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Advent 2016

Dear Friends,

I invite you to join with me and your fellow Fairview friends to journey through the Advent season by enjoying a daily time of reflection. I'm sure this collection of thoughts and recollections by some of our dearest friends will enhance our time of preparation for the Christmas Season. The United Methodist Church describes Advent in this way:

The season of Advent, which comes from the Latin word adventus meaning "coming" or "visit," begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year for Christians. During Advent, we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ. We remember the longing of Jews for a Messiah and our own longing for, and need of, forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning. Even as we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also look forward anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by his first coming.

As Christians we have much to be thankful for. May this Advent season prepare us again for the coming of Jesus into our hearts!

-Pastor Keith Deel

Messiah
Wonderful Counselor
Lamb of God
Redeemer
Almighty God
Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace
King of Kings
Lord of Lords

Sunday, November 27, 2015

First Sunday in Advent

God is there Everyday

Read: John 14:15-17

As a single mother of two teenagers daughters, I live paycheck to paycheck. My girls were honored to be asked to go on a school trip to another state. They would be staying 3 nights, 4 days and attending a lot of activities while there. The school needed \$200 for each child upfront. Oh wow! How was I ever going to come up with \$400.00 in such a short window of time. Now the girls have always done fantastic with their grades and I have always stressed that their education comes before anything else. So, I was very stressed on how I would get the money for a few weeks. It just so happened that my company had us take our Christmas Club money early this year. But it wouldn't be in my checking account in enough time for them to make the deadline. I was so frustrated that I shared with a friend and they had suggested that I ask the teacher if I could post-date a check to the school. She agreed that the school would allow it, since the date I wanted to date it for was before the trip. Whew! Thank you Lord! That was a close one. However, a couple of nights before their trip, the girls asked how much spending money they were going to get to go with them. Spending money?? What? I didn't even think about that. The money I had provided for them covered hotel, activities, and a souvenir, but no money to eat on. Now, where was that money going to come from? Lord, you worked this out so far, please lead a way. So I thought and thought, and knowing that I have always paid my bills on time, I decided that if I let a couple of bills go that paycheck, they would be able to have the money they needed to enjoy their trip. My cable bill was one of them. I didn't share this with the girls as it would be disconnected when they were away on their trip. Throughout the week of their trip, I worried constantly about what they would think of me not paying the cable bill. Not unlike others, our TV was used way too much. They recorded their favorite series to watch while they were away, On the day I picked them up from the school trip, they had commented in the car that they just wanted to go home take a shower and watch their TV. Oh no! So when we came home, they shared all the pictures from their trip and excitedly told me about all the events that had attended. Me dreading the moment for one of them to turn on the TV I said, "Well, I'm really glad that you had a great time on your trip, however, for you to do so, I didn't pay the cable bill and therefore, we don't have a TV right now. I am so sorry." They both looked at me and said, "Mom, it's ok really. Thank you for letting us go. We won't ever forget the experience." For the following weeks without our TV, we played the Wii, went to the library, spent time with friends, spent time outside, and thoroughly enjoyed each others company. Since then, I have gotten caught up on my bills and reconnected my cable. Recently, one of the girls said, "Why do we even have a TV, it would save us money each month." So, I will ponder turning off the cable for good, but for now we are much more connected as a family and our TV is very seldom on.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being with us in our everyday lives, and for helping us, even when the obstacles seem overwhelming.

- Jenn Myers
United Landmark

Monday, November 28, 2016

Christmas all Year Long

Read: Luke 2

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Luke 2:19

The Christmas season is upon us. Are you the type who loves everything Christmas? You don't mind that the stores play Christmas music starting on Halloween. You get your tree up the day after Thanksgiving or maybe before. You delight in the shopping, gift wrapping, cookie baking, house decorating, parties, etc. Or are you one who celebrates and decorates but the day after Christmas, the tree comes down, the decorations are put away and you don't care to hear another carol for at least 11 months? Either way, all of the trimmings remind us that Christmas is a special time of year and hopefully puts the birth of our Savior in the forefront of our minds and our lives. When we decorate our homes and our sanctuary it is an affirmation of what we believe. It is an outward sign of celebration. It revives, refreshes, and reminds us of the Christmas story. God loves us so much that he sent his son. It fills our hearts with joy.

But when we pack up all of our decorations, toss the tree and throw away the leftovers, does the message of Christmas wind up in the attic too? Do we box it up and get it out again next year? As you read this devotional during Advent, sing those treasured carols and celebrate with family and friends, let your heart be filled so full that the joy will last all year long. Ponder it, soak it up, and embrace it. So much so that when all things Christmas are put away in your homes, its message can't help but remain in your hearts and lives. Keep Christmas, its promises and God's precious love out for all to see, all year long!

Prayer: Lord, fill our hearts with such joy this Christmas season that it can't help but overflow and last all year long.

- Nancy Harrow

Tuesday, November 29, 2016

PRAY FOR PEACE

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace....
Luke 2:14*

It was October of 1962. The Soviet Union had installed missiles on the island of Cuba and the United States was threatening military action if they were not removed. Filled with fear, people all over the world prayed as the two nuclear powers clashed.

It was during that time that songwriter Noel Regney was asked to write a holiday song. "I had thought I'd never write a Christmas song," Regney said later. "Christmas had become so commercial. But this was the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In the studio, the producer was listening to the radio to see if we had been obliterated."

As he thought about the song, Regney saw two mothers pushing their babies in strollers. The babies reminded him of little lambs, and the first line of the well-known Christmas song, "Do You Hear What I Hear?" was formed in his mind: *Said the night wind to the little lamb....* After finishing the lyrics, his wife, pianist Gloria Shayne, set them to music. Later, Shayne said, "We couldn't sing it through; our little song broke us up. We cried. You must realize there was a threat of nuclear war at the time."

