



CABC

Lenten Devotional

EASTER 2023

This lent season is surely a new one for my family. About one month prior to the beginning of lent in 2023, we officially welcomed 3 new members to the Trojak clan. They have been a part of our family and our church family for the past 2.5 years, but it became official through adoption this year. It is one thing to wait and hope for something, and it is a whole other thing to finally see it come to completion. It has been a great, emotional journey that I am not sure I have even fully processed.

One of the pieces I have spent time with is what it means to choose someone to join your family. Even though I had some choice in bringing our three biological kids into the world, there is something different about being asked by a judge if I would commit to raising other children as my own. Our lawyer asked if I understood that I was taking responsibility for their future. He even asked if I understood that these children would be included not only in my life, but also in my inheritance when I am no longer here. It is more than just a name, we were welcoming them into our everything.

God did the same for us. We were created by God, but we screwed up the relationship with Him. We didn't earn or deserve His favor, but in the end are given this gift of being adopted into His family.

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Romans 8:17

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Take some time to sit with this truth. If you have chosen to believe in Jesus Christ, you are one of His children who has access to all of the inheritance that comes with being in the family of God. That should cause us to live differently, but at its core we become one of His because of the choice and love of God. That is a truth worth holding onto.

Dear Christ American Baptist Church,

My name is Norman Humber and I have the honor to serve as the CEO of LifePath Christian Ministries. I was asked if I'd be willing to provide a Lenten devotion for a compilation booklet. Here is what came to mind:

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:12-13)

Christians around the world are celebrating Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent. Lent takes place over the forty days before Easter and is traditionally a time of repentance and preparation for the celebration of Easter.

The goal of the Lenten season is to draw closer to God. There are many traditions surrounding this season, but whatever you do, it is great to start by reflecting on your life, and the parts of your life where you feel disconnected from God and his people.

For example, you may have heard about people giving something up for Lent—often things that bring pleasure, like sweets, alcohol or tv.

If you plan to give up something, I encourage you to take a different approach. If you are giving something up, do it as an intentional act of worship and sacrifice to God. This year, I am going to try to put away my phone when I get up in the morning and take that time for intentional prayer.

Giving something up is just one way to observe Lent. Maybe, like me, you hope to add something into your life—a time of prayer, or Bible reading. Some believers take these forty days to read through one of the gospels. Another way of observing Lent is through giving—time, money, or talents.

Again, your goal should be to see this an act of worship and sacrifice, not just as a good thing to do.

As a kid, I vaguely remember celebrating the Lenten season. Now, don't get me wrong, I loved Easter. Easter was hidden eggs, Easter baskets, Easter candy, a giant ham at my grandparent's house, hanging out with cousins, brand new fancy clothes, and celebratory hymns. "Up from the grave He arose!" But, the Lenten season was bizarre as a kid. I remember going to school with the smudge of ashes on my forehead (embarrassing). I remember lots of extra evenings spent in church services (boring). I remember that, all of a sudden, school seemed to serve fish every Friday (gross, I hate fish). I also remember giving up something for Lent (weird). Typically, when I was young, the kinds of promises you made for Lent were "no chocolate until after Lent" or "no candy until after Lent" or "no video games until after Lent." I'm sure if cell phones would have been around when I was a kid, there would have been a Lenten season without texting or social media as well. But, once Easter came, let the gluttony party begin. Between Cadbury Cream Eggs and chocolate bunnies the size of your own head, unhealthy eating was back with a vengeance and all the weird activities of Lent were over... until next year.

Giving up something for Lent always meant giving up something fun... but I don't ever really remember having coherent conversation about why we were doing that. It seemed like the Christian version of a New Year's resolution. (And just as effective! Or rather, ineffective.) Lent was just a strange season of doing without. One year, I had the perfect solution. I told everyone that I was giving up Lent for Lent and it is the only Lenten promise I have ever successfully kept. In fact, I have now successfully kept that promise for over 30 years.

Now, I know giving up things for Lent isn't something we actively pursue at CABC, but every year I think about it as we approach Easter. So, I would like to take a little time to reflect on the practice through adult eyes and see if we can learn anything from this tradition. Traditionally, this 40-day period provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the life of Christ and specifically on the events that preceded His death and resurrection. It is also a period when we are encouraged to examine our own lives. What has God been teaching us this year? What is the status of my relationship with Jesus? Are there areas of my life that I need to bring under control as I think about my struggle with sin, my response to Christ's saving work on the cross, and my witness to others? Much like the time of intentional prayer and reflection we take before observing communion each month, Lent is also a time to reflect, repent, and ask for forgiveness to prepare our hearts and minds to confront the weight and glory of the cross.

So, what's with the tradition of giving things up? Some traditions relate it to the 40 days that Christ spent in the wilderness being tempted by the devil before He began His ministry. Some, Christians observe this tradition as a way to share in the sacrifice of Christ or to test their self-discipline. However, there are certainly biblical roots for this practice as well. As Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 16, verses 24-26, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves to take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?'"

A version of this teaching is recorded in three of the gospel accounts. So, it must have been quite a memorable lesson to Christ's disciples. But, what does it mean to deny ourselves? If you guess that it means more than just spending 40 days without chocolate, you'd be right. When we honestly examine the state of our lives and the impact that sin has on breaking our relationship with our righteous and Holy God, we recognize just how much we need a savior. Denying ourselves means dying to ourselves. It means to exercise self-control in submitting our will and desires to the will and plan of God. It is our opportunity to repeat after Christ and call out to God, "not my will, but yours be done!" This exercise of self-denial is one more reminder that we are not in control... that our lives are not ours to live as we see fit. We have been bought by the precious blood of Christ and, as Christians, God has a purpose and a plan for our lives. We need to stop fighting to tell the story we want to tell with our lives and submit to the story he is trying to tell through us. So, yes, the Lenten season may look weird. The Christian life looks weird inasmuch as we are to look different from the world around us. We are not to just pursue what the world calls good or satisfy our every desires. God's plans are bigger and more eternally focused than my narrow, self-centered plans.

What does this weird living look like in the life of a believer? As Peter reminds the faithful in 2 Peter 1:5-9, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins." So, this Lenten season, take some time to reflect on your life and on what God has done for you through the sacrifice of His one and only Son. Don't forget that we have been redeemed by Christ from our sins. Because of your faith, practice goodness. Pursue knowledge of Him through prayer and the reading of the Word. Exercise self-control and perseverance. Reflect godliness by treating others with mutual affection, which leads to love. That way, we will be effective and productive in the work of following Christ. And just maybe, eat a little less chocolate... because Easter is Coming!

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 1The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The Baptism of Jesus

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

It seems much of how our minds process data is based off of first impressions. We see something, make a snap judgment of it, and based off that our mind categorizes what just happened. We process data based upon these schemas; they are what allow us to function in life without using up all our mental capacity on menial or rapidly occurring happenings. This is why first impressions matter so much. Every decision afterwards that pertains to the same person or a similar scenario will always be impacted by the parameters defined by that first encounter, even if we don't consciously realize it.

Because of that, I often wonder why Luke chose to introduce us to Jesus as he did. In the Gospel of Luke, the first time Jesus speaks he says, "Why were you searching for me?" Why did Luke choose that as the first recorded words of Jesus in his Gospel? I know contextually it is because a 12-year-old Jesus was just missing for three days, and He is asking his parents this question. However, what if Luke was using that question as a challenge to us as the readers? I'm assuming that is not the case, but if it is, what would your answer be? If that question is pointed dead at you and no one else, how do you answer? Why were you searching for Jesus? Each one of us needs to know the answer to that question, and use that answer to direct us even more towards Christ. The reason we searched for Christ doesn't end once we find Him.

Then in the Gospel of John, again the first recorded instance of Jesus speaking is a very candid question, "What do you want?" If Jesus, with all the intensity of the Lord Almighty, is staring you alone in the eyes, into your very soul, how do you answer Him? What do we want from Christ?

Each one of us is responsible for our own answers to these questions. These answers help us define and focus our faith. Why were we searching for Him and what do we want from Him?

