

# FIRST CHURCH of MONSON



## LENTEN MEDITATION BOOKLET

*February 26 through April 12*

*This booklet is dedicated to the  
memory of Bob Young, a former  
deacon and trustee  
of First Church, and the father  
of Deacon Chris Young.*

# *Lenten Meditation Booklet*

## *First Church of Monson*

### ***Focus on Your Faith***

The season of Lent has typically held a special place in the life of the Church. Beginning with Ash Wednesday and culminating in the events of Holy Week, Lent is an invitation to focus on what is central to our faith. It has also become a time for personal and spiritual reflection on who we are as God's people and on what God has given us so graciously in Christ.

For many years, under the guidance of Suzanne Kelley, we have had this collection of reflections, written by members and friends of the church, to help deepen our understanding of the scriptures we read during Lent. This devotional booklet is meant to enhance and enrich our Lenten observance.

It is our hope that, as we reflect on these passages from God's Word, our faith in God may be strengthened and our commitment to His Word renewed.

It is also our prayer that, as we move from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week, we may join the two disciples of Jesus as they cried out, "*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*" (Luke 24:32 NRSV).

May God bless us as we journey through the season of Lent together,

Peace,  
Pastor Peter



**Thursday Lenten Bible Study**  
**"Understanding the Bible"**  
**March 5, 12, 19, 26 at Noon**

*Reverend Peter Johnston*

*Day 1—Ash Wednesday, February 26*  
*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

*Be Righteous with Humility*



I hear coloring is very popular now, so enjoy creating a beautiful picture and finding all the crosses you can as you begin your Lenten journey!

*Sarah Brown*

## Day 2—February 27

### Romans 1:1-7

#### *Faith Transforms Hopelessness*



Paul the Apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul, taught the gospel of Jesus Christ to the first-century world. In the Christian faith throughout the world, Paul is credited with founding Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD.

In this passage, Paul explains that through Christ's resurrection "*we received grace and apostleship to call all Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for His name's sake.*" (NIV) Since the meaning of the word "apostle" is the sent one, the meaning of apostleship is quite plain; that is, the office of the sent one.\* In this passage, Paul assures all Romans they are loved by God and called to be His holy people through the grace and peace from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

I am so very thankful for my faith, the source of my spiritual strength and belief in Jesus Christ my Savior. Now that I'm in my senior years, as I look back over my life, I am certain my faith and God's grace has guided and helped me through the many challenges and life changes I have encountered. And I thank God for the gift of faith and all the blessings bestowed upon me in this life. I pray for the faithless to be filled with grace through the Holy Spirit to find faith in God—faith that can transform hopelessness to hope and fulfillment.

\**The Normal Christian Church Life*, Chapter 1, by Watchman Nee

*Joan Lowbridge-Sisley*

## *Day 3—February 28*

### *Romans 1:8-17*

#### *Jesus Relieves Pressure*

Pressure, always pressure. What to eat? Where to go? How to act? Pressure the moment we wake 'til the moment we sleep. What, where, how? What, where, how? Needs, wants! Knowing this, we need a reason to try; a reason why.

Apostle Paul starts by counting his Blessings. He was under the same pressure. He thanks God for Jesus. He longs not for wealth or power. He longs to share his Faith with others who have Faith. He never discriminates in choosing with whom he shares his Faith in Jesus. Paul proclaims he has no shame in his Faith in Jesus.

What does it take to start with Jesus? Faith. Jesus needs to become your reason why. Jesus is the answer to pressure. *“Where two or more are gathered in my Name, there will I be in your midst!”*



Faith. Act on it. Paul did.



*Joseph Wholley Jr.*

## *Day 4—February 29*

### *Matthew 18:1-7*

#### *Become like a Child*



In this passage, Jesus' followers are asking Him who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I'm always amused by the competition among the disciples to be the best, the greatest. I guess this goes to show that the desire to be elevated above others, to feel more important than the next guy, started early on, and still continues. If instead, we could all practice humility, I think our relationships with others would benefit.

However, Jesus was not amused by the question. His response was that one must become like a child (or children) to enter the kingdom of heaven. I imagine that this may have confused His followers if they thought about the characteristics of children that are not very admirable — they can be noisy, have temper tantrums, get dirty, cry, make a mess, etc. But I think Jesus was referring to the best qualities of children — they are open, trusting, joyful, loving, and humble. They have not yet been burdened with the thought processes of adults which are filled with negativity, intellectual static, and confusion. Rather, children tend to live from their hearts. So Jesus is saying that if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, you must make a connection to the Spirit through your heart.

The passage goes on to say that if you don't receive and appreciate the Christ awareness that children have, and instead you "infect" children with your own fears and negative energy, then you are making a serious error that will weigh heavily upon you (a millstone around your neck).