At Christmas time today, we listen to many versions of "Do You Hear What I Hear?" by various artists and choirs. We rightly think of it as a song about the birth of the Christ Child. The Good News of Christ's coming to earth is passed from the night wind to the little lamb to the shepherd boy and finally to the king. It is the king who proclaims the song's secondary message, *Pray for peace, people everywhere!* It is as relevant today as it was in 1962.

As Christians, we know that there will not be peace on our earth until the reign of Christ. But we thank God that He offered His Son to the world so that the gift of Christ's peace through the Holy Spirit can be ours now, every day.

The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night, He will bring us goodness and light!

- Jan Deel

Wednesday, November 30, 2016

Christmas Memories

Read: 1 John 4:7-10 MSG *“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love —so you can’t know him if you don’t love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about —not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.”*

My childhood Christmas memories are not ordinary. Yes, my sister, two brothers and I would get up before sunrise, wake our parents and ask “Has Santa come yet?”, and receive the usual answer—“Go back to bed, it’s still dark”. Eventually the sun would come up and our Christmas morning would begin. Since there were four of us, if each one of us had 2-3 packages under the tree, it seemed like a LOT of presents. But then our real Christmas would begin.

We would pile in the car and begin our travels “over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house.” My mother’s parents lived in the hills of Kentucky, truly on the top of a mountain. Depending on the weather, we might be able to drive closer to the house, but we still had quite a distance to walk. I remember one Christmas in particular that we couldn’t drive on their road at all, and had to abandon our car “down by the highway”. My grandfather then drove his team of mules, dragging a large sled, down to the “creek”, picked us all up, and took us up the hill to the house. Wow, what would kids today think of that? They barely had electricity, much less the internet! That was love—harnessing those animals and dragging a sled over hill and dale on the ice and snow, just to spend the day with us. My grandparents are both gone now, but the memories are not. I can still feel their love.....

Thought for the day: Love is all that matters.

Prayer Focus: Grandparents

-Bonnie Hendrickson

Thursday, December 1, 2016

Walk in the Light

Read: John 8:12 *"I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

I like to take walks, especially during the holiday season. I enjoy gazing at all of the decorations, and peering in at the tree in each of the windows, as I pass by.

But it's the lights that capture my attention! It's as if they are dancing a tune to comfort my soul. My depression is lifted and my anxiety calmed.

We all struggle and need comforting. I think of my cousin, who is fighting breast cancer; my neighbor whose husband walked out on her after over twenty years of marriage; my friend who lost her 23 year-old daughter last year in a tragic bike accident.

I can only offer the comfort of a hug, an encouraging word, a listening ear and pray.

But I know One who can offer more. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). May each one of us find the Light that comforts the soul!

- Chris Adkinson Edwards

Friday, December 2, 2016

Babies

Read: Deuteronomy 31:6

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Oh my goodness, I love babies! I just love them! So soft, and warm, and tiny, and cute, and cuddly, and kissable. I love the commercial where this young woman says something to the effect... “Who knew I would fall so madly in love with a chubby, bald, toothless guy!” then it shows her holding this little boy about 5 months old grinning his toothless grin from ear to ear. So cute!

I imagine that Jesus was an adorable little baby. Grinning a toothless grin from ear to ear. Learning to roll over and crawl. Learning to walk then run. Learning to share and be a good friend.

There are things I have trouble imagining. I can't imagine giving birth in a stable like Mary. With animals sleeping, eating, drinking, and relieving themselves near by. I can't imagine losing track of a child like Mary and Joseph when Jesus was 12 years old. What a panic stricken and sleepless night that must have been for them. They found Jesus in the temple teaching and explaining the word of God to his elders. The relief they must have felt when they found him safe and sound! Most of all, I can't imagine watching my son dying a horrible and painful death on the cross. It had to be near unbearable. Mary didn't want to leave her son. She didn't want him to go through something so terrible all alone, so she stayed by his side.

During this season of advent I pray that God will remind each of us that He loves us and has loved us since before we were born. He loves us even more than a mother loves her baby. He sent the gift of His love in the form of Jesus that Christmas long, long ago. He loves us and wants us to dwell in His house forever. He is with us every minute of every day our whole life long. He has a plan and a purpose for each of us, and that He will never leave our side.

— Teresa Bond

Saturday, December 3, 2016
My First Christmas in Heaven

Read: Matthew 5:1—12 MSG

*“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.”*Matthew 5:11—12 MSG

For those grieving the loss of a loved one...

I see the countless Christmas Trees, around the world below
With tiny lights like heaven’s stars, reflecting on the snow.
The sight is so spectacular, please wipe away your tears,
For I am sharing Christmas, with Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs, that people hold so dear
But the sounds of music can’t compare, with the Christmas choir here.
I have no words to tell you, the joy their voices bring,
It’s far beyond description, to hear the angels sing.

I know how much you miss me. I see the pain within your heart,
But I am not so far away. We really aren’t apart.
So be happy for me, loved ones You know I hold you dear,
And be glad I’m spending Christmas, with Jesus Christ this year.

I send you each a special gift, from my heavenly home above.
I send you each a memory, of my undying love
After all “Love” is the gift, more precious than pure gold.
It was always most important in the stories Jesus told.

Please love and keep each other, as my Father said to do
For I can’t count the blessings, or the love he has for you.
So, have a Merry Christmas, and wipe away those tears,
For I am having Christmas, with Jesus Christ this year.

-Anonymous

Sunday, December 4, 2016
2nd Sunday in Advent

Miracle

Read: Luke 1

Why is Christmas such a magical time of year? I think its because everyone is expecting a miracle at Christmas. Consider all the popular movies. Each one has a miracle as it's central plot. Whether it's a boy hoping his parents get back together, a shop-owner hoping he can keep his business running or a town who needs a new hero to help "save Christmas"

You might be reading this and wishing for your own miracle this Christmas. It's probably much smaller than what makes a holiday movie But it is no less important to you.