We watched from a window as an unfamiliar vehicle pulled up our driveway. Then there came a faint knock at the back door. "Come in!" I hollered, from a choice center of repose. "Come in!" I yelled from my favorite couch - from just off the kitchen. Soon a perfect stranger was standing in our doorway. He whispered, "Don't you know me?"

Although his face was totally unfamiliar, he insisted he knew me, and rather well at that. But I noticed when the older gentleman cautioned our rug, that he could hardly raise his voice at all. Suddenly I was saddened by a speech impediment. I struggled deeply to recognize him. Deeper still, I wanted to know him. Then the stranger, as troubled as he was, again turned to my wife and whispered: "He doesn't know me."

Now we were all three affected by such an uncomfortable greeting. Yet I studied his face and adjusted to some more of his whispers. As I focused on the subtle nuances of his voice and manner, I noted how much we may actually "know" a person, not only by one's face, but by their voice as well. Presently, I remembered him from meager accounts with mutual friends, some of them from fifty years ago...

Someone has said: "We may know some things that we haven't remembered yet". But I still could neither recognize nor identify this man without his voice. This started an hour-long conversation which revealed that he had experienced Cardiac Arrest a year or two earlier. We discussed how he was saved by the Providence of God, his Grand-daughter's actions as a nurse, and her CPR training as well. We were all quick to be thankful for friends and family.

After he had gone, we considered his visit, and commented on his calm spirit. Then we looked up terms like 'Intubation' and the "Mitral Valve" etc., to better understand various CA heart conditions, - particularly, terms associated with the larynx and vocal chords.

Initially, it was easy to connect the day's events with John 10:27: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

In further review, I think about the vast greatness and wisdom of our God, to create us in His image, with an ability to speak and hear and commune with not only each other, but with God through Christ, remembering Him who ever lives to intercede for us.

Matthew 6:6

"When you pray go into your room close the door and pray to your Father, who can't be seen. He will reward you. Your Father sees what is done secretly."

This was our KidzLife lesson on January 25, 2023. When we talked about this in our group the answers were not a surprise. No one had the time to do it and the excuses were all very similar. They did not have the time, they did not want to put their phone down, they did not want to put away any of their devices, turn off their TV, or put down their computer. When you ask children a question you get the truth. They just did not see the need to take the time for alone time prayer.

I feel we as adults use the same excuses when it comes to our devices such as phones, computers, TVs and other distractions. I have also found that children learn from us adults doing these things so they feel it is okay for them. As parents and grandparents, we need to set the example for them.

Luke 5:16 tell us Jesus often prayed alone. He prayed so He could stay in touch with His Heavenly Father. We need to do the same. We need to be the example for our children/grandchildren. Find a place, put away your distractions, empty your thoughts and talk to Jesus. You will be amazed at the results.

Prayer: Lord, let me set time to be alone with you and to listen to you. Amen.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds," Hebrews 10:24

Have you ever considered who has been a catalyst to you in your faith walk? This past month in the Pulse the teens focused on the word "catalyst" and what that meant in terms of faith. [A catalyst is something or someone that starts a reaction.] I had the chance to share with the youth group a few of the people that have "spurred on" my faith, and since then I've continued to mull over who has had an impact on my relationship with Jesus and why.

My great aunts, Welda Bell and Nancy Benedict come to my mind. They dragged my father kicking and screaming (literally) to VBS, were a huge influence on his faith, and were one of the reasons my parents met. They also invested time in my siblings and me. Under their supervision I attended CEF summer camp, did a summer missionary training in Baltimore, and organized a small group for my peers that met in their home.

My youth leaders in high school, Jason and Julie Chitester. They taught me how to dig into scripture and study the Bible. They asked deep questions and encouraged me to ask them as well. Their influence was a part of what helped me to begin pursuing Christ and making my relationship with Him my own in a way that I had never done before.

The person in college who helped to reignite my faith, Shane Locke. I became the volunteer female youth leader at the church where he was leading the youth group. He was one of the people that drew me back to a faith I had walked away from. He also suggested I work at Christian summer camp, Camp Judson – where I ended up meeting my husband (and where we got the name for our oldest kiddo). My friendship with him set me on a different path from the one I was headed down, and in some ways, changed my life forever.

My husband, Josh Trojak. A mutual friend from camp once commented that Josh was the same person both in the "camp bubble" and in the real world. Before I "liked" him, I was very aware that he was a man of integrity. And in the past 14 years, he is often the person that has redirected my focus when I take my eyes off of Christ and put them on myself.

This is just a small snapshot of all the people who have played such a huge role in spurring me on in my relationship with Christ. Grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives (both by blood and marriage), Sunday school teachers, pastors, mentors, bosses, coworkers, friends, authors, musicians.... The list goes on and on. There are so many people who have helped me deepen my relationship with Christ. Who called me out on sin that I needed to deal with. Who encouraged me and came alongside me when it seemed too hard to keep running towards Him. Who set an example that I want to follow.

Who has been a catalyst in your faith walk? My encouragement to you is to start making a list for yourself of who and why they specifically are someone who has impacted you. (Maybe even take some time to thank a few of them for what they've meant to you and your relationship with Christ.) Then take it a step further – Who can you be a catalyst for? We interact with people every day, and God has placed people in our lives that we can affect (for better or worse). What sort of catalyst will you be to those around you?

A man went to the park and saw a little girl sitting by herself. Everyone passed by her and never stopped to see why she looked so sad. Dressed in a worn pink dress, barefoot and dirty, the girl just sat and watched the people go by. She never tried to speak. She never said a word. Many people passed by her, but no one would stop. The next day he decided to go back to the park in curiosity to see if the little girl would still be there. Yes, she was there, right in the very spot where she was yesterday, and still with the same sad look in her eyes. Today he was to walk over to the little girl. For as we all know, a park full of strange people is not a place for young children to play alone. As he got closer he could see the back of the little girl's dress. It was grotesquely shaped. He figured that was the reason people just passed by and made no effort to speak to her. Deformities are a low blow to our society and, heaven forbid if you make a step toward assisting someone who is different. As he got closer, the little girl lowered her eyes slightly to avoid his intent stare. As he approached her, he could see the shape of her back more clearly. She was shaped in a humped over form. The man smiled to let her know it was ok; he was there to help, to talk. He sat down beside her and opened with a simple, "Hello." The little girl acted shocked, and stammered a quick "hi" after a long stare into the man's eyes. The man smiled and she shyly smiled back. The two talked until darkness fell and the park was completely empty. Finally the man ask the girl why she was so sad. The little girl looked at him with a sad face and said, "Because, I'm different." Immediately he said, 'That you are!', and smiled. The little girl acted even sadder and said, "I know." "Little girl," the man said, "you remind me of an angel, sweet and innocent." She looked at him and smiled then slowly she got to her feet and said, "Really?" "Yes," he said. "You're like a little Guardian Angel sent to watch over all the people walking by." She nodded her head yes, and smiled. With that she opened the back of her pink dress and allowed her wings to spread, then she said "I am. I'm your Guardian Angel," with a twinkle in her eye. The man was speechless – sure he was seeing things. She said, "For once you thought of someone other than yourself. My job here is done." The man got to his feet and said, "Wait, why did no one stop to help an angel?" She looked at him, smiled, and said, "You're the only one that could see me," and then she was gone. And with that, his life was changed dramatically.

I know in my life there were two incidents that I often wonder, could God have placed an angel in my path to see how I would react to that person? If they were angels, I pray I past the test. I really feel in my heart they were angels sent to earth in a human form. I hope one day I find out.

Hebrews 13:2 "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Continue reading the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

Laura Enslen

March 6

Pictures are so wonderful! Often, they can trigger a memory or tell a story. As a mom of three, I'm usually not the one in the pictures, but behind the camera capturing the smiles of those I love. Our dear brother, Pastor Polo captured this picture however back in July 2022, and I am so thankful to have this image.