*Crystal Kofke*

## *Day 5—March 2*

### *Romans 1:1-7*

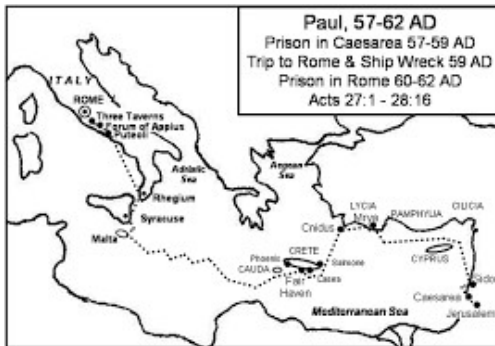
#### ***Paul Brings Gospel to Gentiles***

This passage is the introduction or salutation to the book of Romans (Letter to the Romans). It begins by introducing the author, the Apostle Paul (a.k.a. Saul). He starts off by stating “From Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ...”

This introduces him as a follower, or servant of Jesus; called to be an apostle. It then goes on to describe how the gospel of God was promised by prophets in the Old Testament concerning Jesus, a descendant of David, and son of God. He goes on to say that, through Jesus, Paul received “grace and apostleship” to bring the gospel to all the Gentiles.

Paul makes it clear that this is a mission given to him by Jesus. It closes with his greeting specifically to the Roman Christians stating, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!”

This was typical of the time to state the name of the sender, the recipient(s), then to give a greeting. Paul has done this, but has made sure that the recipient(s) knows about his direct relationship with Jesus and the gospel.



*Cynthia DeSellier*



*Day 6—March 3*  
*Hebrews 4:14—5:10*

*The High Priest Grants Mercy*



*“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16 NIV)*

*David Wallace*

## *Day 7—March 4*

### *Matthew 18:10-14*

#### *When You Need Love the Most*



This scripture passage is the parable of the lost sheep. A shepherd has a flock of 100 sheep and one of the sheep is lost. He leaves the 99 to go in search of the lost sheep.

My grandmother was married at age 18 in October of 1918. She had eight children and outlived all but three. Her first child, a little boy, died at six

weeks of age. Her sixth child, a daughter, died at age five in 1932. Her husband left after the funeral, leaving her with six children between one and twelve years of age during the Great Depression. My mom was eight at the time and never saw her father again.

My mom recalls someone asking her one day which of her children was her favorite. Her response was, “The one who is sick until he is well; the one who is away until he is home.”

This reminds me of the parable of the lost sheep. Even though you love all your children, the one who needs saving temporarily becomes your focus until they are all safe.

*Jeanne Dill*

*Day 8—March 5*  
*2 Timothy 1:3-7*

## *A Reminder from God*

I love getting handwritten letters from people, especially in these days of the internet.

Can you imagine Jesus' disciples mailing their followers and what the impact on them might look like? Paul says in his letter to Timothy that he is holding him in prayer and has hopes for better days for him. He reminds Timothy to “*rekindle the faith in God*” that he already has.

Thanks be to God for this reminder.



*Diana Nothe-Taylor*

## *Day 9—March 6*

### *Romans 3:21-31*

#### *Unconditional Love*

As the mother of four young children, I spend so much of my time reflecting on the personalities of my children and how I am parenting them. They have their own likes, dislikes, and worries. They build relationships differently and respond to different methods of parenting.

To effectively manage my role in their lives, I have to embrace their differences. I have to see what makes them unique and beautiful and tailor my approaches to those differences. Where my eldest daughter responds to a logical explanation of why things are the way they are, my middle daughter is much more emotionally driven and responds to how things affect others as opposed to why they are how they are.

This approach is applicable to all relationships in life, not just a parental role. However, where these differences have no real standing is in love itself. Love should not be based on what separates us but rather on our commonalities. I love my children equally, unconditionally, and without prejudice or limitation. In this love, there are no grudges, no resentment, and no denial of acceptance. I love my children through their success and their failures, through their attributes and their faults. I love my children with all of my heart both because of and despite who they are. My love is not based on their personalities; my love does not waiver based on their differences.

This is how God loves us. He loves the Jews, the Gentiles and the Muslims, and he offers each and every one of us redemption regardless of our path to faith, regardless of our belief. As I love my children inclusively does God love us and offer us redemption through His son, Jesus Christ. He is my God and he is your God and though we are two very different people with very different needs, he will always love us equally, unconditionally, and without prejudice or limitation.

*Audra Staples*

## *Day 10—March 7*

### *Luke 7:1-10*

#### *Have Faith in Jesus*

Jesus and His disciples enter Capernaum. A Roman Centurion who was a friend of the Jews had a servant who was ill and near death. He asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus went on His way to the house but was stopped by friends of the centurion, who felt the centurion was not worthy to have Jesus in his house.

*“But say the word and my servant will be healed.”* The core of this is the faith the man had in Jesus as a healer. Turning to the people gathered around Him, Jesus said, *“I tell you, nowhere, even in Israel, have I found faith like this.”* The friends returned to find the servant in good health.

Look into your heart space and let your faith guide you. Let it bring you to the love of God and the strength of His son Jesus as you go on your life journey. Amen.



*Alexander Otte and Jane Roberts*

## *Day 11—March 9*

### *Hebrew 3:1-6*

#### *Christ Is in Charge*

In my Bible, these verses start with this title: “Jesus Is Greater than Moses.”

O.K. Easy enough.

But upon reading verses 1-6, the message I received from the writer of Hebrews is a reminder that we are on a journey of Faith and Trust.

We can seek out others to help us on our journeys — friends, family, therapists, books. We can hire the best carpenter in town to build our home.