Maybe you're hoping your prodigal comes home. Maybe you're wishing for a job. Some are yearning for a special someone to sit next to you by the fire. 2,000 years ago, there was a couple who hoped for their own miracle. But like many, they had long given up on this dream. Zacharias and Elisabeth prayed for a child, but year after year, that prayer went unfulfilled. So, they gave up on the dream.

But this couple didn't give up on God. They stayed faithful. Then one ordinary day the extraordinary happened. Zacharias, a priest in Isreal, was chosen to give the incense at the altar. This was a once in-a-lifetime chance, a rare honor for such a common man, Then, as he preformed this sacred duty, an angel of god appeared breaking God's 400-year silence with Isreal.

The angel told Zacharias that he and his wife, Elisabeth would have a son after all. He would have a special purpose and would prepare Isreal for the coming of the Messiah Jesus.

This all sounded impossible to Zacharias. Not the miracle itself—that Jesus would come, that John would be the forerunner. Zacharias, as a believing Jew, knew the Scriptures and believed this.

He just had a hard time thinking God could use silly old him. After all, he and his wife were well past the child-bearing age. But, true to His word, God performed this miracle in the lives of Zacharias and Elisabeth. You know the rest of the story. John the Baptist led revival in Isreal and would later baptize Jesus Christ, the very son of Gov.

Prayer:

May God Bless each of us this Christmas with a miracle of our own. Amen

- Chip Zawacki

Monday, December 5, 2016

Anxious

Read: Matthew 5: 13—16

Willis and Stella were stalwarts of the church. Each approaching 90 years of age, too feeble to be as active as in previous decades, they became the church's prayer warriors. My childhood memories include faded images of Willis and Stella sitting near the front pew praising God and truly worshipping our Risen Savior. As young people, we rarely interacted with these elderly saints; we were so different. Our vibrant and zealous lives contrast the slow and peculiar ways of these gray-hairs. I thought I had so much I could teach them!

Our youth group Christmas caroling excursions annually included the home of Willis and Stella as well as all the church shut-ins. We visited sad elderly ladies, some of whom could only sit, watch, and listen to us through the front window. At a few houses, old couples would join us on the porch, shiver with us, and mouth the words of the familiar carols we sang. Others insisted that we come inside to sing and then shared with us a homemade treat or a piece of fruit. It seemed that they all lived in farm houses with century-old furnishings. They walked funny, they didn't talk like us, even their houses smelled different.

To me, the caroling time was really an opportunity for a social event. The visits to the shut-ins was really an excuse for the party afterwards. Sing three or four songs and move on to the next house.

When we arrived a Willis and Stella's home, we were invited inside by their son and daughter-in-law. Stella couldn't stand long, so she sat at the dining room table. Willis staying in a rocking chair in the corner, an old afghan on his lap. The blazing fireplace made the room feel like it was 80 degrees. As we began to sing, it occurred to me that this was probably the last Christmas these people would ever experience on Earth. Here I was anxious to get to the party and these dear old folks were anxious for their heavenly home. Someone requested "Away in a Manager". And we all joined in. This had to be my least favorite Christmas carol. It was a child's song not for us mature adults! But the words of the hymn rang out:

“...The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down here He lay.
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay,”

These lyrics, full of comfort and peace, were the words that were most appropriate for these people soon to be reborn. Their child-like faith had seen them through wars and depressions, When I hear these words each Christmas time, I think of Willis and Stella. I think of their lives and how our church was blessed by their faithfulness. Then I realize how much they taught me.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for sending so many to touch our lives. We can learn much from the experience of others, Help me to reach out and love others as You did.

May I be able to touch the life of others during this Christmas season. Thank you for coming to Earth and giving if yourself so we can be reborn, Amen.

Tuesday, December 6, 2016

Childlike Faith

READ: Hebrews 11

As a child, Christmas was an exciting time for my brothers and myself. We were told that if we were well behaved, Santa would arrive Christmas morning with gifts for us. I believed this.

For the month leading up to Christmas, we had prepared. We didn't know then that this preparation time was called Advent. There had been baking, decorating and deep cleaning. We even waxed the hardwood floors and shined them in our stocking feet. It was so very hard not to be excited. One particular Christmas Eve, I was extremely anxious for Christmas morning to come. We needed to get to bed quickly, because Santa could not come until we were asleep. I quickly hurried to bed in my long nightgown with its matching dust bonnet (it was a style in the early 60's). My bedroom was usually downstairs, but because it was Christmas Eve, I needed to sleep upstairs, so Santa had room to work. I just had faith that he would come. Long gowns can be tricky. Anyway, in my haste to get to bed, carrying my doll baby up the stairs, I tripped. My arm hit on the stairs. I cried a little, but went on to bed, so Santa could come. On Christmas morning, it was apparent that my arm was broken. Mom called Dr. Hedges and on Christmas morning, he left his family, his own Christmas activities and met my parents to set my arm. It didn't take long, but it was an inconvenience for everyone. When we arrived back home, Santa had come. We opened presents; we celebrated Christmas and then went to Grandma and Grandpa's as was our family tradition. Our Christmas celebration had been delayed, but it was still great.

That Christmas was over 50 years ago, and I don't have much of a memory of it, only pictures with my arm in a cast and the occasional ache when the weather gets cold (and I never really liked dolls much after that). What I want to remember is the childlike faith, that I had. This is how God wants us to anticipate and approach him. We will have setbacks and inconveniences. Things are not always good, but God is. When things don't go as anticipated, have faith that God has everything under control, and our reward is in Heaven.

Thought: As Christmas approaches, may we prepare and wait with unwavering faithful hearts for the coming of our savior much the way a child awaits the arrival of Santa.