Although I am a mother here in the US to three extraordinary kids (ok...end mother brag here!), I am "mom" to some extraordinary kids that live in Dominican Republic. This sweet boy is called, Mario Felix. When we went on our team trip in March 2022, he was a student in the classroom that I was assigned. He is a student at our school at Batey 35 in the sugar cane fields of the DR; a school that so many of you here support. Mario Felix is one of many whose life has changed because of our school. He knows about His savior, Jesus Christ and his basic needs are provided for daily through the education, care and nourishment he receives at Batey 35 school. Mario Felix has a way of capturing your heart with his sparkling eyes and dynamic personality.

There was a song some years back called, "When God Ran." Part of the lyrics say, "He ran to me. He took me in his arms. Held my head to his chest. Said my son's come home again. Lifted my face. Wiped the tears from my eyes. With forgiveness in his voice He said, 'Son do you know I still love you?'" What you can't see in this picture was the surprise, joy and the fact that Mario Felix and I ran to each other just before this embrace. See, Mario didn't know I was coming back in July. That embrace was God using me to show Mario that he is seen; He is not forgotten and God loves him so much. The Haitian boys and girls that live in the DR are often unseen. Their lives are very simple. Each day is the same as the next. Life in the Batey is monotonous at best and incredibly difficult at worst.

In Matthew 18, Jesus was asked about who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the disciples that "whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (vs. 4-5) Children are treasured by the Lord. In the same chapter then, Jesus shares the parable of the wandering sheep and reminds them that a shepherd will leave the 99 sheep to find the one that has wandered off. "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." (vs. 14)

Please keep our team in prayer as 37 of us are traveling March 4-12 and will be serving alongside our staff at the school in Batey 35 to continue to share the love Jesus has for each of them.

Lord Jesus, thank you for saving us, for loving us, and for seeing each of us. There have been times in my life where I know you have run to me to remind me that you are my Father and you love me. May we each share that same love around us, and may the children in our lives know that they are gift not only to us in this world, but to their Heavenly Father. Amen.

This past year I read a book titled, "Foster the Family", written by Jamie C Finn. Some of you may already know, our daughter, Sarah and our son-in-law, Jacob are foster parents. They had their approval meeting on January 27, 2023. In preparation for helping them with the children, I have been reading a lot of books on foster care. Hands down, this is the best one I have read so far. (Thank you, Deb Trojak!)

This book has changed me and my thinking in many ways. As a foster parent, Jamie is often in the position to not only care for foster children but also the biological parents of these children. Jamie talks about her struggles with the biological parents and how she classifies them as enemies. She states that this helps her because she then knows how to treat them because the Bible is clear on how we are to treat our enemies. The name "enemy" includes those that hurt her or the children a little or a lot.

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

Luke 6:27-28

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone...On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Romans 12:17, 20

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." 1 Peter 3:9

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"
Matthew 5:44

Not easy, I know!

Jamie sums up her chapter on the topic this way: "God's direction for dealing with our enemies is counterintuitive, countercultural, seemingly counterproductive. I'm the first one to get my back up and stand up for myself and others, and verses about "blessing" and "doing good" are like a slap in the face to my sense of justice and righteousness and, well, self-righteousness.

"The ability to love our enemies is found in a deep trust in our God. In our finiteness, we think that if we don't see and experience justice now, injustice must be reigning. But our God always reigns. He will right every wrong and repair every broken thing. He will punish wrong and defeat evil. Sometimes He will even restore and redeem what we---in our limited wisdom---thought needed to be punished and defeated. In any case, God will have the final word with our enemies. In every case, He will reward our love to them.

"But friend, you were loved by God when you were hard to love. You still are. "beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). When I'm weary and weak and unwilling, I remember this love---shown to an enemy--that has colored every part of my life. It is the love of Christ that made my dead heart alive and able to love and that gives me the strength to do all things, even love my foster child's family. "

This is all very fascinating to me, but what does it mean to me? I may never meet a biological parent of a foster child, but all the same, I need to show love to those that hurt me and others "a little or a lot". I need to love people who are different from me. I need to love people who think differently than me. I need to love those who persecute me. I need to love those that have a differing political view than me. I need to love people who look different from me. I need to love those that don't like me. I need to love those that say mean things about me, true or not true. I think you get the picture. It all comes down to love. It doesn't mean we have to agree with any sin associated with these our enemies, but we need to love the people committing those sins. In the words of Lord, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Although, God has been working this out in my heart for quite some time, God really got my attention when I read it in this book. This is such a challenge for me. Maybe you too?

Precious Heavenly Father, I thank you for this day and I pray that you help me to love like you love. You know that some are easier than others. Help me to see what you see in each of the people I come across. I know you created each one of us and you love each one of us. Help us to focus on the things we have in common, not our differences. Help us love you and people. In Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.

Recently Chris and I finished watching the third season of "The Chosen." I was mesmerized by the portrayal of how Jesus chose, taught and encouraged his disciples. We all know how the story goes: He selected a band of ragtag individuals from various backgrounds and identities; He asked them to follow him without many, if any, questions; He taught them by performing signs and wonders; He preached through stories (parables) that were relatable and relevant to the times. And then He asked them to go two by two to the "corners of the world" to share the Good News of God's Kingdom. Yes, the disciples had doubts and anxieties over this assignment because they didn't feel worthy or even up to the task. They didn't think they were qualified or equipped to handle such a monumental undertaking.

I think, sometimes as disciples of Jesus, we might feel the same. However, Jesus was clear to each of us in Matthew 28: 18-20. Here we find the "marching orders" from Jesus that we know as the Great Commission. I think there are two things we should remember about this passage. First, these words are a command and not a suggestion. That's why it is the Great Commission and not the Great Suggestion! These words were given to every follower of Jesus. If I am His disciple, I am commanded to go and make disciples of others. Secondly, some believe that to fail to do this could be a sin. James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin." This is called a sin of omission, which is not doing what you are supposed to do. A thought to certainly ponder!

The Commission is not to wait for the world to come to us; it is to go into all of the world. Are you going into all of "your world?" Am I doing the same? If we are not trying to make disciples of others, then maybe, we are not being the disciple God wants us to be. These words were not only given to the original apostles, nor were they exclusively for pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. They are for every follower of Jesus. They are for us! It doesn't necessarily mean we are to cross the sea. But certainly a good start would be crossing the street to talk to a neighbor.

I am struck by the contemporary Christian musicians and singers called Cain. Chris and I heard them in concert two summers ago. Their worship song titled "The Commission" tells the story of His command to the disciples and others. Pay close attention to the lyrics as you listen to this beautiful song (<https://g.co/kgs/AxBEjR>). Yes, "go tell the world about me." Interestingly, this song is 3 minutes and 16 seconds long. A coincident, I think not! Blessings, as you serve our Lord!

This past summer, my husband and I decided to celebrate our ten year anniversary hiking a couple 14,000 ft mountains in Colorado. We spent several months planning and preparing for such an adventure – and by preparing I mean months of running on a treadmill to help with cardio endurance as well as altitude.

Once we finally got out there, our first mountain on the hiking itinerary was a loop of four “14ers” called Decalibron – Mt. Democrat, Mt. Lincoln, Mt. Cameron and Mt. Bross. Now, if you’re like me, you would think this would be a pretty isolated adventure. Well, like me, you’d be wrong. We began hiking a little before 5:00am and the parking lot was already full. As we began climbing we were able to keep to ourselves for the most part, but as we started the steeper ascents up each mountain we started passing more and more people (both those hiking up and those already hiking down).

Throughout the rest of the morning, we passed (and were passed) by many hikers. It seemed almost ridiculous how many people were on this mountain. Finally, as we reached the summit of #3, Mt. Cameron, and started onto our last summit, we came into a stride another woman. Naturally, for some of that time we were close enough, and breathing more evenly enough, that we could have a small conversation. And one part of that conversation I have thought about quite often since. It was nothing profound, she simply gave a comment about how beautiful the wild flowers and weeds were that grew on top of the mountains. I had the quick thought in my mind to say, “Yes they are. Isn’t it amazing to see how God has made such beauty even all the way up here?!” But I didn’t. I thought it might be awkward to say that...Then I thought about how maybe I should still say it...Then I thought I really, probably should say it...Then I thought about how much time had passed since the comment that now it’s too late to say anything at all because it would be so delayed, and awkward, and.... So I didn’t. And I have been so annoyed at myself ever since.