But it is Christ, the Faithful Son of God, who is *in charge* of the household. We have builders and helpers, and we can say they are “really great,” but we must put our faith and trust in God, the Creator. Let us always be reminded of who is really in charge, and who is really the greatest of all!



*Janice Muldrew*

## *Day 12—March 10*

### *Romans 4:6-13*

#### *Promise of God to Believers*

The book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul who had come to Rome because he had heard of the Romans' strong faith in Jesus Christ – and they had requested he come to them.



He was speaking of the importance of faith in God – more important than obeying the law of the land. He speaks of Abraham, the father of us all, and who believed in God, and the way God would have us live. He had a very strong faith in God – and believed that God would forgive us our mistakes and errors – if we are truly sorry and try to live righteously.

Paul also mentions another man. He says David described the blessedness of the man – unto whom God imparted righteousness apart from works.

The promise to Abraham and his descendants that they will inherit the world did not come through the law – but through the righteousness of faith.

Paul responded to the many arguments for a law that would force all those who claim to believe in God and Jesus Christ to be circumcised. Paul says that the promise of God is made to all who believe – not in whether or not they are circumcised. He says that the promise of God that Abraham would be heir of the world was not to Abraham through the law – but through the righteousness of faith.

*Lyle Miller*

*Day 13—March 11*  
*John 7:53—8:11*

*Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*



In this section of John the, Chief Priests and Pharisees are attempting to trap Jesus because of His teachings. So, as He was teaching, they brought before Him, a woman

caught in adultery. They cited the Law of Moses saying she should be stoned to death, and asked Jesus, “*What do you say?*”

So Jesus, while writing with His fingers in the dirt, said, “*Whoever has committed no sin may throw the first stone.*” While Jesus continued to write in the dirt, they left one by one, without throwing any stones. Jesus then said to her, “*I do not condemn you either; go and sin no more.*”

I believe that Jesus was placed among us to show God’s loving, empathetic, forgiving nature. Jesus showed us that even breaking one of the Ten Commandments could be forgiven if we repent of it. But Jesus also taught us that all the law and the prophets depend on “*Loving the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your mind, and all of your soul*” and “*Loving your neighbor as yourself.*”

In this election year – through primary and general elections – may we seek out and promote the candidates that we believe will most closely emulate Jesus’ compassion and thinking – and those that seem most capable of putting into action what He has taught us through their words, deeds, and passage of just laws.

*Roy Miller*



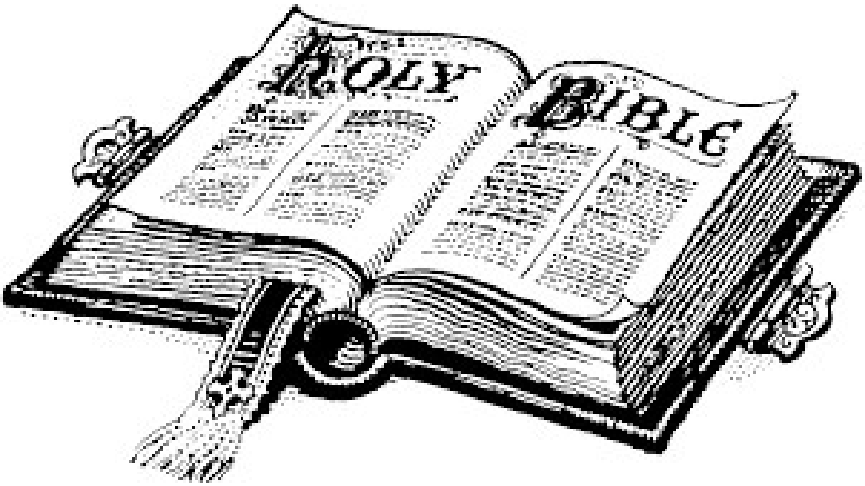
*Day 14—March 12*  
*Colossians 1:15-23*

*Live According to the Bible*

The Bible is an instruction/teaching book about God and Jesus. Sometimes the words are run on together. It's difficult to see how they apply.

To me, this scripture says to stay grounded in my Faith in everything I do. Respect God. Respect the blood sacrifice of Jesus for us. Act on “the hope of the Gospel.” Live this way to be pleasing to God.

Actions, not words, are what matters.



*Kimberly Farr*

*Day 15—March 13*  
*Ephesians 2:11-22*

*We Are One*

**E**ventually we all will see,

**P**assing judgements, and modes of separation,

**H**ave no power here.

**E**qually, we stand with no head taller than the next,

**S**eparated by notions of the self-taught thought,

**I**nspired by internal ache,

**A**s He gently but surely,

**N**udges us closer toward spiritual realization,

**S**o we are one.

**2:19-22**

*Erin Wallace*

## Day 16—March 14

### 1 John 4:1-6

#### *God's Spirit of Truth*

What stands out to me in this reading is the last line: *“This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”* Since I believe in God and He is in me, I can call upon Him to guide me in understanding what is truth versus what is a lie. The passage speaks of the antichrist. This, I think, takes many forms which challenge one's faith—greed, addictions, jealousy, infidelity, desire for power—and draws one away from the Spirit of truth to be overpowered by the spirit of falsehood.