-Lori DeBruin

Wednesday, December 7, 2016

Baby Pictures

Read: Isaiah 9:6

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

I am a new Grandpa! At this writing, our sweet baby granddaughter is four months old. Her birth was a joyous occasion for Grandma and me. Her new life is a joy. Everything seems to stop when Alaina is in our home.

We take lots of pictures with our phones of Lainey. And I like to show them to anyone who will look at them. She is beautiful! My good friends and acquaintances are eager to see the latest pictures and share in the joy of my only grandchild. But those with whom I am not as close are not so eager or excited about our Baby’s pictures

I believe celebrating Christmas is very much similar to my sharing of the pictures of our granddaughter. The people who are close to the family of God and know His Son are much more able to share in the celebration. Conversely, those who are not so close and do not know the Son cannot quite understand what all the fuss is about. I miss Alaina when I do not get to see her for a little while. Folks without children and grandchildren have a difficult time understanding what all the fuss is about. It is a father’s love!

The Child that was promised, the Son that was given, was written by the prophet Isaiah some 700 years before the blessed birth. From that birth comes the man, Jesus, who said, “I Am the Way, the Truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

Come to the celebration of Jesus’s birth. Come to know His Father and His family personally. When you do that, Christmas celebrations will be much more meaningful. You can then enjoy much more deeply when others share their “pictures” of Jesus.

Merry Christmas, Mike

-Mike Miller

Reprinted from the Fairview 2015 Devotional

Thursday, December 8, 2016

God in Control

Read: *“You will keep in perfect peace whose minds are set on you because they trust in You”* Isaiah 26:3

Anyone who knows me knows this is my “go to” verse. It seems to fit any situation I might be in or am currently dealing with.

We’ve all been in situations where we don’t know what the outcome will be. HE does! He knows before we do! “Trust and Obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to Trust and Obey”.

Like Dorothy said “There is no place like home....so it is with us, no way but God’s way.

We need to relinquish the control we all seem to think were so good at mastering. “I’ve got this...I can do it without help from anyone, anybody” And what happens when we do? Off into the ditch goes the bus! When we say Jesus take the wheel (after going into the ditch literally and figuratively) we need to again-relinquish that control to Him. I woke up at a jerk in the road of my life and let God take the wheel. It’s not been an easy one, easier than for some, harder than for others.

They say He’ll never give you more than you can handle. I know because of Him I’m stronger than what I realized, otherwise I wouldn’t have made it through the last few years. I know He puts people in our lives to help us through rough times - family, church family, prayer, God’s grace—These are what got me through these times.

God never promises a smooth road...it’s just smoother than where we try to navigate ourselves. After we’ve come through difficult times I believe He blesses us with happy times (Weddings, grandchildren, Baptism of loved ones). Perfect peace when we let God take the wheel.

As Christ commands: “Love one another & love God with all your body, mind, heart & soul”. When we do that our difficult days and situations are easier to get through.

God bless us with perfect peace this Christmas.

- Michelle Christopher

Friday, December 9, 2016

“Cast A– Down the Proud”

Read: Luke 1:51

What else is there to do on a rainy late September day? It was too cold and wet to work outside. All the inside & church chores were done. So we cleaned out a cabinet in the family room & moved some equipment around.

When you rummage through long-forgotten items, sometimes you find something that surprises you. One of my tasks that early autumn day last year was to rewire my cassette tape player and move it behind a cabinet door. I couldn't remember the last time we had played a cassette tape over the stereo.

As I sorted through wires and a box with old cassette tapes, I discovered something that I had nearly forgotten. There was a cassette dated 1985 with the words “Choir Christmas Cantata” on it. Suddenly I remembered; this was a recording of the Christmas program that my home church performed that year. Considering we were just a small country church, we had assembled a fairly decent choir. I inserted the tape in my newly-moved player and sang along. I could still remember the tenor parts!

I recall our director had selected some rather challenging pieces for us. We started the practices in September. As we tackled each piece, it became apparent the most difficult song would be one called “Masters in This Hall.” It is an English carol attached to a French dance tune. It borrows some vague Biblical imagery and is only moderately popular around the world. It certainly has not entered the canon of most popular carols.

The song had some unusual entrances and overlapping parts. To make matters worse, it used a few old English words:

*Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!
Nowell, sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on earth,
Born is God's son so dear...*

We were tempted to complain (and many did) about how we could never perform this song—besides, the audience wouldn't appreciate its complexity. Couldn't we just omit it from the program? But our hard work paid off. After many weeks of practice, we finally got it; my old tape reminded me how well we did! After the performance I recall just how proud we all felt about that particular part of the program.

Maybe it took the ensuing 30 years for me to finally see the irony of our pride. The last part of the chorus goes like this:

*God to-day hath poor folk raised
And cast a-down the proud.*

I trust that your Christmas season is coming along well. Just be careful that you don't get ‘cast a-down.’

Saturday, December 10, 2016

BEST. GIFT. EVER.

Read: Matthew 2:11

As much as we try to avoid focusing too much upon gifts at Christmas, as humans we just cannot help but get excited about the anticipation of Christmas morning. While we must guard against being too focused upon the excess materialism that comes with receiving gifts, I believe that God gave us many gifts so that we may enjoy them and use them. When we use them we should be thankful we have them and use them to glorify Him. Both giving and receiving are blessings for us to enjoy.

