

Thursday, March 31, 2011

My Sunday school teacher had our class of teenage boys memorize II Timothy 2:15—“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”.

This concept and its memorization was an early awakening that God is listening, watching and there to guide. At that time in my youth He was waiting for me to wake up and pay attention to who I was and what I might become. It was an alerting and lasting message!

Although I was brought up in a firmly established Christian home, I was a typical drifting teenager. A cousin asked if I would like to ‘try his Presbyterian Sunday School’. I did. It significantly deepened and changed my life. Our teacher was a gem. She could readily handle a dozen or so teenage boys, most of whom were on the football team and thought of themselves as a pretty rugged bunch. Among her admonitions was a sharp alertness that your behavior is not only ones’ self guide, but may well be a signal to others as to behaviors to be emulated. (Did she mean disciples?)

A furthering of this understanding came a few years later. A fellow college student (a pre-ministerial scholar) had occasional evening prayer meetings. One message struck me and greatly influenced my personal and business life. The message, like my Sunday school memorization, was almost identical. You are always an “Unconscious Leader” to some one(s)! What one says, does, or how one acts is –or may well be - a behavioral signal to others as to how they might behave or perform. Someone else, you never know who, is observing and taking clues for your behaviors.

Throughout my personal and business life the concept of an Unconscious Leader – a Workman- has been focal. Over many years I shared the concept with all employees on a continuing basis. I emphasized they were THE company and THEIR behaviors were being seen by other employees and all our publics. Hence, their behaviors were a mirror of their inner selves and therefore, the Company itself. They each carried a major responsibility.

(cont. April 1, 2011)

Friday, April 1, 2011

(cont. from March 31, 2011)

Even though I did not quote Biblical passages in staff sessions, all could figure out the basic source AND the validity of the teaching. It was most effective. I believe it altered lives. It certainly positively affected the culture of the Company.

God sees, hears and teaches and wants us to be Workmen of the Truth and “Unconscious Leaders”, .....i.e. Disciples!

Bill Smedley

Matthew 28:5-7

Easter has been my favorite holiday (holy day) since I was a little girl. Although the newspaper advertisements pictured girls in straw hats and short-sleeved dresses, Easter in Michigan often meant snow boots worn over shiny patent leather shoes and wool coats over bright cotton clothes.

Several churches in our town joined together for a sunrise service on Easter Sunday morning. What a contrast to the wintry chill of pre-dawn gloom! The brightly lit sanctuary was packed with worshipers; organ, trumpets and choirs played and sang joyful music; the rich aroma of Easter lilies filled the room. After the service, the bitter wind outdoors couldn’t extinguish the glow we felt as we headed home for breakfast.

As I grew older, I became a rebellious, ungrateful teen who was content to live in disobedience. The loving Lord didn’t allow me to settle for darkness but drew me into His glorious light. The fear of the women as they hurried to the tomb so long ago turned to joy when the angel told them the good news that Jesus lives. They were instructed to go and tell their good news to the disciples. Their instructions are meant for us, too: “Go, and tell. . . “

Thank you, Lord, for reminding us that we who live in darkness have seen a great light. Help us to guide others into Your glorious light. Amen.

Ruth Sweetman

Saturday, April 2, 2011

Phillipians 2:14-15—"Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation."

In taking classes taught by Ron and Catherine Hilliard, I have learned to notice and share "God sightings"—the small and large ways we see God in our lives on a daily basis. When I slow down or step back from the busyness of life, I notice God's presence in myriad ways all the time. Just last Sunday, I was scheduled to be a Circle of Prayer minister after the 11 o'clock worship service. I was not serving as a deacon that day and my family could not attend 11 o'clock service, but because I was scheduled to come forward to pray with anyone wanting prayer after the service, I attended alone. Wearing the "prayer minister" badge I went up to the front as everyone was leaving, but no one came forward, so after a little while, I took off my badge, put it back in the basket, and left.

Outside the Sanctuary I bumped into Catherine Hilliard and we started chatting. We were about to say goodbye when I asked her how she would be spending her Sunday. She said her cousin was in town from Idaho and she had not seen her in 40 years. She didn't know her cousin's faith journey and she asked me to pray for her and their visit—meaning some time that day. I asked, "Do you want to pray together now?" Catherine was delighted and I did pray for her, but the point is in just that everyday situation, our hearts were made aware of God's presence.

When no one had come forward after the service after I had made a lot of effort to be there was a little discouraging—but to be altogether honest, I also felt like I was off the hook because I'm not one hundred percent comfortable in being the go-to person for prayer in the Sanctuary. However, God knew what He was doing for all involved, and, as usual, He did it in a way that was not expected.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the ways you make your presence known to us. Please help me to slow down and notice You at work in all of my circumstances and draw me closer to You. Amen.

Lisa Cole

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

(cont. from Tuesday, March 29, 2011)

While staying with Kitty's parents over Christmas in Virginia we had planned to drive up to Baltimore to see Mad & Dad on Sunday, December 26. There was a strong winter storm forecast (6"- 8" of snow) for that day and we decided not to go. Miraculously, the storm didn't materialize along the route, although it was very bad further east. The weather cleared quickly and we elected to go the next day, the 27<sup>th</sup>.

We saw Dad in the dining room but he was fast asleep, snoring loudly, and they were having trouble waking him up to eat. Madelon, Kitty and I had our lunch in a room near Dad's in the nursing facility and had a good time talking about all kinds of things. It looked like Dad wasn't going to wake up anytime soon, so we started to collect our things to leave but continued to chat for another ½ hour or so.

I went in to his room to say good bye, kissed him on the head, whispered into his ear that I loved him and that he was free to go 'home' whenever he pleased. I left to start the car for the trip home; it was very cold outside. While I was on the way to the car, Kitty and Madelon stopped to see him and he died peacefully while they were with him, within 5 minutes of me leaving his room. As Lucky would say, "My Dad had been promoted". It was the best Christmas gift that I could ever receive.

God's love, power and grace, displayed with his command over the weather and placing me in the right place at the right time is awe inspiring. "His will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven". Sometimes you don't need to look very hard to see His will working in your own life.

Lord, thank you for continuing to love me unconditionally and showering me with blessings with your Amazing Grace. Amen.

Skip Hudson

Tuesday, March 29, 2011

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13

It is clear to me that if you have let God into your heart, He is with you all the time. I am continuously astounded by the path my life has taken, to live in such a beautiful place as South Florida, to be married to a wonderful lady who brings out the parts of my character that I'm proud of (which are not that many), and to provide me blessing after blessing, none of which I deserve. Synchronicity is everywhere, but sometimes it is so powerful that it removes any doubt of God's love for us.

My mother died 30 years ago and my sense of loss was profound as I felt that the only person who loved me unconditionally was no longer in my life. Then God sent me Kitty, my wife, and everything changed.

My dad remarried 5 years after Mom died to a wonderful woman named Madelon. They have lived happily in a retirement community near Baltimore for the past 15 years. We called them Mad & Dad. My father's health deteriorated in the past three years and he became seriously debilitated about six months ago so we had to place him in a nursing facility. I saw him occasionally in 2010. I frequently prayed that God would give him peace and tranquility during the remaining days of his earthly life, that Mom be ready to help him with the transition and let Him know that Dad was ready to go any time He was ready for him.

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(cont. Wed. March 30, 2011)

Sunday, April 3, 2011, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

John 14:6—"I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

As I reflect on the Lenten season this year, I think of the 2 people in my life that led me to Jesus. As a child I would sit by my grandmother's side, as she would tell me the story about Jesus and His death on the Cross. When she spoke about Jesus she would always mention to me what a horrific death He had. I remember how it would bring tears to her eyes and how sad it made me feel and yet, this was the start of my relationship with Him.

Many years later my grandmother went home to be with Jesus and shortly afterwards a man came into my life whom later became my husband. As God worked by His grace through Curt, my faith and belief in Jesus Christ deepened. Through the ups and downs in life and battling through Curt's illness I found myself wavering in my faith and trust in God from time to time... but not Curt, he never wavered no matter what adversities he faced. Curt taught me to never give up and to keep trusting and believe in God through Jesus Christ, to the very end. I will always remember Curt telling me, "God loves you, don't forget it, don't EVER forget it. I want to see you again after I'm gone from this life." When I finally learned to completely commit my life to God on His terms and not mine, I found myself to be filled with the Holy Spirit and enjoying the blessings of His goodness and faithfulness in love, peace, hope and joy.