A friend once told me her therapist said everyone has a “God Hole” that must be filled. Those lucky enough to believe in God fill that with the Spirit of truth and try to lead a life based on service to others, ever trying to base decisions on what is just, kind, and forgiving. Those who don't, turn to a life of aimlessness, devoid of purpose, propped up by alcohol, drugs, selfishness, unable to love anyone, even themselves.

Recently my five-year-old grandson was playing Ninja with Papa and told Papa he had reached his “full potential” as a Ninja—very impressive language for a five-year-old! Later I was reading a graphic novel Ninjago to him and came across that very phrase. I asked him if he understood what “potential” meant, and since he didn't, I explained it. He then asked, “What does **“true”** mean?”

That is a deep question that seems to be answered in part by this passage: *“We are from God...This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth.”*

*Mary Newland*

## *Day 17—March 16*

### *2 John 1:1-13*

#### *Finding the Real Truth*

In the early days of the church, there were teachers who travelled from place to place. As they went, they taught the people about Jesus.

The problem was that some of the teachers taught false things. Many of them had wrong ideas about Jesus. They denied the truth that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God.



John said that such teachers were not real Christians. What they taught about Jesus was not true. They tried to damage the church by what they taught.

John warned the church about the false teachers. He told the church members not to accept these men. The church must be careful to obey the true message of Jesus. They must love each other and live in the truth. They believed in Jesus and what He has done. They must separate themselves from everyone who denied the truth about Jesus.

Today our false teachers can be found on the internet, on Facebook, and on TV. There someone's crazy idea can be posted and spread in an instant all over the globe as "truth."

*Dan Newberry*

## *Day 18—March 17*

### *1 Corinthians 10:1-14*

#### ***Pray Unceasingly to Know God's Peace***

*“The people sat down to eat and drink and afterward got up to amuse themselves.”*

To pray, to sit with, eat and drink of our Mother/Father God. To pray unceasingly, to trust in our gracious God's love, to trust in God's peace and kindness, joy, and beauty.

Then why do we “get up and amuse ourselves”? Why eat at the table of false gods? Why leave God's table and eat the food of self-doubt, self-recrimination, self-criticism? Why worship the false gods of the world? The gods of vanity, pride, the need to be in control, the god of thinking we need others' approval, the god of needing to be right, the god of getting it right, the god of being perfect? These are false gods, and what they feed us is destruction.

Our gracious Mother/Father God feeds us hope, love, peace, joy – that which supports us, strengthens us; that which helps us to grow in our love for God, for each other, and for ourselves.

Jesus is the peace the world cannot give. Jesus, please put out your hand and hold me; I am drowning in the world.

Be still my child, and know that I am here: with you, in you, for you.



*Roseann Vínčíguerra*

## *Day 19—March 18*

### *John 7:14-31, 37-39*

#### *Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover*

For the Jews of Jesus' time, the Law of Moses prohibited performing any sort of work on the Sabbath. When Jesus violated this law by healing a man on the Sabbath, He angered the Jews, who vowed to kill Him.

Jesus speaks boldly to the multitude: *"Are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."*

This is sound advice. Jesus wants us to look beyond the surface to see what is right with the character of a person before we make a judgment about who he is. In *Hamlet*, Polonius, a shallow and garrulous courtier, advises his son Laertes that "the apparel oft proclaims the man." What terrible guidance to give a young man! Just because someone dresses the part does not mean that he acts the part.

Judging according to what we see is a problem in our world today. We too often look at the appearance of a person to decide who he is and what he represents before we get to know him. The black man in a hoody, the tattooed waitress, the motorcyclist in a leather jacket, the youth with a spiked Mohawk, and the teenaged girl with pink hair all have a deeper personality that may belie their superficial exterior.

How does the person act towards others? Does he think before speaking, act kindly, show respect, listen to and love others, and treat them well? Jesus wants us to look inside for these Christian ideals even when a person's outside appearance may be to the contrary.

*Suzanne Kelley*

# Day 20—March 19

## Ephesians 4:25-32

### *Paul's Rules for the New Life*

#### Paul's Rules for the New Life

Eph. 4:25-32

Douglas E. Kelley, 2020

1 Paul's rules for the new life, ad - vice how to live:  
2 Stop ly - ing, cease pre-tense, and al - ways be true.  
3 If you be - come an - gry, it could lead to sin.

Be gen - tle and sen - si - tive, quick to for - give.  
Stop steal - ing, be hon - est in all that you do.  
Don't leave it to fes - ter; the Dev - il could win.

Ban bit - ter - ness, an - ger, and slan - der and wrath.  
Let noth - ing pro - fane ev - er come from your tongue.  
Don't go to bed an - gry or e - ven the score.

End brawl - ing and mal - ice: a poi - son - ous path.  
Speak on - ly what's help - ful to those you're a - mong.  
Treat neigh - bors like broth - ers; be an - gry no more.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with lyrics written below the notes. The lyrics are divided into four systems, each with three lines of text. The first system includes a numbered list of three verses. The subsequent systems contain the main body of the lyrics, which are phrased to fit the musical rhythm.