As I grow older the memories of my greatest Christmas gifts are still vivid in my mind. Though many years have passed and I probably couldn't recall the exact year I received some of these gifts, the feeling of excitement and blessing has not waned and will never be forgotten. Two particular gifts stand out. One year I made my typical 5:30 a.m. pass through the living room towards my parents bedroom to see if it was time to get up yet. Incidentally I can remember sitting at the top of steps for probably more than an hour waiting until it was at least somewhat close to a reasonable time to go down. I remember trying not to look under the tree, but I couldn't miss seeing a large gift with a sheet and two red bows on top even with the lights turned off. I had no idea what that could have been, but I just knew there was no way that could have been for my little sister who was only two or three at the time. I remember the joy when later that morning I was able to lift the sheet to receive my very first stereo complete with an AM/FM receiver, turntable, two speakers, and headphone jack! The other most memorable Christmas gift was wrapped with only a tag and a red string which wound through the house, out the back door and next door to our neighbors screened porch and at the other end of the string was my first red, white and blue ten-speed bike! Those gifts gave me great joy. I know my parents made sacrifices for me to have nice things like that as a child. I am forever grateful to them for my stereo, my bike and the many other gifts they have given to us. My parents shared in the joy knowing they had given me gifts I cherished.

Let us remember that we show others the Lord when we follow His example. Let us give cheerfully and generously just as the wise men who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus in that manger. Let us also be appreciative as we receive gifts especially when they are from people and a God who love us so much. It is my hope that we also realize that the Greatest Gift that has ever been given is our Lord and Savior Jesus' whose Father in heaven loved us so much to offer such a tremendous sacrifice to all of us so that we might live forever. It's not a bike or a stereo, but Eternal Life is far and away the BEST. GIFT. EVER.

Merry Christmas!

- Jon Saxton
Salem UMC

Sunday, December 11, 2016
3rd Sunday in Advent

We are The Body of Christ

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12 *“The body is a unit, though it is comprised of many parts. And although its parts are many, they all from one body. So it is with Christ.”*

Every year, the Ohio State Marching Band performs a Hometown concert. The audience gets to listen to their favorite selections from halftime shows in an up-close, personal way. It is very exciting to be a part of the crowd!

At one point in the concert, each section of the band is introduced. We get to hear the unique sound of the featured section and hear how it differs from the other sections. Each section plays an important part, and each section is needed to make the musical selection complete.

After all the music sections are introduced, they are combined and begin playing. Some of the sections have a great deal to play and are needed to carry the melody. Other sections keep the beat steady, and yet another section provides harmony, but all sections have a function and are necessary!

We may sometimes feel that we don't have much to offer—no one notices us anyway. The great conductor notices and needs us!

The kids sang a song about the body of Christ. “When we get together, it's very nice, for we are the body of Christ.”

So whether you are a trumpet or a tuba, you are necessary to the body of Christ.

- Diane Miller

Monday, December 12, 2016

My First Christmas As A Father

Matthew 1:20-21 ...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Christmas morning, our first as parents, my first as a dad, my first with a son. My life had been changed so much by that blessing and the new responsibilities. Our son was too young to understand presents, but he did hear the Christmas story and he got to experience the excitement and warmth of family gatherings, gatherings forever changed by his presence.

Family members clamored to be the first to hold our son. They talked about whether he looked more like his mother's family or mine. They commented on how healthy he looked and how bright and alert he was. His mother and I had, of course, already dreamed of what his life might become. His future was full of promise and we hoped for only the best. I wanted to be a good father and provide the example and guidance he would need to be a good man himself someday.

I think about Joseph, father of Jesus, and how the first Christmas had changed his life. Although he had been visited by an angel in a dream, his instructions must have left far more questions than they answered. Surely as Mary's delivery time approached, Joseph must have thought about being a good provider and raising a son that he could train to be a carpenter as himself. As angels appeared in that Bethlehem stable, did his thoughts turn from the normal "new father" dreams to how he would raise a son who "came to save his people"? His mind must have been overwhelmed as he surely recalled Mary's account of her own meeting with an angel and what she heard from Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Luke tells us that "...Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Her husband Joseph must have pondered them as well. The exhaustion of travel and the excitement of the birth would eventually cause his busy mind, full heart and tired body to surrender to sleep. The darkness of the night would soon give way to a bright morning and a world changed forever.

-Larry Bond

Tuesday, December 13, 2016

Acknowledge Him, Always

Read: Proverbs 3:5-6 *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him, And he shall direct your paths.”*

Many years ago I adopted this verse as what I call one of my “life verses”. As many of us do, I have struggled numerous times to keep the teaching of this verse in perspective in my life. So many times I have asked “Why is this happening to me?”, “This isn’t fair” or “What good could possibly come of this situation?” I have fallen short so many times, but the good news is that God’s grace is sufficient and we can get back up and try again.

I struggle a lot with “lean not on your own understanding” as I am a very practical person. I like to know the reasons for everything. However, we do not always know the reasons for everything that happens to us or to others and that can cause us to worry. The Bible tells us some very specific things about worry. Matthew 6:25-27 states “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Over the years I have come to realize that we do not need to know the reason for everything. More often than not, what comes out of a tough situation is growth. Sometimes it is growth in knowledge, understanding, or even maturity. However, I believe that the best type of growth is that of Faith. When our faith increases, so does the quality of our relationship with God.

Christmas is a time for reflection and thanks for all that God has brought us through, celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and anticipation of the good things to come. Remember that if you put your trust in Him, He will direct your paths. Romans 8:28 tells us that “God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”. I pray that all of us can start the new year with the faith and understanding needed to fulfill His purpose for our lives and the courage to spread that love to others. Amen.

- Heather Queen

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

A Change of Heart

Ezekiel 36:26 *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”*

In Dr. Seuss’s classic Christmas tale, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch suffers from having a small heart. The source of his heart problem is his lack of understanding of the meaning of Christmas. As the story goes the Grinch tries to put a stop to Christmas, but in the end, he comes to understand what Christmas is all about and his heart grows three sizes! This heart change makes a big difference in his life.