Oh God how Great Thou art. Thank you for working through my loved ones as they led me to You. Lord, I pray in Jesus' name that You work through me, so now I can witness to others and they will know the blessings of Your love, peace, hope and joy as I have. Amen.

Ann Marie Grothmann

Monday, April 4, 2011

“Oh My Goodness!!!” This is my granddaughter Lucy's favorite expression, currently. And, as I look back to the phone call I received in 2008 from a member of the Nominating Committee, that's exactly how I felt when that call ended! I had been asked to be on the Session, serving as the co-chair of the Worship Committee, and I would be in charge of all facets of Communion for any/all services.

Let me say that I had served as an Elder at Memorial for 6 years. I really thought that First Pres. would be better served by a YOUNGER Elder, who would surely serve with more energy and enthusiasm that I could probably muster. Anyhow, as I began to pray arduously about this request, it quickly came to my mind that, as a child, I had gone so many times with my dear Grandmother to prepare/put away Communion at our Church in Huntington. I remembered that the best part about this whole adventure was that I was allowed to drink all of the extra grape juice! Would I experience this same happiness now, many years later, if I was in charge of this Communion responsibility here for 3 years??....I seriously doubted I would.

Scriptures I read and re-read continued to remind me that I was instructed to "be available" - to be ready and willing to serve, when asked. And, as I studied Scriptures that talked about the sacrament of Communion, I saw anew that God used material things like bread and juice to put NEW LIFE into believers. Receiving Communion is certainly a way of responding to God's work and His provisions in our lives.

Through the Lord's Supper, our hearts are touched in a very tender place. Dr. Dale Bruner says this: "The Sacraments are God's HUGS! They are God physically approaching and touching us." I love this thought of Dr. Bruner's!

This calling to serve again as an Elder was going deeper in my heart - my roots - than I ever would have thought possible! Yes, I could accept this call, and I would "Trust and Obey" my God. Trust is certainly a prerequisite for obedience, as I have seen proven in my life over and over, and both are necessary for FAITH to grow. Trusting hearts create obedient wills, for sure. Joshua 24:15 says: ".....As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." This was the bed-rock theme of my home as far back as I can remember. Yes, I will serve.

Becky Jarrett

Monday, March 28, 2011

Psalm 23:2-3—“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.”

When My Feet Touch the Meadow

When my feet touch the meadow,  
When blue birds brush the sky,  
I'll be home  
To walk banks of brooks,  
And watch the butterflies.

When my feet touch the meadow,  
Strength and beauty I'll embrace.  
I'll see lace of sun and shadow  
Caress the meadow face.

When my feet touch the meadow,  
I'll hear the meadow song –  
With harmony from leaves and breeze,  
My voice will pray along.

When my feet touch the meadow,  
And blue birds brush the sky,  
I'll be home  
At last at rest –  
Restored and glorified.

My prayers and heart turn to Elton and Lee. I recall the times these faithful servants brought beauty and strength to my husband's bedside. During days so dark and bleak, when injury or illness shadow life, the glories and comforts of Christ come to us through the works of the faithful – For the works of those like Elton and Lee create in us a state of grace.

Annie Dougherty

Sunday, March 27, 2011, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

Deuteronomy 31:8—"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

When my family and I first moved to Florida when I was 7 or 8 years old, we lived in Indian Rocks Beach, about two blocks from the Gulf of Mexico. To get there, we had to go across an old bridge that did not raise up like our modern bridges. But to open it, the bridge tender had to put a long pipe in a center pedestal and walk around and around to have the bridge turn sideways so the boats could pass. (I loved to help the bridge tender.)

One day my mother and I went to the beach and while I was out swimming by myself, I got caught in an extremely strong undertow that kept pulling me out to sea. It was so strong that I could not get out of it. I tried to swim, but couldn't. After struggling and being extremely terrified, I was finally able to get on top of the water and to swim back to shore. It was a very scary experience, but as I look back on that incident, I feel it was the hand of God that reached down and pulled me up to free me from the stranglehold that the undertow had on me.

Is there anything in your life that is holding you down or pulling you away from being where you should be? Reach out to God to break its grip and to release you. God is faithful and will never let us down. "Call to me and I will answer you and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3.

Dear God, I praise and thank You for saving me that day and for the blessings You have given me during my lifetime. Help us to call to You and listen to Your answers. Amen.

Ken Weda

Tuesday, April 5, 2011

Life is returning to some semblance of normal. I have attended church for two Sundays, also attended our men's breakfast for the last two Thursdays. I am doing daily physical therapy and regaining some strength.

I have discovered again that God has a way of showing up. This past week a friend from church wrote a short encouraging note saying, "Isn't remission a wonderful word." Indeed it is. But when the doctors talk about "remission" they are never quite sure. That's why I need another two treatments and even then there is no guarantee. All they can say about "remission" is that they can find no physical evidence of the culprit called cancer at present. But I am content with the present remission.

And then my theological mind began to play around with that word. It was not first used about cancer or other illness. Its major application comes in the term "remission of sins." When visiting with our senior pastor Lucky Arnold yesterday he offered a prayer of thanks that I was in "remission". And it struck me like a bolt out of the blue. Yes, I am thankful for remission of my cancer but that is nothing compared to my remission of sins. THAT means that God can find NO EVIDENCE OF MY SINS. When I enter into His judgment I will be found "NOT GUILTY" before Him -- and all because Jesus took my place. The doctors can never be sure I am "in remission". But I can be absolutely sure that I am "in remission" when it comes to my sin. I can sing with gusto, (but out of tune) *"My sin -- O the bliss of this glorious thought -- my sin, not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."*

Acute Myelogenous Leukemia might not stay in remission. It may even take my life. If not, something else will. But nothing can change my "remission of sins"!! My prayer and desire is that you have also discovered that. If not, start your search now!

Rev. Elton Piersma, written Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> to his family and friends,

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

As I write this our brother and friend, Rev. Elton Piersma, has died. He enjoyed his last week on earth with family and friends. He was cheerful, grateful, funny, tender, and, as usual, quite articulate about how he was doing, what he was feeling, where he was spiritually. Elton Piersma ministered as our minister of visitation...but was so much more. He quietly assumed the role on our church staff of elder statesman. He was an enthusiastic staff member, not infrequently reflecting on how much he loved being a part of this ministry team and how grateful he was for the unity of heart and genuine affection he experienced in and among the staff. He was fond of remarking that First Pres was the best place he ever worked. He was our friend.

Elton and Lee lived out lives of ministry and demonstrated before our watching eyes what shared ministry looked like. As Lee struggled with illness in recent years, Elton cared for her, living out, before those of us who are younger, the sickness and health part of the marriage vow. Their tender love for each other and their shared faith in Jesus and partnership in ministry was a quiet and understated but quite powerful light in the midst of our life together as a church.

Elton remained an avid learner of Biblical truth. He seemed as the years went on to worship more and more as he studied and meditated on things we studied and discussed. As he would reflect on some thought or insight he had gleaned he would sometimes close his eyes and tilt his head up and speak with a smile on his lips as he marveled at the God of his salvation. As he journeyed through his battle with leukemia his faith never wavered nor did he seem to be discouraged or disappointed. When his family gathered around his bed in the hospital, they remarked that they had never known him to be so funny. My thought was that I had never known him any other way. Joy seemed to well up out of him from a fountain deep within. He did not seem to fear death but longed for the blessed future that awaited him.

(cont. Thursday, April 7, 2011)

Saturday, March 26, 2011

I described the last three days to a visiting friend as an emotional and physical roller coaster. At one moment I am feeling fine and ready to go home. Then comes some more antibiotics or some other injection and I am weak and wiped out. Yesterday while Faith and Lee were visiting, they started me on potassium. In a half hour I was faint, the room was spinning and I had to be helped to bed. I slept for over two hours, was awakened by the nurse to tell me my dinner was getting cold and felt quite normal. The day before, I could not walk to the bathroom without help because I had no sense of balance.