Tune: ST. DENIO 11.11.11.11.  
*Adapt. from a Welsh ballad in John Roberts' Caniadaeth y Cysegr, 1839*

*Doug Kelley*

*Day 21—March 20*  
*Ephesians 5:1-9*

Now you are light in the Lord;  
walk as children of light.  
The fruit of light is found in all  
that is good.



“Awake, O sleeper, and arise  
from the dead,  
and Christ shall give you Light.”

*Ephesians 5: 1-9*

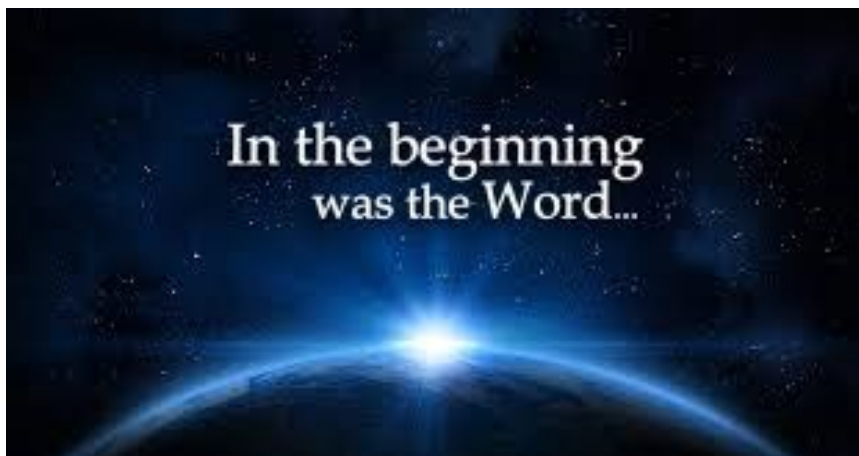


*Jeff Gardell*



*Day 22—March 21*  
*John 1:1-9*

*God: The Connection between Us*



The word is a combination of sounds that create meaning. Meaning comes from ideas. The word is an idea. In the beginning, there was an idea about God. And the idea became God. The idea that was created is that things matter. What you do matters.

God is not a white man with a long white beard who sits in a chair in the sky. God is the idea that there is a connection between us. That justice matters, that there is right and wrong.

If we do the right thing, we will be rewarded with heaven, and if we do the wrong thing, we will be punished by hell and that there will be an omnipotent judge to know which is which.

I think there is a correlation between our experience of heaven and hell and the amount of justice we receive or do not receive, that we give or withhold. We ourselves are not the idea,

*Keith Obert*

## *Day 23—March 23*

### *Acts 9:1-20*

#### *Look to the Example of Jesus*

We learn by example. There is proof of this beyond time. How do you know  $2+2=4$ ? Or that the alphabet has a certain order? Someone probably showed you when you were little. Maybe when you were younger, you lost a toy for whining, and that's how you learned not to whine.

Here, we find that Saul loses his sight for his lack of believing. God made Saul see by taking away his sight and not giving it back until three days later. Then Saul, newly renamed Paul, went and spread the truth about God. God taught him by example.

In this time, and always, we must maintain the strength of our faith, and always believe that God will give us an example. In times of doubt, we can look to Him, or to the flesh example God sent us, His only son, Jesus. Even if your faith wavers, God will know to present Himself to you.



*Michelle Croak*

*Day 24—March 24*  
*Colossians 1:9-14*

*Sometimes . . .*

Sometimes it seems so unsurmountable.

Sometimes they just don't seem to be grateful to be alive.

Sometimes it's just too damn hard.

Sometimes we need to stop.

Sometimes just to pray.

Sometimes to let the spirit in.

Sometimes just to hope.

Sometimes in the Lord's time.



*Tony Siciliano*

## Day 25—March 25

### Matthew 9:27-34

#### *Having a Faith Connection*



Matthew 9:27-34, a story of Jesus restoring sight to the blind, is common to us. We hear it regularly in readings and sermons. It's simple and powerful in its own right. While most of us would stop to ponder this miracle, few move beyond that to consider a deeper message.

Matthew's text helps us to take that step by presenting a hidden message about faith. Inquiring about their faith, Jesus asks the blind men, *"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"*

When they reply, *"Yes, Lord,"* Jesus then says, *"According to your faith let it be done to you."*

In our modern-day lives, we could replace blindness in Matthew's text with almost any of our life challenges. Though



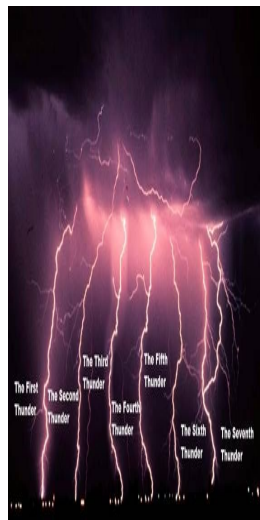
Jesus isn't here, we still have that faith connection. It seems clear that Jesus was trying to build a foundation of faith, knowing that when He was no longer with us physically, we could rely on the lifeline of faith.

*Lyn and Brian Fioravanti*

## Day 26—March 26

### Revelation 10:1-11

#### *God Shows in the Wonders of the World*



*“There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”*

God has a plan, and He is always and will forever be true to His word. He shows his strength and His faith through all the wonders of our world.