That whole afternoon I kept thinking of 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Always. Be. Prepared.

Who would have thought I would have had an opportunity to speak the name of God to someone else on top of a mountain? Clearly I didn’t. And clearly I wasn’t as prepared as I thought for that trip. Two days later we had traveled to our second location to hike, Mt. Elbert. It is the tallest mountain in the Rocky Mountains and second tallest in the continental United States. If that first mountain was busy, I figured this one would be too. So I prepared myself. I prayed for courage to just speak God’s name if the opportunity presented itself again. (I didn’t want to preach a sermon or anything, I just wanted to speak if I had the chance to redeem myself a little from that first encounter.) But I didn’t. Mt. Elbert was much less populated hiking up and we only passed one person throughout our entire ascent.

So, I’m still waiting. I still think about this encounter a lot and would like to think I am more prepared and more readily looking for the opportunities God has for me in the future. Currently my husband and I are planning another Colorado trip this June to hike two more mountains. We’ve already started preparing - both physically and spiritually. I just want to encourage you as well that if you think there is no opportunity to speak the name of Jesus where you are, don’t worry... God has a habit of putting people around you in even the most remote of places to share His hope and good news (read Acts 8:26-40 if you don’t believe me). God can use us wherever we are, we just have to be willing to listen and obey. Take the time, meanwhile, to make sure you are prepared for those encounters too.

Ephesians 5:8-21

It always amazes me (and it shouldn't) when Pastor Josh's sermon is reflected in our discussion at adult Sunday school (School of Christian Living) or when what we share at KidzLife on Wednesday evening lines up with one of my small group studies.

Recently, during one of our KidzLife meetings, we were discussing Jesus' charge to us as believers to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16. As God's Garage became completely dark and quiet, we realized the impact of light, as each child took turns turning on a small flashlight. What a difference light makes in the darkness.....even a small light!

In the same way, Ephesians 5:8-21 was the text for a recent discussion in my ladies' Bible study group where the apostle Paul tells the believers in Ephesus (and all believers) that "you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." The questions that beg to be asked are "How do we live as children of light when we see so much darkness in the world today?" and "Exactly what does it look like to live as children of light?" First of all, I believe it isn't living in a bubble and avoiding the world at all costs. It also isn't staying super busy and ignoring those in our community, our neighbors and our friends. And it definitely isn't pointing our finger at those living in darkness and having no love and compassion for them.

Instead, the Holy Scripture from Ephesians 5: 8-21 goes on to tell us how we are to live:

- First, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit – daily dying to self and allowing the Spirit control.
- We are then filled with His goodness, His righteousness and His truth.
- We are to be careful how we live.
- We are to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord! (Singing hymns in the car counts!)
- We are to give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- And we are to make the most of every opportunity. An interruption could be a God appointment!
- And finally, we are to be humble and submissive out of reverence for Christ.

All of that sounds like a tall order...and it is! It goes completely against our human nature, which is why we need the Holy Spirit to "fall afresh on us" each day. He will empower us to be His light in this dark world.

May the Lord, through His Holy Spirit, help us to shine His light into the darkness so that others will see the True Light, glorify God and live for Him.

Heavenly Father, fill me anew today with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to make the most of every opportunity to live as a child of Your light so that others may be drawn to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Jesus Walks on the Water

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Community is not a word that I often think about. I live in an area on the outskirts of Hanover that isn't really a neighborhood. We wave to some of the neighbors but know very few names. This isn't new to us; in fact, it has been the case since we were married. It had never crossed my mind that community was overly important. I was content to live with my family, a few friends from church, and colleagues that I chat with in the hallway at school. It wasn't until I went on my first trip to the Dominican Republic that the idea of community started to creep into my mind.

While on the trip, I began to notice things that I had never seen before. On our first day of food distribution, I saw neighbors who truly were looking out for neighbors. They made sure to let us know if someone wasn't home and why, so that we could leave food for them. It was interesting to me...a glimpse into Philippians 2:3-4, which states, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." They wanted the friends in their community to have a meal for their family. Could they have simply ignored that need? Of course, but they live in such close community with one another that I don't believe that option would've crossed their mind.

During a clothing distribution, I saw people, all of whom were in great need of clothing items. They did not push, grab, or fight to get items. They did not argue. They did not complain at what was available or offered. They simply waited together. They showed items to others and helped choose sizes to meet the needs of each person. Even, when we ran out of items for the teen boys, they did not become disrespectful or belligerent. They simply said thanks for the shirt or the socks, and went out on their way, genuinely pleased that others were able to receive much-needed items. (Don't worry, when we returned in July, we packed up special bags for these young men filled with items to remind them that they were not forgotten and that God saw their needs). Such a picture of Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

Upon my return home in both March and July, I stayed in daily contact with many of my new friends living in the DR. I could tell you countless stories that I heard, but one of these really stuck out to me. My new friend, whom I met in July, lives in Villa Mella with his parents, sister, and nephew. A horrible work accident has left his father unable to work his regular job, and now this young man is the primary provider for his family. While working with him to create a more stable financial plan for his life, he shared with me that he was unable to pay the rent or purchase food for his family. I was so frustrated, because we had been working on this concept of meeting basic needs. He very calmly explained that his God-mother was extremely ill and needed medical care. I explained that I understood his wish to help her, but that it was more important for him to feed his family of five and not be kicked out of his rented home. Without a second thought, he explained that with God as the center of your life, you place these needs into his hands and in doing so, you are able to care for the needs of others without fear. I can honestly say that never in my life have I chosen to meet the needs of someone else at the risk of my family missing a meal or missing a mortgage payment. How simply he imitated the words found in Acts 4:32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."

I have one final example to share from my Haitian brothers and sisters that are serving the Lord so faithfully in community in the Dominican Republic. Another young man shared with me that he wanted to begin working with an organization in the US. This group had decided, on what appeared to be a whim to me, that they wanted to offer some support to the poorest of Haitian communities in the DR. This young man had literally no spare moments to his day, as he typically works a 75-hour week while attending several courses to train as an electrician. The organization had no plan, no money, and no concept of how this was going to work. Their work had primarily been with immigrants within the US. So again, in my "great wisdom," I advised against joining this new group. I had spoken with the head of the organization, searched their financials, found google reviews and did my due diligence to make an informed decision. I was shocked that he did not agree with my sound logic. Instead, he reminded me that it is the job of those who love God to come alongside people in their community, to walk with them in hard times, provide for their needs, and to encourage them with the Word. He assured me that if he was faithful to this calling, God would prove faithful to him by providing the time and resources, regardless of what my research had shown. Their first outreach was in a community that he described as far worse than any of the areas we are taken to serve in. He gathered a group of 30 friends and people within his community to celebrate the start of a new school year with clothing, school supplies, and haircuts. To this day, I do not know how he stretched the tiny amount of physical donations and money to supply these needs for over 200 children. What I do know is that his faith was strengthened, the faith of his community was strengthened, and my very weak faith was strengthened, as I saw God meet

(continued on next page)

impossible needs in impossible circumstances. It didn't matter that those serving had little to offer and that they also were living poverty. Instead, they remembered the words of 1 Corinthians 12:26-27, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." They chose to follow the call of decreasing the suffering of others by serving them in the name of Christ Jesus.

So, as we look at community in this new year in our Sunday services, my thoughts go in numerous directions. Can I honor Christ in the way my Haitian family does? Am I willing to sacrifice my comforts to support my communities? I pray that God uses me this year, uses each of you this year, uses CABC this year to build a better community of people that love and obey God and seek to share His salvation with others so they can be in community as well.

Could you imagine if your whole body was an eye ? You could not walk or talk . Or an ear? How would you see and walk and talk? Think about what you would be missing out on! I use to think that as being a part of the Body of Christ we all had to be alike in all ways! I was so wrong! Just like our physical body has many members and each one has a specific purpose so do we as the body of Christ! Even Jesus's disciples were hand picked by God each one different for the furtherance of the gospel. Each one had a specific purpose that God wanted them to do. God has specific purposes for you and I as well. Each one of us make up the body. I can not be you and you can not be me but we can work as one to glorify God! So next time you begin to wonder why he or she does not think exactly like I do know that God has placed them here to balance us out and complete the body so that we can glorify God and grow and build the body up in love. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35.) The way we love demonstrates who we are.