As we talked and laughed about this, we shared that roller coasters can be scary but that if the safety bar is firmly in place, there is no danger. I just want you to know that my safety bar is secure! The experiences are unpleasant and a bit disorienting but all is well. I also had another unit of blood in the past couple of days. The final one I think. As I was musing again on how "the life is in the blood" some words of a great hymn popped into my mind. Remember these words? "*And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing; Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin.*" Jesus's life was in that blood and He gave that life for me! *My God, how great Thou art!*

It's o.k. to be on the roller coaster because that shed blood is the safety bar! Of course, that also led me to repeat in my mind the last verse and refrain:

*When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.  
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,  
And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

Rev. Elton Piersma, written Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> to his family and friends

Friday, March, 25, 2011

I was probably dreaming. I know I was. No hot water in the shower last night. The bed was less than comfortable. Mosquito netting draped over my bunk bed was brushing against my face. Yet all I could hear in the faint distance was "Devo Time", "Devo Time", "Time with Jesus", "Time to get up". The sun had not yet risen and Suds was methodically making his way through the boys' bunk house. We had been in the Dominican Republic less than 24 hours on the high school/college mission trip. How could Suds be getting us up before sunrise? Throughout that trip we got up every morning very early and spent time with our journal, pen and a Bible. It may have been 30 minutes or it could have stretched to 45 minutes. We would just immerse ourselves in time with Jesus. This is when the relationship develops and deepens. When we spend time with someone we care about: whether it be our Savior, our spouse or our kids, we draw closer.

On this mission trip there were several parents who had come along with their children. These high school/college students were an inspiration to us through their testimonies and transparency throughout the trip. On that trip, several fathers felt they wanted to continue the closeness of the mission trip and form a small group to study the Bible and draw closer to Jesus Christ. Our Bible theme verse for the group was from Malachi 4:6. "He (the Lord) will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

So on alternating Saturday mornings.... at 6:15 (before sunrise) in the sand just north of the Juno Beach Pier, you will see five fathers huddled in their beach chairs. If you could listen in on them, you would hear them sharing their "Jesus time", reading Scripture and attempting to become better husbands, fathers and brothers in Christ. From Matthew 7:8 we are reminded that: "Everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds and to him who knocks, the door will be opened". Let's take the first step of action by moving closer to Jesus.

Alan Mulcahy

Thursday, April 7, 2011

(cont. from Wednesday, April 6, 2011)

He quoted to me and to his family and probably many of you who visited with him in those last few days the words of the Apostle Paul at the end of his life found in 2 Timothy 4:7-8—"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there awaits for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that Day."

Now Lord, we commit our beloved brother into your care and keeping in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life.

Elton Piersma was a gift of God to me, to us and to this world. We will miss him...but we will see him again! Hallelujah!

Rev. Walter B. Arnold



Friday, April 8, 2011

We read of Christ's experience at the Garden of Gethsemane. . . when He got away from the crowds, even away from His closest friends. He was quiet and alone with God. He then said, "Nevertheless, not My will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42). That complete surrender to the will of God must have replaced the stress and tension of His situation and brought Him inner peace.

I would like to say that I completely surrender myself to God all of the time; but as most of us, I take over far too often. However, I have definitely learned when my life is in harmony with His will for me; I cannot see fully the way ahead, but I have an instinctive sense of the right direction and can move ahead with His gifts of love, courage and confidence. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and he shall direct thy paths (Proverbs 3:6). I desire peace of mind and peace of heart and know the only way to acquire that peace was in the acceptance of Christ as my Savior and His purposes for my life. . . my peace is found in His will for me. He does not make it known for me years ahead, but rather one step at a time. As I have taken those first steps, I realize that God offers me the next steps as He gives me certain tasks in life.

Several years ago a visiting pastor at the Ash Wednesday service suggested that it was beneficial to give up things during Lent as a sacrifice, but why not "also add some type of service to God to your days during this period". I have practiced that idea for the years since and find it quite meaningful. In fact it brings such inner reward that I have extended it more often throughout the year. What a blessing I have found. Service to God in any form is fulfilling and rewarding, affords a closer relationship with others who are served and certainly brings more of that inner peace and closeness with our Heavenly Father.

Jesus so freely gives us peace. . .all that remains is for us to accept it. . . we can have perfect peace.

Dear God, Help each of us to freely give of ourselves. Amen.

Jane Sanders

Thursday, March 24, 2011

I had time to do some musing over the weekend. Israel was forbidden to eat meat with the blood in it because "the life is in the blood" and God's children must not mingle human life with other forms of life. As I watched the blood cells being infused into my body I was reminded of that. Without those infusions, my life would soon be gone. Because of the curse of sin we suffer various diseases. But God, in grace, provides doctors, nurses, blood donors, etc. so that we may live. And in the new heaven and new earth we won't ever have to worry about that.

Sometimes it is difficult to know how to pray. My daughter, Sharon, sent a card and included a copy of the prayer that Lee and I used at our wedding. It is appropriate for my present situation --- and for yours!

*Refrain:* Lead me, guide me along the way, For if You lead me, I cannot stray. Lord let me walk each day with You, Lead me, my whole life through.

1) I am weak and I need Your strength and power to endure with grace my weakest hour.  
Help me through the darkness Your face to see. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

*Refrain:*

2) Help me walk in the path of righteousness; be my aide when Satan and sin oppress.  
I am trusting You whate'er may be. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

*Refrain:*

3) I am lost if You take Your hand from me, I am blind without Your light to see.  
Lord, forever may I Your servant be. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

God Bless!!

Rev. Elton Piersma, Written Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> 2010 to his family and friends

Wednesday, March 23, 2011

A year ago this past Thanksgiving a terrible tragedy occurred in our community. A little girl and many of her family members were gunned down in their home just after Thanksgiving dinner by a calculating killer, a member of their extended family. This little girl was only 6 years old but was so full of the love of Jesus, that she wanted to share Him with everyone, even the killer who came to her home that day.

It brought to mind a line from a Steven Curtin Chapman song about a similar incident where he wrote, "Never have I questioned more the wisdom of God's plan". So many of us felt that way, felt betrayed, and couldn't begin to understand.

But in the days that followed, her parents were pushed in front of TV cameras and their story was not just about the tragedy, but also their faith, knowing where she is today, was made known to many. Knowing she went from her father's arms here in this world to Jesus' arms in heaven were her father's words. This strong witness was broadcast nationally and even internationally.

So even though this was tragic and even though her parents' strong faith cannot take away the pain they feel in losing their only child, it was part of God's plan. And "God only knows" how many people who heard this story were inspired to want to understand who Jesus is.

God is not finished with me yet and I believe my faith has far to go to even reach where this little girl's faith was the day she died. She was more ready to see Jesus than many of us are as adults today.

So this is my prayer...

Lord, help us to trust You entirely and believe that even if tragedy strikes our lives, that You are in control. Hold us in Your hands and comfort us in our grief and continue to grow our faith and strengthen our witness daily. Amen.

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."

Scott Smith

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Phil. 3:7-8

Our instruction in writing this devotion was to tell our story. Since I have been working here at First Pres. in the area of Congregational Care, I have been blessed to hear YOUR stories. YOUR stories have given me hope and inspiration, and I would like to share some:

A few days ago I say my friend Jack Wiersma. You may recognize him as the gentleman in the power scooter at the 9:30 Worship Service. Jack has MS, and although he never complains, each day brings great challenges for him. The day I saw Jack he had journeyed to church for a 9:00 am Bible Study via Palm Tran Connection which arrived at his home to pick him up at 7:30 am! Jack was not upset; just happy to be at church.

A week ago I received a phone call from Ann Marie Grothmann wishing me a "Happy Birthday." That was very special because Ann Marie lost her husband Curt a year ago. I know she misses him dearly, but she was thinking of me and not her sorrow. You may recognize Ann Marie as the smiling deacon greeting you at the door of the sanctuary on Sunday mornings.

Yesterday I spoke with Art Nickler. You may know that Art has been confined to a wheelchair for years. He told me over the phone that his wife, Barbara, had let him take the car out yesterday. "Where did you go?" I asked, picturing a pleasant drive along the beach. "To the doctor," he said, and it was the highlight of his day.