*Heather Brouillette*

## *Day 27—March 27*

### *Revelation 11:15-19*

#### *And He Shall Reign Forever and Ever*

Are these words familiar? Handel used this scripture to compose a section of the Hallelujah Chorus. The choir begins in a hushed tone with soft, legato voices, “the kingdom of this world,” as strings and voices intone “is become.” Then, instruments and voices jump to fortissimo, heralding the text “...the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever...” repeating and developing the idea musically over and over until the final Hallelujah. We can ask ourselves whether Handel selected these words from Revelation to underscore his faith that someday our small, imperfect world would fade away and become the majestic Kingdom of our Lord.

The Revelation scripture is hopeful with the vision of elders falling on their faces to worship God and give thanks for God Almighty taking power while the nations react in anger and suffer destruction. The temple of God opens in heaven to reveal the “ark of His testament” amidst lightning, voices, thundering, an earthquake and great hail.

Meantime, here we are pondering these words and trying to live in Christ until the fateful day. What can we do? We are reminded of words from the 2019 Barnes and Noble Book of the Year, *THE BOY, THE MOLE, THE FOX, and THE HORSE* by Charlie Mackesy. BOY sits on a tree branch and asks MOLE, “What do you want to be when you grow up” MOLE replies, “Kind.” BOY continues, “What do you think success is?” MOLE answers, “To love.” BOY asks HORSE, “What is the bravest thing you have ever said.” HORSE says, “Help.”

May we in preparation for “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done” pray for God’s **HELP** to be **KIND** and to **LOVE**.  
Amen!

*Gay and John Paluch*

*Day 28—March 28*  
*Luke 24:44-53*

*Jesus Ascends to Heaven*



This is the most important Easter passage in the New Testament. This is where Jesus reminds His disciples that His death and resurrection were foretold in the Hebrew Bible.

The disciples are witnesses to this and more, for shortly thereafter, Jesus led them out to Bethany, blessed them, and was taken up to heaven.

This was the last time they saw Him and the start of their ministry. What follows after this, of course, is the beginning of Christianity.

*Carolyn Horacek*

*Day 29—March 30*  
*Acts 20:7-12*

*Stay Awake in Church!*

Poor, sleepy Eutychus,  
A-sittin' without squirmin',  
Perching on a window ledge  
To hear an endless sermon.

How his eyes are droopy,  
Sittin' way up high;  
Poor, sleepy Eutychus  
Is just about to die.

Saint Paul keeps a'preachin'  
To our hero snoozin' hard;  
Then Euty leans into the air  
And crashes in the yard.

But Paul is an apostle,  
Quite unlike other men;  
Down he runs to Eutychus  
And gives him life again.

So if you're gonna sleep in church,  
Don't from a window fall;  
The man up front a-preachin'  
Is not Apostle Paul.



*From A Pillar of Pepper and Other Bible Nursery Rhymes.*  
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*Lisa Borten*



## Day 30—March 31

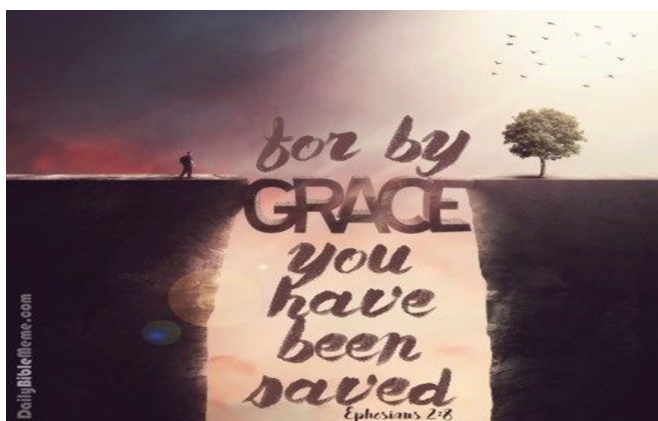
### *Ephesians 2:1-10*

#### ***God's Mercy Gives Salvation***

This passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians describes humanity as being spiritually dead, having trespassed, sinned, been disobedient, and subjected to the desires of flesh and the senses. How then are we, further described by Paul as children of wrath and following Satan, able to find salvation?

Paul explains that God, because He is rich in mercy and has a great love for us, acted to save us. God made us spiritually alive in Christ and has given us the unmerited gift of His grace. This gift of grace from God is the means by which we receive faith. Paul clarifies that our salvation is given to us entirely by the grace of God alone and not attributed to any human act.

In addition, Paul reminds us that God has a plan for us, and we were created by Him to do good works. We need to remember that doing good deeds does not lead to salvation, yet God's intent is for our good deeds to be a result of our salvation. *"For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."*



***Donna Okscín***

*Day 31—April 1*  
*Matthew 22:23-33*

*Jesus' View of Heaven*



Always trust in God's word.

Angels are One in Heaven.

God's Love is our Love.

Man says, Show me,  
and I'll trust you  
God says, Trust Me,  
and I'll show you

*Ed Maia*

## *Day 32—April 2*

### *Philippians 1:1-11*

#### *What Would Jesus Do?*

All of us have family, friends, and co-workers that sometimes bring us great joy and sometimes great frustration. In these verses, Paul shows that he understands this, but that as Christians, there are certain expectations we should strive toward when dealing with others and ourselves.