"Body of Christ" refers to all individuals who heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13); are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22); and are joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16).

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

O Christmas Tree

Chris Abbey

March 15

Ask my husband. I have literally hundreds of Christmas ornaments on my tree each year. I have been collecting ornaments since I was 17. I have ornaments from my travels to Europe, Asia, Canada and Central America, and many states in the US. My friends and family know I collect, so they bring me ornaments from their travels. I have handmade ornaments for my mom, children, grandchildren and friends that I cherish.

It's not just enjoying my finished Christmas tree that brings me joy, but the act itself of decorating it. The memories of my past come to life when I open those ornament boxes. When I select an ornament, I remember back to where I was, or I think of who gave it to me and my heart smiles just a little. Some of them are so fragile, and some have scents; and the look, feel and smell take me back, so many years. Usually, I cry at least once or twice at the memories some of my ornaments bring. I love those memories of family and friends.

As treasured as my ornaments are to me, we are so much more a treasure to God. The beauty of my tree cannot begin to compare to the beauty all around us. There is so much that's not good these days. We hear of evil on the news, we see greed all around us, and injustice where we most expect justice to rule. What can we do to keep from drowning? We must take the time to find those "God Sightings". If we don't, we can lose sight of all the glory of God's creation, and fall into total despair. We must Choose Joy!

Each one of us is like one of those ornaments, a treasure, a beautiful creation, most precious to God. He handmade us. He dreamed of us. He created the earth for us. From the majesty of the mountain ranges, to the fierceness of the ocean. From the quiet of the woods, to the vastness of farm fields. From the mysteries of stars in the heavens, to the heat and brilliance of the sun. I like the simplicity and celebration of the old hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth". Google the words and think of the blessings all around us. Such a simple, sweet song.

Scripture: Read Genesis 1-31. It's about the creation of everything, and it ends with "...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

I read recently, where a little boy was looking at the sky and stars with his dad and he asked, "If the wrong side of Heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side look like?" Just imagine!



On Sunday, January 22, 2023, I sat in the sanctuary and watched as my son became a member of Christ's American Baptist Church. This is something he did fully on his own, without any encouragement from me or his father. Yes, we were very happy that Gage decided to take this big step and so extremely proud of him. However, the decision was his and his alone. Becoming a member of the church was not something I was going to "push" him into.

As I was sitting there in the sanctuary taking it all in as Pastor Josh spoke about how Gage literally grew up here at CABC and has been a part of things since he was a toddler, a thought popped into my head, "huh, we've come full circle". The verse from Proverbs 22:6 immediately came to mind. This verse is special to me for several reasons! It is the verse that CABC Preschool identifies with, and strives for above all other teaching. Training a child to go in the way they should go... listening to God's words, knowing of Christ's love for them, serving their Lord and Savior. This is my main goal for the children that go through CABC Preschool each year. "When they are old, they will not depart from it." It is our prayer that even after these kiddos leave CABC Preschool, a piece of this knowledge, love and servant heart will go with them, so that when they are older, teenagers, adults, they will still have that knowledge, or have expanded on it over the years.

As a young mom I was careful and adamant about raising Gage and later his younger sister in the way they should go. I grew up knowing about Jesus and believing Him and His Heavenly Father. I knew Christmas was because of Christ's birth and Easter was because of His crucifixion and resurrection. I knew Christ was the Savior of the world and the only way to get to Heaven was through Him. However, when I was older, in my teens and early adulthood (particularly after Gage was born and my Grandfather passed away) I really struggled. Not so much with faith, just lack of proof, lack of evidence of God in my life, lack of knowledge. I vowed that my children would not feel that way. And so, we went to church.

Gage was dedicated to the Lord (at CABC), he attended Sunday School classes, he attended VBS, we attended Easter Family Fun Days, he was a part of the live Nativities on Christmas Eves, as he got older, he started volunteering for things. Small things at first, like manning a game at the Fall Fest., when he started playing guitar he started to play on Wednesday evenings for the Pulse Worship. He started helping at VBS when he was too old to participate. I could keep going, but my point is, Gage grew up at CABC and NOW he is a member of CABC as an adult.

God has brought Gage around full circle in his life here at CABC. Psalms 138:8 says "The Lord will bring to an end or to completion that which is about me." Gage did not depart from the way he was brought up when he became a young adult, even though it is so easy for young adults to lose their way or fall away from their upbringings, especially spiritually, for however long it may be. I could almost feel God's hand patting me on the back, saying, "Well done, Mom! You started him on the way he should go." This was not about me, all I can say is, "Thank you, Lord. All glory and honor and praise are yours! Gage is yours."

I don't what other "circles" God has in mind for Gage, I'm sure there are many! What I do know is that He will complete the works He starts. Full circle.

JOB 33:14-18 (NLT) "For GOD speaks again and again, in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that, and gives wisdom and instruction, causing them to change their minds, and keeping them from pride, and warning them of the penalties of sin, and keeping them from falling into some trap."

In September 2022, a few friends and I went on a Discover Mission trip to Anadarko, Oklahoma. We went to see how the ministries and the Sullivans were doing. The Sullivans were still recovering from Covid, but doing well, and the ministries were thriving again. On the journey home, we had decided before hand to stop at the Ark Encounter. We arrived in the small town we would spend the night, get up early and go to the Ark Encounter, then head back home.

Well, I needed a brush and the Dollar General was close to the hotel we were staying at. As we pulled up, the store had a shopping cart full of flip-flops for \$0.25. I heard that small voice in my ear say, "They would be good for the DR." NO! I thought. I just wanted to go get my brush and go to the hotel and rest after driving all day. The next morning, one of the friends on the trip said she really liked the brush I got and asked if we could go back to the store so she could get one. Sure! So, we pulled up to the store and the flip-flop cart was still there. I ask the LORD," Do you still want me to get these flip-flops?" "Go get them", He said.

My friends and I pushed the cart in the store, and told the girls working at the register that we would like all the flip-flops. We start packing the flip-flops in boxes, so we have the same amount in each box. The girl at the register said they had more in the back. Eureka!

Then chaos ensued. They couldn't figure out how to ring up all the flip-flops up on the register, and customers were lining up. Meanwhile, we're telling the girls where they would be going - to the DR! Turns out, one of the girls at the register was the manager and says, "You can have them all for \$10. We need to get rid of them to make space in the store." Over 200 pair of flip-flops for \$10! Thank you, Jesus! After packing the flip-flops in the car both my friends hand me money for the purchase. I paid nothing for them!

Listen to that small voice, it just may be the voice of GOD!

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Jesus the Way to the Father

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

In full disclosure, I am writing this devo the day after the Super Bowl. For many of the Eagles fans in our area, that was a tough ending to a hard-fought game. That is the reality of a big game like this. One team will leave elated, and the other will go home disappointed. I am not here to talk about what side of that game you choose. Some of you might even be asking, what game? No matter what your opinion on this big game was, it brought to light an important reminder for me.

For most of us who are not directly on the field, the outcome does not change our life at all. I remember my team winning the Super Bowl and I also remember them losing. In both cases, when I woke up the next morning my day had to continue on. As I drove my kids to school I watched as life went on as it does most mornings. There were people buying coffee at Dunkin, traffic was slow at the circle due to the bus traffic, many were already in their work day while others were on their way, kids were filing out of buses to start their day of school, and I was on Old Hanover road headed to the church towards the usual weekly tasks.

Most of the big popular things in life don't ultimately change our future plans. But there is one thing that should cause major change. What Jesus did for us was gigantic and sometimes we treat it like the day after the Super Bowl. We say "that's cool" and then move on without any change. The gift of grace God gave us through sending His son for us is one that should cause us to live far differently today than we did yesterday. We shouldn't go back to the status quo of yesterday.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

The stuff of yesterday may have little impact on your today, but the gift of salvation from Jesus should have all the impact in the world. Live today in light of that victory!