These stories are a few of those I am privileged to hear and witness on a regular basis, and they remind me of the great blessings God gives to me every day. Everyone has challenges in this life. How thankful I am that we do not walk through them alone! And I thank you, all my friends at First Pres., for when I look at you, I see Jesus.

Lord, thank you for faithful servants who open our eyes to the ways you are at work in the world. May we rejoice and give thanks in every circumstance of life, knowing that you will provide for and uphold us at all times. Amen.

Lisa Hawkins

Sunday, April 10, 2011, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Psalm 51:10-13—"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will turn back to You."

I believe that we are all prodigal sons and daughters. I believe that we all have a Psalm 51 we have prayed. I cannot count the times I have come home to my Father, and each time he has been running down the road to me. Each time I have prayed David's prayer of forgiveness, God has been faithful to restore the joy of His salvation.

One of my mentors is Jim Hornsby, who founded the wilderness camp, Pioneer Plunge, where so many teenagers have grown strong in the Lord. I asked him one day, "How do you follow Jesus? It's so difficult." His response was, "I believe that we need to fall on our faces each day before Jesus and ask His forgiveness. Allow Him to complete the good work He has begun in you."

Each day can be our own return as a prodigal son. And each day can be full of the joy of His salvation. What we do with this renewal is up to us.

Oswald Chambers writes about our spiritual "times on the mount." He speaks of how we are "built", not for a continual time of our being taught, but for that renewal to make us something.

The daily journey home to our Father, and the daily falling on our faces can strengthen and encourage us to go out into the world with the joy of salvation written all over us. We should "walk in wisdom toward those that are without," and we will experience Christ in our own lives as never before.

Thank God today that He ran down the road to meet you and then be His messenger that encourages someone to come home and find that He runs down the road to meet them as well!

Rev. Tim Gooley

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

### New Day Dawning

New day dawning,  
New horizons to conquer.  
By chance or by design?  
God's choice or man's?  
God's spirit or man's will?  
Conquest or consent?  
Each new day; a test or a journey?  
New day, new opportunity.  
Vision or endurance?  
Joy or burden?  
Jesus or self?  
Spirit bound or earth bound?  
Love or loath?  
Laugh or weep?  
Win or lose?  
The journey of each new day,  
God's gift to you.  
Choose wisely.  
A new day is coming.  
Here and now.  
Always remembering,  
The there and then.  
Living and choosing,  
With vision and choice.  
Blessed for all eternity,  
Jesus risen and living.  
Victory is yours.  
New day dawning.

Cynthia Duke Hannan

Monday, March 21, 2011

Isaiah 49:1-7

God's call goes beyond the invitation to come to Him. When God calls us there is also an invitation to join God in the work of the Kingdom. God initiates and calls us in order to impact a hurting world. In today's Scripture reading the Servant is called and given a mission (v. 5 and 6). The first part of the mission involves bringing Israel back to God. On first reading, it seems that it is the exiles that the Servant will bring back. But also within this Servant Song is the promise that God will send His Son to bring back God's people. The mission is more than God saving Israel. God also will send the servant to be a "light to the Gentiles". The Servant will "bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth". Israel was to be a light to the nations, yet somewhere along the way God's people forgot that they were "blessed to be a blessing". They forgot the mission that God had given them.

The church today has the same mission.....to be a light to all people and to take the message of God's salvation to the ends of the earth. As disciples we are called to be a part of God's mission to the world. And today we see that mission coming to fruition. The church in many parts of the world is exploding with growth. Our part in God's mission is not only taking the Good News to those in the world who have not heard, but it is also to encourage and support the people of God in places like Africa, Asia, South America and Cuba. Our resources, prayers, and partnerships with God's people are an important part of the mission of the church! May we be faithful to our calling!

How can you expand your relationship with the "global" church?

God, give me a heart for the people that You love and use me to take the good news of Your kingdom wherever You might send me. Give me Your worldwide kingdom vision. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Ron Hilliard

Monday, April 11, 2011

Psalms 19:1—"The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies declare the work of His hands."

John 1:1-3—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

In a recent Sunday School class, our teacher reviewed the five senses by which we humans discern and reason things. He further showed how even the most intelligent minds cannot apprehend and know God by human senses alone. We need a "sixth sense", if you will, the Holy Spirit whose enlightenment alone brings sinful man to a holy God.

When I look back on my life, I realize that I went through this process of discovery during my sophomore year in college. I was taking both Philosophy 101 and Religion 101 that semester. Thrown into the arena of the "great thinkers", I was struggling with what I believed. (Religion 101 was no help because the curriculum was based on liberal theology with no message to me of a personal God.)

I lapsed into a brief atheistic period during which I didn't attend church but that was not satisfying, either. One day during second semester I was sitting outside enjoying the beauty of the campus in its spring wardrobe. I speculated on the rhythm and ordered regularity of the seasons and nature, and a Sixth Sense said to me. "Look around you; there *must* be a Creator God." Immediately I was settled about the matter. It was quite a few more years before I personally "met" my Creator, but it was there on that campus that I discovered that He is there.

God, You *are* there and You are not silent. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to think and reason, a voice to tell, hands to help, and Your Holy Spirit, who will guide us into all truth. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Sally Privett

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

Romans 10:9-10—"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

My task in writing this is to convey to you what led me to believe I was called to serve as an elder of adult education. As I pondered my answer to this question it took me back to earlier years and how I came to love the Scriptures. I must begin by telling you I've had a passion for God's Word since my early twenties. God called me into a relationship with him through His Word and continued to make himself known to me as I was drawn to spend time getting to know Him through the Scriptures. I've been a Bible student, and been a teacher, I've been discipled, and been a discipler. It has been God's faithfulness to me in my time of study, in my quiet times, in my prayer times, in my victories, and in my trials that have brought me fact to face with a mighty God, and enabled me to come to know Jesus as Lord of my life.

I've been called upon to serve as elder of adult education twice within the past nine years. I believe it was not by chance that not once, but twice when asked to serve I was facing some of the most challenging times of my life. The deaths of my parents, brother and cousin and the loss of my husband's business which led to an emotional breakdown were the events that had rocked my world when first called to serve. The second call came two months after the untimely death of my husband. To serve the Lord in obedience, to seek His will and to bring glory to Him by bearing testimony of His sufficiency is my heart's desire. I want to make it clear that it was God who gave me the strength to carry on and answer yes to that call. My natural self had a lot of good reasons to say no! I was weak but He was strong. I have found over the years that no matter what my circumstances, God calls and continues to lift me to a greater height which is not of my own doing.

(cont. Wednesday, April 13, 2011)

Sunday, March 20, 2011, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

(cont. from Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>)

Humble God,  
Teach me Your humility,  
That I would devote  
All of my works and passions

To You alone,  
Granting me the grace  
To disdain glory for myself,  
Desiring all glory be directed  
to You alone.

Gentle Shepherd  
May I hear, know, and heed  
Your Voice  
And be the ever-willing,  
Ever-obedient vessel through which  
Your Love and Beauty flow.

May You grant the requests  
Which fall within Your Provident Will,  
My Holy God,  
My Noble Friend,  
My Wise Master,  
The one and only truly perfect  
sweet and gentle Lover of my soul

Inspired by Psalm 139:1-5; Philippians 2:5-8; John 5:44; 1  
Corinthians 1:27; John 10:27; Leviticus 26:3-22

Rhonda Krill

**Saturday, March 19, 2011**

**Holy God,  
Noble Friend,  
Wise Master,  
Sweet, Gentle Lover of my soul,**

**Who misses not one  
Of my spoken words  
Or quiet thoughts,**

**Let Your Love consume me.  
God, Lord of Love,**

**Let Your Peace envelop me.  
Lord, Prince of Peace,**

**Let Your Joy abound in me.  
Great Fountain of all Joy,**

**Indulgent Father,  
May the guidance I give  
To my daughters  
Who are Your own  
Be full of the discipline  
Patience, and attentive love  
With which you guide me.**

**Master Physician,  
Grant me Your gift of healing  
That I may serve You  
And those around me  
In wholeness.**

**Master Musician,  
Grant to me Your gift of music  
That I may delight in the wonders  
Of Your created sound  
And worship Your Majesty in song.**