I’m not sure what Dr. Seuss’ intentions were when he wrote the story back in 1957, but it certainly comes across as a Christian parable to me that parallels the change that takes place in a person’s life when he or she come to understand the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Jesus, God’s Son, who was born to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). When the light of the Good News of Jesus dawns upon the heart of a person, God replaces the old heart of stone, with a new, fleshly heart—and a new person emerges. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Prayer: “Welcome Christmas—while we stand—Heart to heart—and hand in hand.” It might just make all the difference in the world. Amen.

- Phyllis Zawacki

Thursday, December 15, 2016

God Will Deliver

Read: Psalm 3: 1-4 (NIV) *“Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him”. But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. I call out to the Lord and he answers me from his holy mountain.”*

Wouldn't it be great if you never experienced conflict? Had no disagreements? Never inflicted hurt on others like your family, friends, co-workers, or even strangers? Fortunately, God promises that when you are reunited with Him for eternity, earthly sin, like conflict, will no longer exist. But in the meantime, it's nearly impossible to avoid conflict here on earth. So, how do you deal with conflict? Do you ever feel like you have many enemies, and even more rising up against you? David cries out in lament for the very same reason in today's passage. Sometimes it just seems like everyone is against you, fighting hard for your failure and your discouragement.

But as David shares, the Lord shields you and lifts your head, even when you are so weighed down that you can't even lift your own head. God's shield protects you from hurtful arrows penetrating your heart and soul. Crying out for God's help and protection isn't a sign of weakness but rather recognition of the sovereign power God provides to His children.

As you prepare to celebrate the Messiah's coming, remember that God is your shield, your glory, and the One who lifts your head high especially in times of conflict. May God's love surround you and as conflict comes, pray that His love and comfort gives you lasting peace.

Prayer: Lord, even as my foes surround me and knowing that you are a shield around me, I pray that you lift my head high so that even in times of conflict and distress, I can praise and worship you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

- Miriam Angerer

Friday, December 16, 2016

Grace is Enough

Read: Romans 8:38 & 39 *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I am sitting down to write this devotion on October 30, 2016. In exactly 9 days the United States will elect a new president. I am sure you will agree that this election year has been one for the history books (or the tabloids). As a responsible citizen of this country, I feel it is my privilege, honor and obligation to vote. As a Christian I have always tried to vote for the candidate who I felt had some faith foundation and a heart of service; someone who might just turn to God when making decisions that affect not only us, but the world. But this year, I have been overwhelmed by the negativity from the candidates and the media. Just 9 days before the election, controversy and accusations are still being pushed to the forefront to sway our vote and frankly make us dislike one candidate more than the other. How do you choose? Do you ever just feel like the world is crumbling and we are being swallowed up with it?

Fortunately I have had 3 little “God moments” in the last week that have altered my perspective and reminded me of who is in control.

Listening to the Christian radio station on the way to work, the radio host reminded me that all of the candidates are children of God. God created them, loves them and sent His son to die for them. Wow! God has a purpose for their lives. Let us hope that it is God’s will that one of these people become the president of the United States and He will love them, grant them wisdom and guide them to be the best president they can be.

Also listening to the radio, I heard a Pastor speaking and what I took from his sermon was “God’s grace is enough.” He said that we can pray and ask for things to happen or not happen in our lives but that no matter what happens, God’s grace is all we really need. I for one, needed to hear that.

Lastly, as I was carrying on one day about how scary the world is and how it all seems hopeless, my daughter says to me, “Worse comes to worst, we die and go to heaven.” Again, wow! She is right. Whom shall I fear?

“What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) As you are reading this, the election is over, and we know who will be the 45th president of the United States. It may or may not be the candidate you or I voted for but I will pray for this person, asking God’s blessing on this person, the presidency and the tremendous task that is ahead of them. In the midst of whatever the future holds, I will remind myself that God’s grace is enough.

Prayer: Lord God, let us know deep in our hearts that no matter what happens in our lives and in the world, your grace is all we need.

-Nancy Harrow

Saturday, December 17, 2016

What Do You Do With Jesus?

READ: Matthew 10:32 “Whosoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in Heaven.”

There is a question that we must all answer and it is a matter of life or death....that got your attention, didn't it?

Here is the question—”What do you do with Jesus?” there are only two answers to the question. You either accept Him as your Lord and savior or you reject Him’

The question must be answered in one of these two ways to reject Jesus is to spend eternity in torment. If you accept Jesus you must decide every day what to do with Him.

- Do you give Him control of your life, or do you keep Him in a box until /Sunday?
- Do you live according to His teachings, or is He still the baby in the manger?
- Do your friends know that you are a Christian? How do they know?

So...you really need to answer this question NOW. Do not put it off until later. What will you do with Jesus? It really is a matter of life or death.

-Diane Miller

Sunday, December 18, 2016

4th Sunday in Advent

This Bowl is for You

Read : *Isaiah 43: 2-3* “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.*”

These words have spoken volumes to me at different times in my life. There were times that I thought the waters were going to drown me and I would not be able to make it through the difficult times. God is true to his word and he will carry you through them, if you let him. He also puts people in our lives to help us and for us to help them when they are in need.

When I have gone through the rough waters, I have not always let him help, trust me...it is a lot smoother when we do!

When I lost my Pap, I really felt alone, even when I knew that there were people that really care. Don't get me wrong, I was and am very thankful for all of the prayers, cards, thoughts, etc., but I just could not shake the feeling. I prayed for something to make the feeling to go away, then my mom gave me my Pap's Bible. As I was looking through it, this scripture literally jumped out at me. My Pap had also underlined it. Wow, talk about God speaking to me.

As we grow and have children of our own, we want them to have a relationship with God. When they decide to go in different directions, we often feel like we did something wrong. We went through a difficult time with this, because of our own desires. We need to rely on God to bring them back. When we lost Randy's dad, it was really rough on our sons. But as always, God is a loving God and he gives us reasons to hope. After the funeral, Bryan and Kristen went home to their house. The next day, this was posted on Bryan's Facebook.