"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter, we are the work of your hand." Isaiah 64:8

Recently on a Saturday morning, my daughter Erin and I drove through the scenic country roads of northern Virginia until we came to the potter's workshop. After months of waiting and anticipation, we finally arrived at our pottery class. We were both excited to learn the process of preparing the clay and making our pottery piece. After introductions and a cup of coffee to take off the winter chill, the potter demonstrated how to prepare the clay and create a piece on the pottery wheel. She shared techniques using the fingers and hands to form the clay into the desired shape. The right amount of water had to be applied to the clay to keep it moist and malleable. The clay had to remain at the center of the wheel as it was being formed. A solid and secure foundation had to be established. If not, the vessel could break while being fired. My turn came at the pottery wheel. I learned very quickly my need to be humble, teachable, and laugh at my mistakes. It was obvious I was not an experienced potter. The foundation to my vessel collapsed twice and almost flew off the wheel. Clay can certainly have a mind of its own! Just like us. The potter was patient with me, reminding me again of the techniques I needed to use. She provided encouragement. The potter's workshop was full of finished vessels. This inspired me to persevere and finish my coffee mug.

Over the past few weeks of reflection, my brief time at the pottery wheel reminds me of our Heavenly Father, the potter and creator of our lives. His word provides instruction on how to live this life here on Earth. The potter is patient as He instructs and guides me on my spiritual journey. A journey that began at a young age. I can easily waver in my faith, lose my focus on God, and disobey His word. Yet, time and time again, He continues to shape me into his likeness. The world and the enemy are relentless in trying to distract me from my relationship with God. The devil would love nothing more than to remove me from my relationship with Him. I need to come before Him daily and keep my eyes fixed on the potter, my Heavenly Father.

Despite the world's attempt to distract and crush us, God's promises help us to remain steadfast and persevere in our spiritual walk. One day we will meet the potter face to face. The potter who has patiently molded and made us into His likeness.

Thank you God for your unconditional love for us. Thank you for sending your son Jesus to reconcile and save us. We are grateful for His sacrifice and the life we now can have through Him.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us and himself in Christ." 2 Corinthians 5: 17, 18

I have mentioned in previous devotions, that I am intrigued by phrases used repeatedly in Scripture. I did a Lenten devotional once on "walk worthy" or "walk in a manner worthy." This is used only four times in the NASB20 translation but, for me, it is a convicting phrase.

Another phrase that is used often and therefore deserves some attention is one used by Jesus often in the New Testament -- "Truly, I say." This phrase is repeated about 75 times in the New Testament NASB20 translation. So, what exactly does this phrase mean? It is a term of strong, intense affirmation. It means firm. It means trustworthy. The Greek for "truly" is "amen" and is the word we use to end our prayers (in the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen). It means that everything we have just spoken to God in our prayer is trustworthy, It is true. You can take it to the bank. The only one who uses this expression in the New Testament is Jesus. And again, He uses it some 75 times. In the book of John, Jesus really emphasizes this phrase: "Truly, truly I say" and he uses it about 25 times. He is literally saying -- "Amen and amen." Every use of "amen" or "truly" by Jesus serves to affirm what He is about to say and, consequently, we need to pay close attention to the instruction and/or teaching that follows.

What are some of the "Truly, I say" verses that stand out to me? Try these:

Matthew 10:42 -- And whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

What little ones? What reward?

Matthew 13:17 -- For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Longed to see and hear what?

Matthew 26:21 -- And as they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me."

If Jesus knew about the betrayal, why didn't He do something to stop it?

Mark 14:30 -- And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times."

Have you ever denied Christ? Would you deny Jesus?

John 3:3 -- Jesus responded and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Will you see the kingdom of God?

John 5:24 -- "Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

You have heard; now, do you believe?

Look at these verses as well as others listed within the New Testament; see what Jesus feels so strongly about. Answer the questions with each of the verses above -- understand what Jesus is saying.

And I will leave you this one to think about from Matthew 25:12 -- "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'" As we enter the Lenten season, think about these words from Jesus. I pray that these are not words reserved for you and yours.

Prayer: Father, thank you for Your Word. Help us to understand the importance of reading and understanding what You have for us. Help us to understand that we cannot love You without knowing You and we cannot really know You without Your Word. Bless us during this Easter season. Amen.

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
Matthew 19:26

And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.
Matthew 18:13-14

In Matthew 19:23-26, Jesus is speaking to his disciples about being saved and how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were concerned and asked him, "Who then can be saved?". And Jesus replied, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Persevere and don't give up, good and faithful servants! Continue praying and asking Him for those loved ones to be saved! Matthew 19:26 tells us he doesn't want one to die.

This is a portion of a letter Matt and I received from a friend this past Christmas:

"On September 25th, our 51st wedding anniversary, we attended the God Loves You Tour at the fairgrounds. It was awesome, "Marty" (name changed) stood up and prayed with Franklin Graham! I have prayed for him for 46 years to accept the Lord!! It's still his journey to read the word, we some days do it together, which has never happened. I pray every day for clarity and hunger for God's word."

I know many of you are praying for loved ones to receive Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. I pray that the scriptures and the excerpt from our note encourage you as much as it does me.

Precious Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son, Jesus to this earth to die a criminal's death, so we can spend eternity with you. We thank you that "Marty" accepted your Son as his Savior. We rejoice with all of heaven over his life-changing decision. I ask, Father, that you would draw _____ to you. Please move in their hearts and minds. Open their eyes to see and their ears to hear You. I pray they would accept your Son Jesus into their hearts. Thank you, Father. In Jesus' Holy Name I pray, Amen.

"We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different, but they all have to learn to live in the same box."
(Author unknown)

As a former first grade teacher, I've had many children rush to me proudly showing their new box of crayons, some with 16, 32 or 64 in number. The children thought that their new crayons would always stay that perfect! Of course, by the end of a week many of those beautiful new crayons were either broken in half, had a broken tip or were just missing. We had a "lost and found" crayon bucket in our classroom, but nothing in it was perfect anymore. In the bucket, the children deposited several imperfect crayons that had been found in a variety of places: under a bookshelf, across the room, in the trash can rescued by the custodian, in a game box and even stuffed in the back of their desk or someone else's desk (This is a topic for another time).

Kids rooted through that bucket with full anticipation of finding that perfect crayon to make their box complete again. But this never happened. Their box was now imperfect, never to look the same again. Of course, there was always some child who had purchased the identical box of crayons and would share them with a friend with the rule that it be returned in the same condition. We call that teamwork or showing kindness to one another. Now their crayons were all imperfect but remained the same color. Does our "box of crayons" have to remain perfect? Can we accept that people or situations in our life may change, but still welcome them back in the once perfect "box?"

Ecclesiastics 4: 9-10 says that "two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up."

Prayer: God may we accept others in their imperfectness and team up and make a new beautiful creation. Help us to appreciate the changes in others and still consider them perfect in our eyes. Thank you God for loving us regardless of any changes, as we know that You walk daily before, beside and behind us while making us whole again.

Jesus Predicts His Death

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Psalms 40: 1-4. "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and more; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods."

Recently, I've been in a couple of situations where I knew the answer needed to come from God – I did not have the resources, and needed His direction, patience, wisdom and ability to trust Him for the outcome. Too often in my life, I invite Him into matters where I can really use His help, but I feel I'm able to affect the outcome too.

One of these involved working with my family to address growing challenges with my aging parents – who were still in their home. Kids become parents, parents become dependent on their kids, many tears are shed and fears are realized, and guilt runs high – many of you know all about this experience. Prayers containing heartfelt requests for wisdom, strength, endurance and patience result in needing to trust and wait.

Well, in this matter, a three-year period of searching and waiting on God's timing (since we started having some extra care in their home) has resulted in a joyous answer – placement in a place that really feels right and meets their needs in special ways. The how we got to this location is a beautifully designed God appointment – and is a story for another time.

As the Psalmist shares...He lifted me up out of despair (mire)...gave me a firm place to stand...put a new song in my mouth (and heart). In verse 4, he shares, "Blessed is the one who makes the Lord his trust."