**(cont. Sunday, March 20, 2011)**

**Wednesday, April 13, 2011**

**(cont. from Tuesday, April 12, 2011)**

**My passion and love is being able to know Him personally, to study His word and pass it on. How amazing is God? The place of service to which He had called me is the very place where my passions lie.**

**In this life I have walked through the valley of trials and suffering, but I have also soared to the mountaintop. No matter where God has taken me, I trust I would always bear testimony to the truth that He has never left me or forsaken me. He has filled me with the joy of His Holy Spirit, given me peace that passes understanding. He has given me the mind of Christ to view things that make no earthly sense; and that I will never humanly understand. He has healed my hurts. He has been my great counselor. He has been lover of my soul, teacher extraordinaire, comforter, and intimate friend. He has heard my groaning and grumblings, my joy and sorrows, and has tirelessly listened. He has patiently prodded me along, picked me up when I've stumbled, brought me back to life when I've started to wither. He has been the victor in my battles with the enemy. He has allowed me to forgive and to forget. He has encouraged me as I've wandered in the wilderness. God has faithfully given me the strength to climb out of the valley and enjoy the mountaintop. Jesus hasn't just touched my life, He has given me life abundant no matter what the circumstances! We are all stricken with sin that has us striving for an earthly life that we will never have this side of heaven. I am always encouraged, even in my times of discouragement.**

**So my fellow sojourners, I encourage you to Rise Up With Christ and experience the abundant life, serve him as He calls you, fight the fight, and run the race, proclaiming victory one day at a time until He Comes Again!**

**Praise God He has Risen!**

**Cynthia Duke Hannan**

Thursday, April 14, 2011

Your Holy Majesty,

Perfect beyond human comprehension of what perfection is, no thing or thought on earth compares to your Holy Perfection.

Beautiful Lord,

My eyes have not yet seen any loveliness comparable to Your beauty. The magnificent earth and all Your artwork within it is but a vague image of the beauty You behold. Impressionism of Perfect Beauty.

Brilliant Father,

The vastness of Your knowledge and magnitude of Your intelligence is beyond my mind's capacity to conceive. The intricate, interwoven plans that You have made for each of us is unfathomable. The communication You have created and made available to us is an intelligence so beyond our comprehension that we discount its reality. Like the complex networks of computers and telephones is the science of my silent prayers to You. Wireless communication to the God of the universe; the greatest power available to mankind; a prepaid plan...24/7 tech support...in my own language...worldwide coverage and unlimited minutes!

Powerful Spirit,

With one breath, You shake the whole earth. Ionized air can lift tons of pounds; God breathed air --Spirit of God--moves mountains, sets planets in orbit, and comes down...a cross...to speak...to me;

Spirit to Spirit;

Soul to Soul;

Holy, Perfect, Beautiful, Brilliant,

Powerful Love...embraces me,

makes the imperfect...Perfect...

And I embrace...Love.

Rhonda Krill

Friday, March 18, 2011

(cont. from Thursday, March 17, 2011)

into his briefcase weeks earlier and that he often held it frequently while he prayed and read his Bible. He shared that having the rosary near him helped him to feel even more spiritually connected to me when we were apart.

He called me moments later. I was crying too hard to speak, but he said the Lord's Prayer for both of us - connecting us across the ocean miles - all the while holding in his palms our treasured, precious gift from a Life-Giving Tree.

Loving Father, Jesus, Spirit, thank you for all the mysterious gifts of grace you reveal to us on our daily walks with you. Help us to keep our eyes open for them at all times and to accept your gifts with open hearts even --and especially -- when our minds don't fully comprehend their true significance. In Jesus' Holy, Holy, Holy name we pray. Amen.

Robin Bradley Hansel



The Rosary Tree (photo by Robin Bradley Hansel)

Thursday, March 17, 2011

Proverbs 13:12—“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

I was thinking about Lent the other day while being walked by our giant lab, Lily. She was briskly leash-leading me along our neighborhood streets, and despite the brilliant beauty of the morning, I felt gloomy and stubborn and reluctant to move at her exuberant pace. The idea of forty days of a slow, trudging march to a dark Friday’s cross, despite the promise of an Easter sun-filled morning, completely exhausted me. It was then that we passed The Rosary Tree.

While on another walk with Lily back in June, I had found a crumpled black and white plastic, broken rosary hanging on the trunk of an old palm tree. Initially, I had walked past it but then double-backed to take a photo for my blog. It had seemed so curiously interesting. Then, finally succumbing to the strong urge, I felt that I was supposed to claim the rosary as my own gift for some unknown reason. (I grew up Methodist, so rosaries had never been a part of my personal prayer life.) I returned a third time to place it in my pocket. As it had apparently been run over by a golf cart and left out in the rain and sun for several days, the beauty of my “gift” was a bit arguable. Once home with my glasses, however, I realized it was not broken.

Today, I went to find the rosary in order to have it beside me as I wrote at my computer, but I was perplexed that it was missing from its usual location. After a very intense half-hour of frantic searching, I finally e-mailed my husband, nearly sure he had thrown it away by accident, simply not realizing what it was. He was on a business trip to Europe, and I was already quite anxious about being separated from him by such a great distance. When he e-mailed me back that he was holding the little rosary in his hands at that very moment, I burst into tears of relief. His message revealed that he had slipped it

(Cont. on Friday, March 18, 2011)

Friday, April 15, 2011

Mark 10:15--“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

In early 1980 I was asked to teach Sunday school at First Pres. I taught 1st grade and kindergarten. I did think I was a Christian because I was brought up in a Catholic church and went to a Catholic school. I was never taught that the way to heaven is through Jesus. I thought just believing in God and doing good deeds earned you a place in heaven.

As I prepared each week for my Sunday school class by reading the lesson and studying the Scriptures in the children’s Bible, a light came on. I started to understand what was needed for me to accept the calling Jesus was giving me. Finally, with some adult help, everything made sense. I opened my heart to Jesus in a Kindergarten classroom in 1983.

After that moment I was so on fire for the Lord I couldn’t get enough Bible study and lessons. I was craving all the knowledge about the Scriptures that I could get. I still am on fire for the Lord and want to touch every child and adult with the love of Jesus. My heart will always be with the children who really taught me the true meaning of what it is to be a Christian and what faith of a child means—that Jesus is my Lord and Savior and good deeds are just the result of my faith.

God had a plan and a purpose for me to accept the calling to be a Sunday school teacher. What the Scripture says will always be special to me because I was like a child and now I am a child of God.

I am thankful every day for the person who asked me to be a teacher.

Dear Lord, Thank you for choosing me to be one of your children. Thank you for opening my heart to accept your call. I want to always have faith like a child and enter your kingdom. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Priscilla McKinnon

**Saturday, April 16, 2011**

**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 will make your paths straight.”**

**How fortunate we have been to have found fellowship in First Pres. North Palm Beach. It has been 25 years and things have just gotten better each year. The Pastors have been great leaders in Christian nurturing, the congregation has shown the importance of prayer, compassion caring for each other is evident and the church has grown in mission outreach. It is wonderful to see so many take part in the mission trips and the active participation in local ministries.**

**In 1986 I came into and attended a membership class with the intention of becoming a member because Barbara wanted to join the church. Barbara has been a stalwart support to me and I have seen how important and uplifting it can be to have someone gently encouraging. I found something different at this church. The focus is nurturing the congregation in Christian ways and care for one another. The attendance on Wednesday eve shows a thirst for knowing the Bible.**

**Churches can be a place of conflict of purpose leading its members to taking their focus off the intended reason for being there. There have been bumps in the road here at First Pres but I commend how they were smoothed in a pleasing Christian way and dismissed with blessings. God has been good and continually showers us with His promises.**

**Due to my recent illness further complicating a 64 year old disability. I have been unable to attend Sunday services, however I still feel the fellowship of the congregation and am grateful for it. It is a lift to my Spirit and to me.**

**(cont. Mon., April 17, 2011)**

**Wednesday, March 16, 2011**

**Colossians 4:5—“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”**

**You never know who is watching your life**

**In the early 90's I was a teacher at a Ft. Pierce school. I helped start their "See You at the Pole" gatherings, a time for students to come together in prayer around the flagpole, in 1991.**

**When I had my weekly visits with the principal, I would say hi to all of the office staff, including his secretary, Phyllis. Phyllis and I were cordial to one another but never really had much time to chat or visit.**