When I was first married, my grandmother said to me, “Never go to bed mad.” That was great advice, but I didn’t realize that she was quoting Paul. Paul says, “*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*” So true; by not dealing with a problem immediately, it will fester, creating an embittered and resentful spirit.

Paul also talks about our speech, and that what we say and how we say it are indications of the condition of our heart. If our heart is right, our words will be right. When our heart is out of step with the Lord, our words reveal that too. Because we are followers of Christ, non-Christians look to us to do and say the right thing, to be Christ’s good example. In the second part of this verse Paul helps us learn how to say the right thing. He instructs us not to put people down, but to build others up by being encouraging, constructive, and uplifting and by never tearing others down with gossip, because it is so hurtful. I have often said I have a problem with my mouth working faster than my brain. After reading Paul’s message, I wonder if perhaps it’s not so much my brain, as my heart, that is not working properly.

Paul wants us to be more like Christ. Isn’t that what we want to be too? Several years ago the acronym WWJD was very popular. Would it be helpful to ask ourselves, “What Would Jesus Do?” before we speak or act? If we strive to think like Christ, we will act like Christ.

*Judy White*

## Day 33—April 3

### *Philippians 1:21-30*

#### ***Thinking of Life and Death***

I found the following notation in *The Study Bible for Women NRSV*:

*“(20-26) Here is our most intimate view of the apostle’s philosophy of life and death, This passage can give meaning to our own existence, whatever the circumstances.”*

Reading through this passage along with the above notation brought my thinking towards my own life, and thoughts of dying. When I think of life and death, I think of the most devastating loss I have had: losing my husband Bruce suddenly, without any prior illness, at the young age of 59.

I know that he had a lot of living left to do. But God had other plans. After his death, I worried about my own death. I felt my daughters still needed me. I am the only parent they have now. I felt that I needed to be alive more for them than for myself. I was scared for them. They had already lost one parent at their young adult ages of 19 and 21 at the time. So in addition to the grief of my loss, I was in fear of my own life ending.

Dying could have been my gain as Paul says in verse 21. I could be with Jesus and my husband and my own parents. I prayed that wasn’t God’s plan. To remain here in this life was more necessary at this time than to depart.

I know that death is inevitable for all of us and we really don’t know when our time on this earth will end. Until the time when we can be reunited with loved ones that have gone on before us, let us be the people Jesus would be proud to call his children.

*Laurie Clarke*

## Day 34—April 4

### Mark 10:32-34

#### *The Greatest Gift*

In this passage, Jesus and his followers are on the road, heading toward Jerusalem. Jesus walked ahead, firm and resolute in His stride. His disciples followed, amazed at His determination as He marched toward danger. His followers trailed even further back, and they were afraid for good reason.

Then Jesus took His disciples aside and told them, for the third time, what was going to happen to Him, saying, “*See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and flog him, and kill him: and after three days he will rise again.*”

This journey to Jerusalem was three things: it was an act that (1) was done with determination and earnestness of heart, (2) had, as its purpose, Jesus laying down his life as our atoning sacrifice, and (3) fulfilled the promises foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

What are we to do with this passage? Let it inspire us and lay before us the majesty of God’s love for us. It tells us about what God has done for us through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. It shows not just the willingness, but also the steadfast determination, of Jesus to head toward what He clearly knew to be His death. Jesus did so because of His great love for us. Along with His sacrifice came the promise of the Resurrection and a path to eternal life. God has given us a gift through His Son Jesus —let us believe, and be awed by His love, and allow our hearts to be transformed.

*Steve Scannell*

*Day 35—April 6*  
*John 12:1-11*

*Jesus Is the Center*

This scene is given to us in Holy Week. In a few days time Jesus will die on a cross. We are given an insight into the minds of many people referred to in the story. Mary centers on Jesus and honors Him in an unusual way, letting us know how much she thinks of Him. Martha is catering for all the people there. Others come just to see Jesus and Lazarus. Judas criticizes the waste of the ointment. Jesus, aware of his forthcoming death, is completely composed and answers Judas.



As we go through Holy Week this year, one could say that this story tells of the many attitudes that still prevail among people. Pray that Jesus will be the central figure for you this week, in His wonderful expression of love.

*Kiel Krommer*

## *Day 36—April 7*

### *John 12:20-36*

#### ***Walk in the Light***

This reading is about the parable of the grain of wheat and following the Light.

Did you know that each wheat plant produces about 20-25 stalks or spikes? Each stalk produces a head with from 50-70 wheat kernels. So each plant grows about 1000-1850 kernels of wheat. Let's say 1400 is the average. How is that for an investment? One plant yields 1400 kernels? This, of course, is only the beginning. Because if we have these 1400 do the same thing, we have almost two million kernels (1,960,000).

Jesus explains why He must die. *“Unless a kernel of wheat is buried in the ground, it will not become a blade of wheat producing many more seeds.”*

The grain stood for Jesus' life. Jesus as a grain fell from the stalk (cross) down to the ground where He was stripped of His life. He died and was buried. But that One Seed would spring back up into life ( resurrection) and then bear much fruit (all who believe). By Jesus' one life that was sacrificed, He enabled millions of people to have peace and an eternal life with Him.

What is involved in following Christ?

A Christian's journey through faith is to believe in the life, sacrifice, death, and the resurrection of Christ. It is to give up control of all earthly things and to serve and follow Him.

Walk in His Light! Let His light guide you through your darkest days. Let His light shine! As Christians, we are to be His light bearers, letting His light shine through us.

*Elaine Harris*

## Day 37—April 8

### John 13:21-32

#### *Symbolism of the Last Supper*

In my opinion, today's reading is a great piece of symbolism at the Last Supper.

During the meal, Jesus said that the bread was His body and the wine, His blood. He states to the disciples *"Very Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me."* And responding to Simon Peter after being asked who it was, Jesus states, *"It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."*

Giving the bread to Judas Iscariot was Jesus' way of not only acknowledging that Judas will be His betrayer, but that Judas acknowledged the same.

To me, it also symbolizes how Judas was going to "take" Jesus' body and blood and betray Him, without hesitation. To delve a bit further, as Christians, it is a way to reflect on how love risks betrayal and how we (Judas) may risk betrayal of Jesus in actions we perform throughout our lives . . . without hesitation.



*Chris Young*



## *Day 38—Maundy Thursday —April 9* *John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

### *Washing of the Feet*

*"During supper Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and wiped them with a towel that was tied around Him."*

Jesus said to His disciples, "Are you ready to take our relationship to the next level?" This is always Jesus' question to us. It is answered by our relationships with one another.

If Jesus washed our feet, we also ought to wash someone else's feet. Feet and water are just signs. The purpose and goal is projecting love for another. It is choosing to receive into our hands the feet of another regardless of where they have been, what they look like, or what they have done. It is asking forgiveness for those we have stepped on or for those feet that have kicked us. Jesus knew He would soon no longer be with His disciples, so He gave a new commandment: *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*



*Roger Tirrell*

## *Day 39— Good Friday —April 10*

### *John 18:1—19:42*

#### *Carrying Out God's Plan*

John 18:1— 19:42 tells the story of Good Friday. Faced with the task of responding to what I just read, I am in a quandary. The details of what happened are confusing. It is apparent that Pilate really had no desire to have Jesus killed. He gave the Jews numerous opportunities to spare Jesus' life. He questioned Jesus at length and told the Jews he could find no fault to justify the execution.



Since it was Passover, and there was a custom that one prisoner could be released, Pilate suggested releasing Jesus. Instead, the Jews told him to release Barabbas, who was a thief. It's difficult to understand what exactly was going on. Was Pilate afraid to have Jesus killed because he was revered by so many, and his death could cause an uprising? Was Pilate a fair leader, who was simply offering a solution to a difficult situation? Or was he secretly a spiritual seeker, himself, who didn't want to kill someone who might have the answers?

And as for the Jews ... Was it a mob mentality that pushed them forward? Were they eliminating someone who was too powerful and a threat to their own religious order? Or were they simply making sure that prophesy came true, carrying out God's plan.

Most likely everything unfolded because of self-serving politics on both sides. However, being who I am, I prefer the last explanation for both Pilate and the Jews. I like to imagine that EVERYONE there knew exactly what was going on and that Jesus' ordeal was excruciatingly painful for all. It makes the whole story much easier to bear.

*Shelley Greene*

*Day 40— Holy Saturday —April 11*  
*John 19:38-42*

*The Burial of Jesus*



## **The Burial of Jesus**

The day after Jesus died was a day of deep darkness  
for those who loved Him most. For three years,  
the disciples had basked in the brilliance of His love.  
His every movement igniting goodness, pure and bright.

**His presence lit their lives.**

The moment he died, the lights went out.  
Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.  
Nicodemus helped Joseph wrap it with spices  
in strips of linen. There was an empty tomb in a garden.

They laid Jesus there.

**They couldn't know the light of hope  
was just a sunrise away.**

Excerpts from Susanna Foth Aughtmon.

*Chris Sterritt*

## *Day 41—Easter—April 12*

### *John 20:1-18*

#### *The Empty Shell*

Shells on the beach almost always have one thing in common: they are empty. By the time they reach the beach, the creatures who lived inside have moved on; there's no creature inside. Empty seashells can be a great reminder both of a fun day at the beach and of the one thing that makes being a Christian so special.

Every Easter, we celebrate an empty “shell”— the tomb where Jesus was laid to rest. We've learned a lot in the last few months about life under the sea, and we've learned a lot about Jesus. We know God loves us, and God is always looking out for us. We know God can protect us from harm, and we know God can use anyone, even kids, to do great things. God is able to do all this and more, thanks to the empty tomb.

Because of Jesus, we can know God personally. We can have a personal relationship through the Holy Spirit who dwells inside us, in our hearts; and through the Spirit, we get to know the Lord and know his will for our lives.

Of all the scriptures in the Bible, of all the lessons to be learned, this is the one that matters most: Jesus is not dead. He is not in the tomb. The tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive. Empty shells are a reminder that the

tomb of Jesus is empty. Because Jesus is alive, we can have a new life.



### *Sunday School*



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