I am thankful for God's answer to my prayers (and the prayers of many of you – the body of Christ is so needed and such a blessing!). We all, no doubt, have experienced answers to prayers quickly sometimes, over a long period of time other times, and many yet to come. God's timing is always best. It is often easier to see that more clearly when we can look back. My trust and patience in His timing has provided the gift of another victory! Oh Lord, let my heart and mind remember this time, to help me be more consistent in that trust.

About the other situation, well, it's been over a year with very little answer yet. What does God have planned? It looks like I'll be working that trust muscle more in the days to come! But really, is there any reason I should doubt His perfect timing? I guess I'll keep working on the tasks that I should work on while He works in the waiting.

I heard someone share recently, "When it is not God's timing, you cannot force it. When it is God's timing, you can't stop it." I think I can live with that! How about you? Are you able and willing to allow God to provide the answers and direction you need when He knows it is best?

Dear Lord, Help me to be able to lay the burdens and prayer requests I have at your feet. Please provide me with the patience and strength to trust you – for your perfectly timed answers. I know you love me and care for everything I care about. Thank you for being the Lord of my life, the one fully capable of providing all that I need – when I need it. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

The other year my daughter got a glimpse of a rainbow at our house that just amazed her. It was short lived but she talked about it all the time after. Almost every time there would be rain and sun thereafter, we would run outside on the porch and we'd try to spot another rainbow. Sometimes I would run out myself staring up and straining to find just a bit of color in the sky. Usually it didn't amount to much.

Not too long after that occurrence we entered into a period of nervousness and fear basically any time it would rain. Between thunderstorms, random power outages, and just heavy, noisy rains at night, my daughter started to develop a bit of an uneasiness anytime it clouded up or a rumble was heard. This continued for most of that summer. I would still make it my mission to run out as soon as it ended to try to find a rainbow again, thinking I could assuage the fearfulness with another sighting. Needless to say it didn't really happen.

Fast forward to the beginning of summer this past year and we have our first thunderstorm just a little before bedtime. My immediate dread of the nightly fears and nervousness come flooding back from the summer before. But as we walked passed a window we happened to glance out to see the biggest rainbow stretching across the sky right in front of our house. There was no missing it. I don't think I've ever seen a rainbow that big or that close since we've lived at this house (I'd share a picture here but I just doesn't do it any justice at all to the beauty and enormity that it really was).

I had a few thoughts in that moment as this beautiful rainbow calmed my daughters nervousness before bed. One was that I was probably going to have to write a Lenten devo about this experience. And the other was how this illustrates God's work in our lives. We see Him at work in perhaps a simple little way, and when we catch that glimpse we try to replicate it ourselves. We strain to try to find Him where we want Him to be. We try to make something happen in our own strength and by our own power. But much like my rainbow search that won't amount to much. But when we don't rely on our own power and our own "magic" to make it happen – my daughter is also in the fairy/princess phase now so there's lots of magic and "poof"-ing happening around here right now – when we just have open eyes to see what He has for us, we get something better than we could ever have imagined.

So I don't know what fears and anxieties you have in your life. I don't know what the storms are that you are going through. But if I could give just a little piece of advice it's to remember that God is still walking alongside you. And that He is faithful. It might take a season and you might feel like the storms keep coming your way, but remember that He is faithful. He will bring you through this. You don't have to worry about straining to try to find Him or trying to make answers and solutions by your own power. Just trust that He is with you and that He has good things in store for you. And keep your eyes open for that beautiful rainbow in the sky after the storm.

Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago. (Isaiah 25:1)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Grief. It's a tough word, and it's an even tougher emotion. It can come in many forms, for many reasons and at any time. You may be grieving a lost job, a lost relationship, a medical diagnosis, the passing of a loved one, the wanderings of a family member, or the way of the world.

Why does God allow pain in our lives? I think, ultimately, it's so we can find Him after exhausting all efforts to deal with our issues on our own. 2 Corinthians 12:10 "... For when I am weak, then I am strong." Once we do find Him, He will be with us every second of our lives - helping us, cheering us on, crying with us, lifting us up, protecting us, and loving us.

God does not cause bad things to happen, but He does provide His blessings through those bad things. This is so we will fully rely on Him, be made stronger, and to maybe someday help someone else through their grief. I cannot imagine going through life's trials without Him. Sometimes He makes Himself known in a big way, sometimes it's through little things, and sometimes He puts someone in our path to be our angel on His behalf.

In some of the examples above, in addition to praying through those hard times, we are called to push through, cry through, and work through our tough times. How does God answer our grieving prayers?

If you are grieving a lost job: When one door closes, God will open another one, one that's even better than the path you were on! Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

If you are grieving a lost relationship: This person is probably not the person God has chosen to be in your life. Mourn, then be patient, pray and listen to Him. He will show you who He wants you to be with. Isaiah 40:31 "but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

If you are grieving a medical diagnosis: Have faith. Faith in God and faith in your doctors and their team. The journey is hard. Sometimes we are healed and sometimes we are not. Philippians 4:6-7 "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."

If you are grieving the passing of a loved one: Until the Rapture comes, we are all going to pass away. Celebrate the time you had with your loved one. Know that the grieving will never leave, but it will ease with time. Our separation is but for a moment compared to the greatest family reunion when we will spend eternity together in Heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

If you are grieving the wanderings of a family member: This brings such great pain, watching a loved one struggle through life without the help of the Holy Spirit. PRAY! PRAY! PRAY! Lamentations 3:22-23 "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."

If you are grieving the way of the world: Always remember whatever is happening, God is still on His throne. Psalm 55:22 "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken."

No two people grieve the same, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grieve how you need to grieve. Just remember that you are not alone in your grief. God is right there with you.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
(1 John 4:4)

In 2 Kings 6 the following account was recorded for our encouragement in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. Israel's enemies were so desperate to capture the prophet Elisha they sent their great army of horses and chariots during the night to surround the city. When Elisha's servant woke up and saw this army, he immediately filled with fear and cried out, "What shall we do?"

How many times has this question come to our minds as we receive news of a frightening medical condition for ourselves or for a loved one? In my life, I can say many times.

In the scripture, Elisha answered this question, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." He prayed and asked for his servant's eyes to open so that he could see what Elisha could see. The scriptures state, "Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

When I heard the doctor tell us my wife had cancer I felt like Elisha's servant. When I received news my mother was being placed on a ventilator due to Covid my heart dropped again. In spite of the outcomes, in those situations my fear was soon replaced with peace as my eyes were allowed to see the greatness of our God and His power to save us.

In our lives we may seem to face formidable symptoms, negative reports, and maybe even financial debt. But we are God's beloved. Take your eyes off of the enemy so you may see the exceeding greatness of God's power and deliverance.

Just look at all this STUFF! It is not expensive STUFF, not beautiful STUFF, nor STUFF that appeals to anyone else, but it is MY STUFF!

By the time I was born, my parents had already collected lots of STUFF for me, including the baby STUFF they had saved from the four siblings before me. Growing up, I collected my own STUFF. Then when I married Jim, he had all kinds of STUFF. What a shock it was when he did not want to get rid of some of his STUFF to make room for MY STUFF! Hmmm, it was about that time the honeymoon was over. (Smile)

Now that my daughter and her husband live with me to help take care of me, they are bringing their STUFF with them that they have collected through 40 years of marriage and raising four children. All this being added to an already full home of Jim's and my STUFF, means that together, we have all been getting rid of L-O-T-S of STUFF. I have told them I am not attached to any of the STUFF we are getting rid of, but just be sure they don't send me out with it!

Now it is a matter of this one pile of My STUFF that means so very much to me. Emotions run high as memories reflect over a life time. As I hold on to this STUFF as precious treasure, a startling thought comes to me. This really is MY STUFF, and when I go to be with the Lord, there is no one else to whom this STUFF is going to mean a thing. But it seems like if they really love me, they would love MY STUFF too! And then I realize, how foolish, and how blessed I am with wonderful memories, and knowing the best is yet to come! So with that thought in mind, I continue to sort stuff, making that pile get smaller and smaller.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things (stuff) which he possesseth. Luke 12:15

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Philippians 3:7 & 8

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

"Say to Daughter Zion,
 'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
 and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Luke 6:27-28

I'm gonna be honest. I have read this scripture quite a bit in my life, and it was only in the past couple of years that it has made sense to me on a personal level. So often I would look at it and think, "What a great concept for people who have enemies." Thankfully (or maybe naively) the word enemy had never struck a chord with me. There just wasn't anyone out there who I thought felt that strongly about me.