**Ten years later I got a phone call from Phyllis after I had moved to Jupiter. She still lived in Ft. Pierce. She called me to see if I would come visit her since she had pancreatic cancer and the doctors did not give her much time to live. I was surprised that she called me, of all people, but I immediately said "yes," that I would go. The day I sat on her couch with her I asked her how I could help her. She said: "Susan, I knew that you are a Christian and I want to ask Jesus into my heart before I die." That day, I had the privilege of leading her in prayer to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior.**

**The doctors had given Phyllis about 1 year to live. After being born again of the spirit, Phyllis led Bible studies in her small Ft. Pierce living room, and she wanted to tell everyone she met about Jesus. She ended up living 5 more years before going to her heavenly home. Right before she died, she asked me to write down her personal testimony. She also asked me to read that at her funeral, and through my tears, I did read her witness for Jesus. During my time as a teacher in that Ft. Pierce school, I had been unaware that Phyllis had watched how I lived my life.**

**Dear God, I am so grateful for Your plans and that You are in control. To God be the glory. Amen.**

**Susan Fonger**

Tuesday, March 15, 2011

Have you ever been insulted, discouraged, or maligned? It's difficult being on the receiving end of disparaging words. Those words can cut to the heart and be difficult to shake off. They can wound us temporarily or even give us a lifetime of pain—a witness to the power of our words! If this is true—and I believe it is—then the opposite must also be true; encouraging words can lift us up, heal us, and give us hope for the future!

Scripture tells us to *encourage* others daily so they are not hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Encouragement is not flattery, sweet talk, or a superficial pat on the back. We are instructed to encourage or exhort others. This term comes from the same root word, *paráklētos* that Jesus used when speaking of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, when praying for His followers in John chapters 15 and 16. It calls to mind that of coming alongside, comforting, calling near, or praying.

So how *do* we do it? How can we be encouraged, and how do we become encouragers? True encouragement grows out of a deep faith-walk with God and one another. It requires our time and selfless devotion. It seeks to lift up and heal, helping others grow closer to God, so they can press on in their faith and be better suited for serving in God's kingdom.

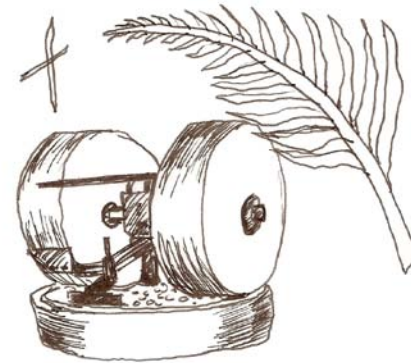
There are dozens of Bible verses that train us to be encouragers. May these sampling of Scriptures encourage you today!

- Jesus, our Hope, encourages us. (Heb. 6:18, 2 Thess. 2:17)
- Salvation encourages us. (1 Thess. 5:8-11)
- The Holy Spirit encourages us. (Acts 9:31)
- The faith of others encourages us. (Acts 11:23, 28:15, Rom. 1:12, Phil. 1:14, 1 Thess. 3:7)
- Fellowship with believers encourages us. (Phil. 2:1, Heb. 10:25)
- The truth of Scripture encourages us. (1 Cor. 14:31, Phil. 1:14, 2 Tim. 4:2-5, Titus 1:9)
- Serving God encourages us. (2 Chron. 35:2)
- Anticipating the Lord's coming encourages us. (1 Thess. 4:18) (I *encourage* you to look up the rest of them!)

Dear Jesus, during this season of Lent, help me to 'give up' disparaging words and seek to encourage others daily! Amen.

Sarah A. Keith

Palm Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011



(cont. from Sun., April 16, 2011)

It is the Lenten season and God's love and Grace is upon us. He has given us all that is sane in this world. As we experience a world of unrest we must keep in mind to make ourselves aware of the happenings in the world but to remember our safety is in our Lord and Savior keeping an eye on "Faith, Hope and Love."

Thank Thee, Father, for sharing Your Son and Your sacrifice, taking our sins from us and giving us eternal life. HE IS RISEN. HE IS RISEN INDEED! Amen.

Art Nickler

Monday, April 18, 2011

In one of my most recent stays at Jupiter Medical Center, the faithful Lynn Grandsire visited me regularly. Each day she visited, she had a special passage of Scripture that she would share with me.

Early in my stay, in the middle of the day, Lynn read the 91st Psalm to my wife Katie and me. Just as she finished the passage a duck appeared at the window of my second floor room...which had floor to ceiling windows overlooking a large, flat roof that stretches over the first floor. This lone duck walked directly to my window. That window gave all three of us a full view of this duck and he could see us as well. He lingered there, looking in and continued to look through the glass at us. The duck appeared at the window with his tail feathers wiggling and gently moving its wings as if it were happy to see us. He literally seemed to invite us to join him "under the protection of its spreading wings."

Immediately our thoughts, which we all verbalized at just about the same time, were of the 91 Psalm v. 4-5 that Lynn had just shared with us. "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that walks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday."

The completely unexpected appearance of that duck and its unusual actions brought Psalm 91 and especially those few verses vividly to our minds. It became even more meaningful during the balance of my stay in the hospital. I spent twelve days in that room and not once did a duck come to my window and not once did I even see another duck up on that roof. I think that it was God showing His presence and to remind us that we are always welcome under the shadow of His wings and comforted by the warmth of His wings.

Psalm 91 and Romans 5:3-5 were a source of reassurance and comfort to me during those very long days at Jupiter Medical Center, much as Lynn Grandsire, Lucky Arnold and Ron Hilliard's caring and meaningful visits were to Katie and me. The prayers of our pastors and of our friends and fellow members have sustained us during this most challenging time. We are very grateful to God and His faithful followers. We are blessed to be a part of this fellowship.

Wayne Gardner

Monday, March 14, 2011

(cont. from Sunday, March 13, 2011)

unworthy and undeserving manner. That love by God was exhibited ultimately by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross for our personal sins. Being loved while we are still in sin is a big deal! Being loved while still in sin, sets me free to love because I have been given divine love, and I am loved at my worst, not my best.

Defining love in today's world is quite difficult. We say we love many things and many people, but our lives don't always exhibit that love. Verses 4-8 are the tangible manifestation of God's love. Elton lived his life in the knowledge and wonder of God's love for him and because of God's love for him, Elton was able to walk in this kind of love. As you read verses 4-8, I would like you to ponder Elton's life in light of the adjectives regarding love that are there for you. When you have done that, I would like you to replace the word love in verses 4-8 with Jesus. As you do that you will find how Jesus treats you, a sinner saved by His grace. I would leave you with some questions to ponder today. How is this love exhibited by my life? Do I "have love" in my life that I am able to love my neighbor as Jesus loves me? What are the ways you would like Christ to be more evident in the way that you love others?

Lord Jesus, thank You for the love You have poured out for me on the Cross. Thank You that You have loved me, and continue to love me. Transform my life into one that shows forth Your love that others might experience You and be freed to love the way that You love them. Amen.

Lynn Grandsire

Sunday, March 13, 2011, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

1 Corinthians 13: 1-3—"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

1 Corinthians 13:4-8—"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

1 Corinthians 13:9-13—"For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

In the midst of Lent you may be wondering, why does the passage about love come to mind? Love comes to mind because it has everything to do with Lent! The love in this passage tells us about divine love, and shows us how our lives should be lived because of the love God has exhibited to His people. During the last few weeks of Pastor Elton's life, I began to reflect on his life in our community, and how he lived that life. This passage kept coming back to me over and over again. Elton loved us the way that God loves us.

Verses 1-3 tell us if we "do not have love" we are nothing. Having love and loving are two very different things. Having love comes from God, and knowing, as Leon Morris says, God's love "is a love lavished on others without thought whether they are worthy or not.", frees us to love others in that same way. Elton knew that he was loved by God in this

(cont. Monday, March 14, 2011)

Tuesday, April 19, 2011

I will miss Elton a lot. I first met him in April 2003. He was visiting me at the Jupiter Medical Center while I was a patient for a blood clot that mysteriously appeared in my right calf. While my doctors were running their tests to see if I had any clots in my lungs, I did, but they also found the tumor that was causing all the weird things happening to me. To me, lung cancer meant only one thing—death. Vicki and I cried and then I got mad at the Lord for letting this happen three months after the happiest day in my life. Long story short, the next day Elton came to visit me.

We hadn't met; didn't know one another; I figured he was just making the visitation rounds he was required to do from First Pres. At first I was not very receptive to him. I was too busy feeling sorry for myself. But after a while, he said things that just made sense. He was by no means sugar coating what we had just learned. He let me know that I may die from this, but what he said just gave me a calming sense; like whatever happens will happen; it's in God's hands and if He wills, it shall be so. I'm paraphrasing of course, but you get the gist. He read some Scripture but I can't remember what it was. Anyway, he left me that day and I was feeling better about my situation. So much so that I asked Vicki to get hold of Elton and ask if he would come and visit again. He came back the next day and we talked a lot. He told me, among other things, that he didn't fear death at all. He said he didn't necessarily want it, but wasn't afraid of it. He told me when death comes he knew where he was headed and welcomed it.

I believe that's where he is now. The Lord called him home and he was ready. I almost envy him. He, among others, played a big role in my becoming a Christian. Although I still have a LOT to learn, I have learned that in order to get to heaven you must go by the way of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. You must ask Him for forgiveness and accept Him as your Lord and Savior. If one does that, then he'll end up where Elton is now when it's his time. That's why I envy Elton, because I know there is a far better place awaiting when it's my turn.

Dear Lord, Help us look to Jesus as we wait for heaven. Amen.

John Copeland

Wednesday, April 20, 2011

Proverbs 3:5-6—“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.”

In 1969 I bowed my head, bent my knee, and accepted the finished work that Jesus Christ did for me on the cross. I knew I was a sinner, and I knew I did not want to go to Hell. Convinced that the God of the Bible had described me quite well as a person justly deserving punishment, it was a reasonable and hopeful next step to believe the rest of what He had to say about the matter. The Book of Genesis describes the episode involving the first humans. It reveals that to Adam God said, "if you do this [disobey me] you will die." Adam disobeyed God and brought death, sin, and anguish into the world. He was separated from God. It was not a blind leap of faith to understand that as a perfect God, the God of the Scriptures, could not accept the things I had done in my life. Yet, He still wanted me, and in order to get me, someone had to die; someone had to pay the price for my sin. I learned that this already was accomplished; that this God had sent His own Son as a sacrifice, to die in my place, in order that the price for my sin would be paid. I wanted that, and so, by faith, I accepted Christ as my Savior.

This time that precedes Easter is a time that helps me to recall not only how I began my relationship with God, but also the years that have passed since then spent developing that relationship. God has been good to me. God is good to all His children. There are many who will be His children. He wants them just as He wanted me and all of us who have come to trust in Him as Savior. He is the one who will enable us to travel this world and bring us safely into the next.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving and wanting me to be your child. Thank you for the gift of eternal life. Thank you for guiding the steps of all those who trust in You. Please lead us to others so that they may have the opportunity to find You and come to know You as their Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Kathy Barsalou

Saturday, March 12, 2011

In my early twenties, I can remember seeing an elegantly dressed woman with ashes on her forehead. Since I didn't grow up in a liturgical church, I was unaware of the observance of Ash Wednesday and almost said, "Hey, you've got something on your face!" Thankfully, I didn't, and I soon found out why she had a smudge on her forehead.

A few years later, I discovered that placing the residue from burnt offerings, ashes, on one's head symbolized repentance and was an ancient Old Testament practice.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter, not counting Sundays, which are considered "mini-Easters." Lent is a time of introspection, to consider anew our need of a Savior and Jesus' call to repent and turn to Him. Many people spend the forty days denying self, fasting from something they enjoy, in order to remind themselves that Jesus denied Himself and calls His people to do the same and take up their crosses and follow Him.

Jesus knows we are incapable of saving ourselves, which is why He came to earth—the Word became flesh and lived among us...but to all who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God.

Jesus sacrificed His life for ours. The ashes of our repentance can be exchanged for the beauty of pardon and new life in His resurrection, Oh, the joy of Easter!

Isaiah 61:1-3—“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair...”

Sarah A. Keith

Friday, March 11, 2011

Proverbs 31:10-11

I awakened that Saturday morning to a classic, mid-January day in the Pacific Northwest sunless, soggy, and more rain in the forecast. But I felt cheery and soon was out the door headed for a breakfast meeting of an AI—Anon group in a suburban Seattle community. Once there, I found my way to the unexpectedly large banquet hall at the rear of the restaurant. I was at least 10 minutes early, and as I scanned the tables set in a sort of horseshoe arrangement with seating on the outside only, I was surprised that all the chairs were occupied, except for one close to the far wall. I made my way to it. My seatmate on one side was a woman, named Betsy, with her leg in a cast, crutches parked by her chair. She revealed that she was a United flight attendant and had been injured in a fall on an icy jetway in Chicago. At the close of the meeting I invited interested parties to join me for a walk on the nearby Green River Trail. Three others joined me including the woman on crutches, hobbling, but “game”.

The walk along the trail brought to mind some lines from Wordsworth: “..a time when meadow, grove and stream, the earth and every common sight, to me did seem appareled in celestial light...”. Soon we were dating and were married the next year. Our first date included a church service. Betsy’s faith life has become a model for me. I learn from her every day, as my rough edges continue to be smoothed. We rejoice increasingly in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

A few years later, as an anniversary rolled around, I was reminiscing with Betsy about that AI Anon meeting and how all that came about was from there being but *one vacant chair*, and that next to her. Betsy’s eyes grew wide as she turned to me and said, “Bob, I remember that very well. I was there early and I saw you when you came in. I just knew that you were going to sit next to me. But there were *lots of empty seats, lots*. You could have sat anywhere.”

Anywhere? There was but *one empty seat*, of that I am certain. All the others were occupied. Had it been otherwise I would not have taken the long way around to sit next to Betsy. And, but for the injury, she might well have been flying that day. God is so good and He can fill seats with people, or even angels, just as readily as He can fill people with His Spirit. And He was close to me that day.

Bob Monahan, husband of Sally Privett’s sister, Betsy

Maundy Thursday, April 21, 2011

Psalm 99:8—“O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings.”

Isaiah 59:18—“According to their deeds, so will He repay; wrath to His adversaries, requital to His enemies; to the coastlands He will render requital.”

Isaiah 66:15—“For the Lord will come in fire, and His chariots like the whirlwind, to pay back His anger in fury, and His rebuke in flames of fire.”

Revelation 19:15—“From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.”

God’s wrath is the natural response of a holy, righteous God to idolatry and sin. Because God is holy, sin must be punished and the idea of the punishment of sin by God is a very real, very scary thing. When we read about it in the Bible it ought to send shivers down our spine (see Isaiah 30:27-28, Jeremiah 30:23-24). We all are deserving of the full measure of his anger.

The good news of the Gospel is that God’s anger, vengeance, and fury against our sin was satisfied by Christ’s death on the cross. His death was a substitutionary death. He bore the punishment we deserved.

Dear God, As we meditate on Your word this Maundy Thursday, help us grasp the awesome reality of what Jesus did as He bore our punishment on the cross. We stand in awe of Your holiness and Your grace extended to us. May we rejoice in the Good News of Christ’s Resurrection this Holy Week! Amen.

Eddie Nabhan

Good Friday, April 22, 2011

Isaiah 53:11—“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”

“After suffering He will be satisfied”, what a peculiar phrase! This word, satisfy means to have one’s fill, or to have enough, or to hold no more. It pertains to food and drink and to no longer being hungry or thirsty. Satisfaction can also mean to be fulfilled, or completed as a work. The work of Christ after His suffering or anguish on the Cross was completed or fulfilled and He has obtained righteousness for the many who are sinners. Ultimately His sacrifice has fulfilled or paid the price for our atonement from sin, and we have been made right with God. Christ’s work of salvation was done in the suffering on the Cross, and He is full or sated by the work that He completed. The original work of Creation done in the garden and before the Fall signified an unhindered relationship with God. With the Fall, that relationship was broken and we were expelled from the Garden because of our sin and rebellion. At the end of God’s creating work, He rested and worshipped.