“This is going to sound crazy. This was a dessert of choice with my pap when we were younger. Yesterday was a tough day as it was his funeral and it has been tough for me. So I went to Kroger's to pick up the stuff for the ice cream (vanilla ice cream, chocolate syrup and cheerios-the way Pap had liked it). I was checking out and the following conversation happened.

Stranger: Are you a Christian?

Me: Yes

Stranger: I want to pay for your groceries.

Me: No, it's ok.

Stranger: God and the holy spirit told me to pay for your groceries. I have to.

Me: Thank you so much.

Stranger: I come here to help people.

All I have to say is thanks Pap this bowl is for you.

God gives us everything we truly need at the time we need it the most. Trust in his loving care and the waters will be smoother than without him because he gives us the hope we need.

- Amy Jeffers

Monday, December 19, 2016

God Carries Us

READ: Philippians 4: 6 and 7 *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything 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."*

In life, we will all go through trials and tribulations. The great promise, that we as Christians have, is that God is with us carrying us through each one. Many times we try to tackle those trials on our own. The wonderful opportunity that we have is that we can turn to God, and He will hear our prayers. He actually knows what we are going to ask before we even ask it. There have been many times in my life that I have prayed and asked God for His intervention. One example is when I was suffering with a kidney disease. I knew that there were only a few options for me. One was divine intervention; another was a kidney transplant, and the last could be death. For awhile I struggled with God and told Him what I wanted. I prayed selfish prayers forgetting that He knew the plans that He had for me. That was okay with God as He wants us to cry out to Him. It took time and much spiritual maturity to one day come to the acceptance to pray for God's will and not my own. That is not always easy. There are many times when we want family members to live or be cured, and it does not happen that way. It is hard to remember that God knows the future. He loves us and is with us no matter what we are facing. After I prayed that prayer of asking for God's will and not my own, I received an indescribable peace. It did not matter what was going to happen to me; I was at peace. We must learn to ask God as He does hear our prayers. We need to trust in His plan and seek His will. Don't be afraid to ask because God knows. It is okay to ask for anything, and He wants you to. Just remember to trust that He will take care of you. God listens to our prayers, so never be afraid to come to Him. I am so glad that I have that assurance.

- Nancy Cordle
Former Amanda-Clearcreek Teacher

Tuesday, December 20, 2016

The JOY of Christmas

Read: Luke 2: 10-11

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the City of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Christmas is a time of JOY, a time to be merry, a time for traditions and a time to celebrate with family and friends. Our schedules are filled with social gatherings, concerts, cookie bakes, shopping, Christmas cards and gift exchanges. The excitement of Christmas is seen at every turn. Children try so hard to be on their best behavior in hopes that their wish lists are filled. Holiday decorations and lights add to the excitement and anticipation of Christmas Day.

During the hustle and bustle of holiday planning and obligations, it may be hard to notice that not everyone is in the Christmas spirit. There are many reasons that can contribute to a joyless spirit. How does one find joy during the Christmas Season when they are struggling? Causes may be financial hardship, relationships, depression and loneliness. I too experienced this struggle for years! In fact, my joylessness at Christmas began on December 23, 1977. I was just 16 years of age. It was the eve of Christmas Eve. My mom passed away suddenly at the age of 45. For years I managed to get through the Christmas Season as if nothing were wrong. I tried hard to keep my sadness buried deep inside. The JOY of Christmas was missing. Or was it?

As the years have passed, I have found that JOY again! I grew in my faith and found the JOY of Christmas comes through accepting and receiving God’s gift of our Savior, Christ the Lord. This Christmas JOY lasts all year, 365 days a year. Choosing to be greatly JOYful is not based on circumstances, but comes by perspective. God’s prayer is for all of us to find JOY in the gift of eternal life.

-Jill Corder
Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

What do Others See?

READ: 1 Timothy 3

We go about our lives, running from one event to another, meetings, concerts, work, Bible Study, Church. We can get so caught up in the doing, that sometimes we lose sight of the why of our doing. And the enjoyment from being able to do. Often we can find ourselves just going through the motions.

Recently someone I know joined their church. They had been attending it for quite some time. The first time I saw them after their commitment, I congratulated them from my heart. First they gave the standard thank you. But what they said next really got me to thinking a bit. They mentioned that the people that were in their church family were a big part of the reason they had joined the church. He went on to talk about how they are the Godliest people he has ever known— That they not only talk the talk, but they walk the walk. This made me wonder, would someone say this about my church or myself.

I immediately thought: “Oh no, someone might be watching me every day, and I’m not sure I am up to the challenge.” Then I wondered: “What poor influence have I been, when I was having a bad day.” I certainly hope my actions have never prevented someone from coming closer to God!

Thought: Is someone watching? What did they see today? Was it God?

- Carl DeBruin

Thursday, December 22, 2016

We Can't all be a Grandma

READ: Roman's 11-13 The Message

“Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.”

Warm sweet rolls, homemade noodles, roast beef. . . . the sights and smells of family dinners past. I remember those times well from my childhood. I can still see grandma's kitchen table filled with bright yellow egg noodles drying in preparation for a family meal. All the work she put into those meals – happily cooking, baking and preparing foods fit for a king! Oh and the best were the Christmas cutout cookies with homemade icing!