Then came foster care. And over the past couple of years, I began to realize that enemy didn't necessarily stand for someone who hated me and was trying to cause me harm. Enemy was someone that I felt very strongly about. Who I felt needed to have justice meted out upon them.

Along came a book (as they so often do in my life). This one is titled *Foster the Family* by Jamie C. Finn. (I highly recommend it.) The author has been a foster mom for many years and has much wisdom on fostering from a Christian perspective. As I read the chapter entitled "My Foster Child's Family Is My Enemy," so many things I had felt and thought on my foster care journey fell into place.

Jamie writes, "On a good day, I may use a Christianese phrase like "I'm struggling to love them." On a bad day, I just flat-out say it: "I hate them." Either way, I need some direction for this fight. How do I think and feel toward someone who has hurt a child I love, someone who has hurt me? When it's too complicated to pull through the tangled threads of all my beliefs and emotions and expectations, I flip the script and simplify the struggle. I rename the discussion completely. I don't have to sort through each piece individually. Instead, I can label my kids' parents with a simple word, one that you would, most likely, never expect: enemy. See, God doesn't provide specific direction for the complicated biological-foster parent relationship in His Word.... It's all just too convoluted; I can't wrap my head around it. But I know how to deal with my enemies. God speaks to that, loud and clear. I find "enemy" to be a helpful category because it includes, well, everyone. Whether I'm actually experiencing threats and accusations or "just" struggling through hurts and disappointments, I have the same answer: love, do good, bless, and so on. Even when I reduce my relationship with my kids' parents down to the lowest common denominator, I still know how God commands me to think about them and treat them."

This chapter stopped me dead in my tracks. Because when I examined myself, this was truly how I felt about my kids' birth parents. I viewed them as my enemy. And yet, how am I supposed to treat my enemies? The same way Christ treated His.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

I was an enemy of God. I was dead in sin and choosing my own way. And yet, Christ still died for me. He died for all of us – even those who will reject His salvation. As difficult and painful as it can be, I am called to love, do good, pray for, and bless even the people I feel don't deserve it. As we approach Easter, let us thank God that He chose to save us even though we didn't deserve it. And let us also choose to show His grace to those around us, whether they are our enemies or not.

"To err is human, to forgive divine."
Alexander Pope

I have never been described as divine! But I have been examining what the Word says about forgiveness. If it is a big deal, what happens if I don't forgive?

My earliest memory around forgiveness is me hitting my sister and my mom insisting I say I was sorry. I wasn't. Fast forward I still haven't people who have hurt me.

Who is forgiveness for? Me or the offender? Let's look at what the Bible says so beautifully:

Remember the Lord's Prayer? In Matthew 6:12 we asked Jesus for a model prayer and we often ignore it. And we stumble over versions- Forgive us our sins (trespasses) as we forgive the sins (trespasses) of others. Did I really agree to that?

God tells us to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you. (John 20:23)

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. BUT if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins. (Matt 6:14-15)

I did once, but how many times? It is not enough to forgive just once. "Seven times seventy" Matt 18:21-22 (as often as needed) That's a lot.

Jesus set the example. From the cross "Forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) I guess any act can be forgiven. Mine seem pretty petty to Good Friday.

But what if I don't want to forgive? Forgive those who have injured you-not because they deserve your forgiveness, but because you can never be fully happy until you release your anger and grant forgiveness.

And you don't even have to tell them.

Forgiveness is an emotional change that occurs within the person who has been wronged. You do not have to forget. Nor do you have to trust.

Look at your life...is there a relationship that needs healing? A person you avoid? A memory that is distant but the feeling is raw?

Let God help you lift a burden. Receiving and giving forgiveness is a way the Lord heals you and brings wholeness to your life.

Is it easy? Not by yourself but with God anything is possible.

Thank you God for the Bible's word about this daunting, challenging and rewarding act of forgiveness. Help us to follow Christ's example. We are in awe that you forgive us our sins. Bring to our mind people or circumstances where forgiveness is needed in our lives. We love you Lord.

Matthew 9:35-38

Jesus went through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease in the people. And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them; for they were helpless and scattered like sheep that have no shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "To the truth the harvest is many, but the laborers few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest.

If we look at Jesus' entire ministry on earth, there is no doubt that his earthly ministry focused on caring for people. In fact, his mission was to heal, rescue, save, and preach the good news of salvation. Jesus focused on doing His Father's will and serving the people.

The biblical text says that the people were like sheep who had no shepherd. Everything indicates that the messiah was born to fill that void, to provide hope where there was none. What a great example for us to care for the people who live around us!

Jesus cared about the people, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. A sheep without a shepherd cannot get to good pastures. Sheep do not have the ability to seek fresh and abundant pastures on their own. Therefore, they must be directed and cared for by someone. Sheep must be directed to the right place in order to feed well.

His example is worthy of imitation. Not only for those in a leadership position, but for every believer. We have a task to do and God is willing to give us the strength to accomplish it. That task is to fulfill our assignment to show love and build the lives of others.

Let's live the example of Jesus.

My name is Paul Beliasov and I am a chaplain at a prison in York. The grace of God is quite the thing. We share God's grace with these inmates, and you wonder if they understand the seriousness of sin and the depth of grace that God is offering. One such inmate who has been here almost a year is Will (not real name). Will is in prison for an ugly crime, and he knows it. Is God's grace for him? We would say yes, but still. When Will first came in he was despondent and did not want to see a chaplain. A few months later someone (another inmate) had challenged him with the gospel, and he did contact us. I have met with him off and on over the past six months as he tries to restart his life with God. Will still gets depressed and discouraged with himself, and he does not know if he can get true forgiveness from God. Yet, he does know he is forgiven in Him and other days he is confident in God. He wants God in His life and wants victory over himself and the stain of sin. He cries over his sin and then thinks about God. One day last month he handed me a poem he wrote. It is not perfect, but it shows understanding of God's grace. It also makes me realize that I need to look at my sin just like Will looks at his and then see God's grace as Will sees it. So, in closing I share Will's poem with his permission. May we all be humbled by the grace of God in this season.

"From Death unto Life"

I was once asleep and internally dead
Due to the enemy, I had no place to rest my head.
He dangles sin and greed on a line in front of me,
Tries his best to ensnare me in vines of poison ivy.
The Lord allows me to turn away from he who lies.
No, I will not fall victim to Satan's whims and cries.
As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
In my Lord I have the strength to endure every test.
By his unfathomable mercy, I have free will to choose my destiny.
In him lies the only true future I can see.
Once overwhelmed by the corruption of sin and hate,
Lord, how I thank you continually that it's not too late.
Having been blind so long, I've taken for granted all you have blessed me with.
Despite my defiance, you gave me your breath as a gift.
Now Lord, because of your Holy Spirit, I now know what is at stake.
As you break, mold, and craft me, my true form will take.
I shall follow you to the end of earth and into the heavens above.
You sent unto me like Noah, that olive branch in the mouth of a white dove.
Day and night fighting for your glory in courage and mirth,
In you alone, Christ Jesus, is my spiritual rebirth.
Your death beautifully wraps me in your warm embrace,
So merciful you are, Lord, to let flow your heavenly grace,
Blessed am I just to have enjoyed but a small taste!
No, my Savior, your covenant of blood shall not be made waste!
Thy name shall be scorched upon my tongue for all eternity!
I ask, Lord, that you thrust your hands into the hole of my heart and turn the key!
Your will is the only will for me. Thank you, Lord, for giving me sight.
The light that is your all-encompassing love shines so bright!!!

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:20-30 (NIV) &
Luke 23:44-49 (NIV)**

April 7

The Last Supper

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The Death of Jesus

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Jesus Has Risen

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

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."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."



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