In the same way Christ at the end of His suffering work on the Cross for our salvation and redemption rested in the satisfaction of the payment of the debt for our sin. Christ’s work returns us to the state of the Garden before the Fall. We have access to God and now enjoy relationship with Him. What a wonder! We no longer die in the presence of God, but have life in relationship with God. As Christ worships with the Father, so too should we worship because Christ has satisfied the debt for our sin. We now have life that fills or satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst for relationship with God. We are full of life because Jesus is alive in the presence of the Father.

Thank you, Jesus for your willingness to suffer on our account and to satisfy the debt that was owed for our rebellion. Help us to live in the satisfaction You bring to our lives by filling us with Your food and drink. Amen.

Lynn Grandsire

Thursday, March 10, 2011

(cont. from Wednesday, March 9, 2011)

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and that is when we begin to focus on our complete sinfulness, and the necessity of Christ’s suffering and death. We find that ashes are mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament and represented sorrow, mourning and repentance.

Palm Sunday begins the last week of Lent and is referred to as Holy Week. It represents the last week of Christ’s earthly life and includes Maundy Thursday, the celebration of Christ’s “Last Supper” and “Good Friday”, the day of Christ’s death by crucifixion.

We should approach this observation with humble and contrite hearts. We should be mindful of Christ’s suffering and the purpose behind it. We should be participants in this observation. We should remember that Lent is not about you – not about me – it’s all about Him.

Lent ends on the Saturday before Easter Sunday – the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in the resurrection of Christ.

Jack Wiersma

Psalm 51:10-17—“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will turn back to You. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

**Ash Wednesday, March 9, 2011**

Lent, although not Biblical, is a period of time in the Christian calendar where some practice fasting, some exercise charity, and some increase in their prayer life. It is the period of 40 days prior to Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We find the Biblical significance of the number 40 already in the Old Testament when Moses and the Israelites were cast into the wilderness for 40 years and in the New Testament when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert for 40 days. Lent is the holiest time of the year for the church. When we reflect on this period we must look to Scripture for its place in the total journey of faith.

We find that there are references to Lent in the Old Testament in Psalm 51:10-17, Psalm 31:9-16, Psalm 91, Deuteronomy 26 and Isaiah 50:4-9, and in the New Testament in the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John. We find after reading Scripture, Lent is not just a period of time restricted to the New Testament. The Bible tells us that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", and the purpose of creation was for redemption. The Bible is about the rule and reign of God: His biography; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Our Triune God. With following our pastor's teaching of finding where in the Old Testament is the foundation for what we find in the New Testament, we see that the meaning of Lent is found in both Testaments. The Bible, God's Word and its truths, begins in Genesis and finishes in Revelation, and all that is in between.

As we approach the season of Lent, let us not forget that Salvation is an all or nothing choice; that Christ died for all the sins of mankind and that His sacrifice is part of God the Father's biography. As we follow the life of Christ, it is important to have a full and complete understanding of what His life stood for and what, in its totality, it means for you and me. It is with the Power of the Holy Spirit, and His granting us a better understanding, that we find Lent is about the lessons learned from Scripture and about the suffering Christ bore on our behalf. That, in part, is what is behind the meaning of Lent.

(cont. Thursday, March 10, 2011)

**Saturday, April 23, 2011**

**Psalm 23**

**The Lord is my Shepherd –that's a Relationship!**

**I shall not want –that's Supply!**

**He maketh me to lie down in green pastures –that's Rest!**

**He leadeth me beside the still waters –that's Refreshment!**

**He restoreth my soul –that's Healing!**

**He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness –that's Guidance!**

**For His name's sake –that's Purpose!**

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death—that's Testing!**

**I will fear no evil –that's Protection!**

**For Thou art with me –that's Faithfulness!**

**Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me –that's Discipline!**

**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies –that's Hope!**

**Thou annointest my head with oil –that's Consecration!**

**My cup runneth over –that's Abundance!**

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life –that's Blessing!**

**And I will dwell in the house of the Lord –that's Security!**

**Forever –that's Eternity!**

## **Easter, April 24, 2011**

### **Jesus Christ Is Risen Today**

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!  
Our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!  
Who did once, upon the cross, Alleluia!  
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!  
Unto Christ, our heavenly King, Alleluia!  
Who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!  
Sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!

But the pains which He endured, Alleluia!  
Our salvation have procured; Alleluia!  
Now above the sky He's King, Alleluia!  
Where the angels ever sing. Alleluia!

Sing we to our God above, Alleluia!  
Praise eternal as His love; Alleluia!  
Praise Him, all ye heavenly host, Alleluia!  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Alleluia!

From "The Hymnbook" published by Presbyterian Church in the US, The United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., 1955  
Stanza 1 to 3 based on the Latin, 14<sup>th</sup> century and stanza 4, Charles Wesley, 1740.

**Alleluia!!! He Is Risen!!!**

## **Introduction**

This year the Fellowship Committee has compiled Lenten Devotions provided by Rev. Lucky Arnold, Rev. Dr. Ron Hilliard, Rev. Tim Gooley, Elders, Deacons, members and guests at First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach. We have also included excerpts from emails that Rev. Elton Piersma wrote to his family and friends during his battle with leukemia that took his life on February 8, 2011. He ministered to his family and friends to the end and taught us how to look forward to heaven in the face of death. The artwork on the cover was drawn by Sonya Haffey. We have been given a great gift from those who have opened their souls by sharing with us words of inspiration, encouragement and hope.

We invite you to use these devotions as a daily source of help during the Lenten Season. We have printed an opening Scripture and closing prayer for many devotionals. We pray that these will assist you in your personal preparation for Easter and your worship of God.

Lent is the forty-day period of penitence and prayer beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter. The forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness, preparing for His ministry on earth, is the model for this period of reflection. During this time we contemplate the meaning and power of the crucifixion and the celebration of the resurrection day, Easter.

Please find a schedule of our worship services on the inside back cover and back cover of this booklet. We hope you will join with us in worship on Ash Wednesday, throughout Lent and during Holy Week.

Colossians 3:1-3—"Since, then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

**Lenten Schedule of Events at First  
Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach**

**Wednesday, March 9, 2011  
Ash Wednesday Service 7:30 PM**

**Monday, March 28, 2011  
Lenten Recital, Noon, Chapel  
Kristen Reisig, mezzo-soprano**

**Sunday, April 3, 2011  
Easter Cantata 9:30 & 11:15 AM  
The Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra will present  
Joseph Martin's "The Lenten Sketches"**

**Monday, April 4, 2011  
Lenten Recital, Noon, Chapel  
Kath Doerr, Laura McLeod, sopranos;  
Glenda Schultz, flute**

**Monday, April 4, 2011  
Spring Concert 7:00 PM  
The Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra will present  
a spring concert featuring Franz Schubert's  
"Mass in C Major" and Mack Wilberg's  
"Four American Folk Hymns."  
Soloists for the concert include  
Lisa Pontbriand, soprano;  
Kristen Reisig, mezzo-soprano;  
Bryon Grohman, tenor; and Chip Damsel, bass**

**Monday, April 11, 2011  
Lenten Recital, Noon, Chapel  
Jacqueline Pimienta, soprano**

**April 15-17 Discipleship Weekend  
Keynote Speaker—Robert Coleman, author of  
The Master Plan of Evangelism and  
Scott Hafeman, Bible teacher**

**Holy Week Schedule of Events at First  
Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach**

**Monday, April 18, 2011  
Lenten Recital, Noon, Chapel  
Sally Privett, piano; Glen Arfsten, organ**

**Thursday, April 21, 2011  
Maundy Thursday Communion Service  
The Chamber Choir and Instrumental Ensemble  
will present Ruth Elaine Schram's  
"Tapestry of Darkness"**

**Good Friday, April 22 2011  
Communion Service 7:30 AM, Sanctuary  
Men's Breakfast in Fellowship Hall  
(following communion service)  
Women's Breakfast off Campus 9:00 AM**

**Saturday, April 23, 2011  
Children's Easter Egg Hunt  
10:00-Noon**

**Sunday, April 24, 2011 - 8:15, 9:30 & 11:00  
Easter Sunday Services, Sanctuary**

**2011**

**DAILY**

**LENTEN**

**DEVOTIONALS**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NORTH PALM BEACH**