Her love of the Lord showed in everything she did whether it was washing her (bachelor) brother's laundry weekly, helping us kids with our chores on the farm, or just spending time with us grandkids. While babysitting for 4 neighbor boys one summer (while in her 70's) she would play with them heart and soul – even “raccoon hunting” in the basement of their home with flashlights and all. In earlier days, she and grandpa fostered children, along with adopting my mom (I know I smile every time I think of it—what a great connection God gave us!). She taught me about working joyfully, with a giving heart for the Lord. And she NEVER complained. I remember asking her, Grandma don't your hands hurt, when they were red and swollen with arthritis and she would laugh and say, it's not so bad and “what good does complaining do anyway?” She was a prayer warrior and quick to remind us of His blessings in everything great and small. Reminding me of God's Commandments when I needed reminding :)

This isn't meant to tell everyone what an AWESOME grandma I had (even though I did). You see, my grandma is one of the strongest influences of Christ in my life I have ever had. We can't all be a grandma, obviously. But we can all be Christ-like. We can give joyfully and willingly to those around us – each and every day. We can work through the pain (physical, emotional, etc.) knowing that Christ suffered and died for each and every one of us. We can pray often with passion and confidence knowing we can talk to our loving Father continually, constantly knowing He will take care of our needs.

Let's all work joyfully to be THAT person that God uses to glorify Him and share the love of Jesus.

- Kelly Cramer

Friday, December 23, 2016

Remember!

READ: Psalms 42:1 *Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God.*

When I was young and my brothers and I were getting too rambunctious, my mother would often say, "'tis better to be seen than heard." She also liked to talk about how silence is golden. Every parent has probably recited similar lines to their kids when the busy din just becomes too overwhelming.

But silence is needed to experience some of the lovely beauties of life like an infant sleeping, a child's quiet song, a deer in the woods or a stunning bird at the feeder.

I've always been someone who has been on the run. Busy schedules and constant activities leave little time for quiet reflection. Times of silence can feel somewhat disconcerting to me. I have to confess that sometimes church services that include a lot of silent prayer leave me feeling impatiently uneasy.

But I'm missing out when I keep my brain running at full speed all of the time. Settling down in quiet reflection can allow a deeper appreciation of God's creation and complexities of life. But it can also lead to unexpected feelings. Sometimes I may feel a sadness.

Sometimes I may feel abandoned in the silence.

Certainly others also feel a sadness and loneliness in their lives and wonder if they have been forgotten or forsaken. But God is there for us in the lively and happy times, as well as the quiet and dark times.

Ours is a God of love and steadfastness. The psalmist says, "Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God."

Dear Lord, please help me to use this season of preparation to observe the silence and focus on God's presence in my life and rejoice in the promise of love and hope. Amen.

- Beth Short

Friday, December 24, 2016
Christmas Eve

Remember!

READ: Psalm 27:5 “For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock”.

Justifying distancing myself from God has come easy in the wake of the heartache of the past 36 months. My life has been turned upside-down and the only security I felt that I’ve had is an unseen God whom I’m consistently questioning.

God and I have had many heart-to-heart discussions. Actually, I’m the one who has talked, questioned, screamed, ranted, rebelled, and cried all while feeling vulnerable and unlovable. God has patiently and calmly listened. But one morning this past June, God decided to put His two cents into the conversation.

My path to a coffee shop took me along the shores of Lake Erie. I lingered at the edge of the water and watched the determined waves crash against the jagged rocks. I recognized immediately the metaphor for my current life; pushed, shoved, broken, airborne, lost and utterly out-of-control. I stood there for some time and watched as unseen forces pulled those shattered pieces back into the collective to be absorbed and reunited with the other waves—healed and whole again. At that moment I began to have a renewed hope that it *WAS* going to be okay again. I think I actually smiled for the first time in a long time and began to feel hopeful for the future.

No matter how shattered and broken we become God is there to pull us back and make us healed and whole again—unconditionally loved and valuable beyond measure,

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for being my rock, my refuge, my strength, and my hope. Thank you for unconditionally loving me despite my brokenness. Give me the courage to continue forward when all I want to do is hide in your refuge. Amen

- Judy Kraft

Friday, December 25, 2016
Christmas Day

Read: Luke 2:6-7

I come from a large family. We were not rich by most standards, but Mom and Dad always found a way to make Christmas morning special. With so many of us, to a little boy, it seemed our tree was absolutely inundated with brightly wrapped gifts.

I don't know what your tradition is for Christmas morning, but we weren't permitted to just tear into the packages. First, we had to wait for everyone to stir. Then we had to wait for Grandma Cowgill to arrive. She didn't live far away, but it seemed like it took her forever to show up.

After breakfast, it was finally time to attack our gifts. Our tradition was to have each person open a present—ooh and ah over it—before we could move on to the next person. The camera was always ready for those now-awkward shots of someone holding up their new underwear. As you can imagine, this process took a long time.

Of course, the greatest reason we share gifts at Christmas is our acknowledgment that God shared the greatest Gift of all with us, His Son Jesus. But it looks like God handled His gift-giving on that first Christmas morning in a much different way than my family did.

It seems He didn't want any oohs and ahs over His gift. He chose an obscure woman to bear His Son. Then he arranged for this pregnant couple to head to Bethlehem, an out-of-the-way town of maybe a few hundred people. When birth was imminent and overnight accommodations could not be arranged, He hid them away in the worst hiding place I can imagine: a common stable. It was there we were presented with God's great gift.

It's hard to keep quiet about special gifts. The angels seemed to share that same excitement I felt as a child. They just *had* to tell. One of the angels scurried to a nearby field of sheep and shepherds. There, I can almost sense, the angel couldn't hold back any more. *"I bring you good news of great joy... Today a Savior has been born...He is Christ the Lord!"*

Now the secret was out. The sky filled with angels. *"Glory to God in the highest!"* they shouted. The shepherds went looking. Wise Men heard the news too and came later to share the joy. There were a lot of oohs and ahs.

I trust that you have been blessed with our joint venture through the Advent and Christmas seasons this year. We acknowledge this Christmas Day we have been presented with a great Gift. It's okay to ooh and ah.

-Pastor Keith Deel

Notes: