep. He knows his voice intimately. It is not that the bummer lamb is loved more, it just knows intimately the one who loves it. It's not that it is loved more, it just believes it because it has experienced that love one on one.

So many of us are bummer lambs, rejected and broken. But He is the good Shepherd. He cares for our every need and holds us close to His heart so we can hear His heart beat. We may be broken but we are deeply loved by the Shepherd.

Our good shepherd is always working in my life and loving me!

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5,6)***

***“Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.” (Song of Songs 2:15 NIV)***

When my daughter Sara was a toddler, we developed a ritual for the times when her feelings would be hurt. She would come to me and, in sobbing wails, explain some insult from one of her playmates. I would kiss my finger, touch it to her heart, and then place a Band-Aid over it. The tears would immediately stop and she'd bounce away to play, never recalling the incident again. If only our emotional wounds were so quickly resolved in our adult lives!

Most of us hold our emotions close; we don't want to appear weak or overly sensitive. Too often, it's the little unspoken offenses (foxes) that build into a destructive result. Bitterness and unforgiveness can consume a relationship. This is especially true within the church, where we hold a higher expectation of being loving and sympathetic. It's never a good feeling to learn that you've offended someone and it may seem easier to avoid an awkward conversation when you feel insulted. However, when the air is cleared, our relationships are spiritually stronger and we are freed from the burden. Being vigilant in mending our wounds strengthens the church and encourages good fruits. Certainly not every minor insult need addressed, but when a thought becomes pervasive, we need to conquer it before it takes root.

As a sensitive person, I have learned that getting beyond a hurt is a conscious choice. When I invited God into the process, I was amazed at how easy it is to accomplish. Thankfully, we have God's promise to "bind up our wounds" if we turn it over to him. There is strength in being vulnerable enough to acknowledge a hurt, share it, and most importantly, release it to God.

***“He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3 NLT)***

Is there an offense burdening your heart today? Are you willing to step out in faith to resolve it? Will you accept your loving Father's promise to heal?

***“All of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tender-hearted and keep a humble attitude.” (1 Peter 3:8 NIV)***

*Father God, give me the courage to show a tender heart and make amends when I've wounded a friend. May I have your strength when I need to bring an offense to light. Cover our wounds and make a path to peace as we seek to love one another.*

## Do You See What I See?

Jess Slenker

April 10

Yes, I know this is a line to a Christmas song. Yes, I know this is a Lenten Devotional. But when God shows you something, you don't question it. This title has been going through my head for a little more than a year now. I really wish that everyone could see what I see.

I have the opportunity to teach the little ones who come to Christ and I get to see His light shining through them. As I'm typing this, so many faces are flashing in front of me and it moves me to tears. It's all because of what God has done in their lives. The thing that amazes me the most is how unashamed they are to share the Gospel. So many times I have been teaching and looking at their precious faces and expressions and can see how much they truly love God.

My favorite part of teaching is talking about salvation. Those who have declared Jesus as their Savior have the biggest smiles on their faces! You can see they want everyone else to experience that same love they know.

I sometimes joke that I'd like to wear a camera because I want everyone else to see what I see. I am so honored that I get a glimpse at what God sees. I see the outward expression of what is on the inside, but God gets to see their hearts.

Just like kids, we make mistakes, get off path, and do things we ought not to do, but God sees our hearts and that we believe in who He is! He doesn't see that ugly human nature; He sees our smiling faces beaming with His love and grace. Each day we grow closer to Him and more like Him, just like our children. I am so proud of the kids I have the privilege to spend time with and God uses them every day to teach me new things about Himself! Do you see what I see, or better yet, do you see what God sees?

***In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)***