

healing. In the places where we feel like darkness abounds, God's light is shining through today. Christ is risen! God is breaking through!

God has broken through in so many ways in my own life, bringing hope, wholeness and healing to places that looked bleak, weary, and grim. However, as I write this, I am not experiencing any great burdens. There is nothing weighing heavy on me today. That may be your experience as well. If so, you are needed, for this is when you need to allow God to work in you to break through in the lives of others. We need to share the story of how God has been at work in our lives. We need to tell others that there is hope. We need to find ways to allow God's light to shine in the darkness. We want the world to know that Christ is risen! God is breaking through!

Ephesians 3:20 says, "Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us." Did you catch that? Go back and read that verse one more time, because this is important. This verse gives us a couple of vital reminders. First, it tells us that God is able to do more than we can imagine. That is good news! However, the part that I don't want you to miss is that God is able to do this "by his power at work within us." God's power is at work within us. We are the hands and feet of Christ. We are the ones to carry out God's work in the world. We are the way in which God continues to break through. So, I want to challenge you to allow God's power to be at work within you today that God's light will shine and God's love will be shared as the world discovers Christ is risen! God is breaking through!

Pastor Justin Williams

**Prayer:** Gracious and Loving God, we are in awe of Your power as we celebrate the triumphant victory of Your Son, Jesus Christ, over death. We thank you for the truth that "Christ is risen! God is breaking through!"

May the reality of your breakthrough fill our hearts with hope, peace, and joy today. In the midst of our challenges and triumphs, may we remember that Your power is at work within us, enabling us to be vessels of Your love and light in the world.

Empower us to carry the message of Easter into the world. Help us share the story of your breakthrough in our lives, offering hope to those who need it most. In times of darkness, may Your light shine through us, and in times of despair, may Your hope spring forth.

Thank you for the promise that Your power exceeds our wildest imaginations. May we, as individuals and as a community, be transformed by Your grace, living as witnesses to the ongoing reality that "Christ is risen! God is breaking through!" Amen.

## 2024 Lenten Devotional Series

### When Heaven touches Earth; God is breaking through.

During Advent we experienced the sermon series in worship called "When Heaven touches Earth; God is breaking through". It causes us to ponder what does this mean in our lives? At Advent we recognized God's coming to be with us through the birth of Jesus and recognizing that he will come again. All of that is important.

So now in Lent, our question is how does that presence of God break into our lives in a way that allows us to share our faith with others. How does this breakthrough empower us to speak into the troubles of our world to bring the Light of Christ...to bring hope where there is none? What does God's presence allow us to do in bringing people together despite our differences so that we can together show love to those around us? If we can do this it will cause a ripple effect of love. What a difference that could make!

This Lent, we will be experiencing "Wandering Heart" and we will be walking in the steps of Peter. Peter also experienced God breaking into his life in a powerful way. Let's walk with Peter and listen to the stories of our congregation members and find ourselves watching for God's breaking into our own lives.

We are thankful for those in our congregation who wrote devotions in this booklet for us this year.

Blessings,

Kim La Rue

Adult Ministries Director

Powell United Methodist Church

## The Season of Lent

**Lent** is the season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The season of Lent is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Easter is the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the vernal equinox. For this reason, Easter is never the same date two years in a row.

**Lent** is a time for penance by all Christians. The First Sunday describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent suffering and death. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent should be tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection.



**Ash Wednesday** emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship, and the Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation.



**Holy Week** begins with Palm Sunday and continues through the great three days from sunset on Holy Thursday through sunset Easter day. This is the apex of Lent and the whole Christian year, and a bridge into the Easter season. These days proclaim the mystery of Jesus Christ's passion, death and resurrection. During these days, the community journeys with Jesus from the upper room, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the garden.

*"Fellow Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having released him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." Acts 2:22-24*

At first, I wasn't sure how I felt about the Lenten Devotional having the same theme as the Advent series. During Advent, we explored how God broke through in a manger in Bethlehem. But then, after further reflection, I realized that Holy Week is all about God breaking through. God broke through as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. God broke through in a meal on Maundy Thursday that we continue to celebrate allowing God to break through in our lives. God broke through as Jesus knelt down and washed his disciples feet teaching us to serve. God broke through as Jesus endured the cross revealing God's overwhelming love for us. On this Easter Sunday morning, we know that God broke through because the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. Christ is risen! God is breaking through!

This Lent we have been looking at the life of Peter in our study and sermon series. In his sermon in Acts 2, Peter proclaims "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having released him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." Peter proclaims that God is breaking through in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The world tried to crucify him, but God raised him up. This was part of God's plan. Peter says, "it was impossible for him to be held in [death's] power." Christ is risen! God is breaking through!

Because we know that Jesus conquered the grave, Easter is a time when we remember that there is always hope. The worst day is not the last day. Death does not have the final word. So, in the midst of whatever we are going through today, God wants to break through and offer us hope. In the midst of our grief, God offers comfort. In the midst of our conflict (internal and external), God offers peace. In the midst of our despair, God offers hope. Easter is the reminder that God wants to break through in our lives to bring wholeness and

## Saturday - March 30

*Luke 24:1-12*

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

## Ash Wednesday - February 14

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Come, thou Fount of every blessing,  
tune my heart to sing thy grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
mount of thy redeeming love.

*Words: Robert Robinson (1758)*

*Music: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second (1813)*

*United Methodist Hymnal #400*



*River of Grace by Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
A Sanctified Art Group*

## Thursday - February 15

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Proverbs 31:8*

We had barely made the abdominal incision when the surgeon gasped, “Oh my....most of his organs are dying.” It was a sickening sight to see. What should have been pink, warm and vibrant was ashen, cold and still. The person had chronic A-fib and apparently developed a blood clot (that had cut off the blood supply to his abdominal organs). “We’re closing, there’s nothing we can do,” the surgeon stated. Anesthesia wondered if he wanted the patient to stay intubated and asleep until he expires. “Yes, no need to wake him. I expect him to pass soon.”

*That is when I spoke up.*

“Doctor, if we keep him asleep, he will never have that chance to say his good byes. There are two sons and a daughter in the waiting area for him. I think it is important they are able to talk to him.” The anesthesiologist supported my request and guaranteed full pain control until he expired. Thus, the plan was set into motion. I went with the surgeon to talk to the family and we explained the situation. They were shocked, but grateful for this last opportunity with their father. Later, I met with the patient and his entire family. We spoke and I was asked (by the family) to inform their father of the situation. This was challenging, but I allowed the Spirit to be my guide. I placed my hand on his shoulder and held his hand with my other as I revealed what we had found. I prayed from the heart and I concluded with the Lord’s Prayer. The tears flowed as the family drew close to him and I witnessed a pouring river of love. Jesus was there in that recovery bay. It was electric. I could sense it.

*I know that we had made a difference.*

After my shift had ended and I was driving home, I thought a lot about what I had just witnessed.

David Narance

**Prayer:** Thank you, Father for allowing me to be the nurse for that patient...your timing, your perfect place. You allowed me to become the voice advocating for my patient and his family. Continue to give me your voice so that I may speak in love and peace. Amen

## Good Friday - March 29

*Nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Luke 17:21*

In May 2022, my Mom died in hospice suddenly after a three-day whirlwind. I was utterly unprepared for her death. But God came down from heaven, and today, I see the holy spirit breaking through on earth.

Of course, none of us are prepared for a loved one’s death, and in the middle of a whirlwind crisis, I wasn’t thinking about God. But to illustrate my mindset, two weeks prior, my cat was terminally sick, and I went to the vet to put her down. Instead of being with her, comforting her as she was put down, I chose to drop her off and sit in the lobby. Why? I didn’t want to see death. I loved that cat.

When my Mom was admitted to Hospice, I now found myself faced with her imminent death. She only had days to live. Seeing death was being forced upon me. I couldn’t sit in the lobby. That’s not what daughters do.

I was there. I was scared, but present. I was brave and said, I love you when my Mom took her last breath.

Today, two years afterward, the irony is my Mom was a retired hospice nurse. Amongst her belongings is a poem she wrote. She said it is a gift to be in a home when someone is dying, to witness the sacred moment. I understand now that death is not seen - but a blessing to witness - the soul’s passage when heaven breaks through on earth.

Patricia Arnold

**Prayer:** God, help us to be aware of Your presence in our days - during good, bad, extraordinary and ordinary times. May we seek you out and find peace in knowing, and believing, You are with us always. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday - March 28

*His massive arms are wrapped around you, protecting you. You can run under his covering of majesty and hide. His arms of faithfulness are a shield keeping you from harm. Psalms 91:4*

Heaven touching earth is evident every day but in our zest we often aren't deliberate to seek, listen, observe and reflect. A recent one for me was standing on a boat for a day trip and observing a man sitting on the deck with his young son asleep in his arms. To most this would seem ordinary but it was beautiful and remarkable. There was deep love in the father's eyes and desire to create the most comfortable sleep conditions despite his own physical discomfort. For the boy there was simple surrender.

How many times as a child did I wholly succumb with trust into my parents arms? Our Holy Creator affords comfort in our surrender. Not perfection... not every worldly desire... but the deepest promise and privilege of unconditional love. Always. We never outgrow or get too big for it. Here's to going forth with our childlike wonder to continue to seek.

Dana Ullom-Vucelich

**Prayer:** In the chaos of our day let us look up and look around to see where heaven touches earth and turn from self-reliance to reliance on you God. Amen.

## Friday - February 16

*O Come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1.*

### Songs of Lent

One of the many things I enjoy about Powell UMC is the music. I have loved to sing since I was a little girl. Lent has so many meaningful songs for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. The titles almost say it all.

*In the Garden*, by Charles Austin Miles paints a picture of what that night might have been like with the disciples as Jesus prayed.

Bill Gaither and The Gaither Vocal Band wrote and recorded many powerful lyrics about the Crucifixion of Christ, including *I Believe in a Hill Called Mount Calvary*, *At the Cross*, and *It is Finished*. Then there is the classic hymn, *The Old Rugged Cross* by George Bennard.

There are many Gospel songs to celebrate The Resurrection of Christ. Two of my favorites are *Then Came the Morning* and *Because He Lives*, by Bill and Gloria Gaither. Then there are the traditional hymns like, *He Lives* and *He Arose*. Other inspirational Gospel songs for Easter Morning include, *Rise Again*, by Dallas Holmes and *I've Just Seen Jesus* by Sandy Patty.

If you prefer Classical music, The "*Hallelujah*" chorus proclaims Christ's Resurrection and makes a splendorous finale to Part Two of the Messiah.

I would encourage you to search out and discover the heartwarming and touching music of Lent. I know you will be blessed.

Lori Kipfer

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the gift of music that helps us through the dark times of The Crucifixion on Good Friday and to help us celebrate Your Resurrection on Easter Sunday Morning. Amen



## Saturday - February 17

*But those who look into the perfect laws, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. James 1:25*

The words in the local Massachusetts newspaper leaped out at me, “If you have room in your heart and your home, become a foster parent.” With some trepidation, Brian and I applied, were trained, home studied and licensed. In time, we received a call to accept a nine-month-old girl into our home. We loved her. Our two sons loved her. After several months, her parents were able to provide a safe home for her. She left us. Two more little girls entered our hearts and our home and returned to their parents. Each time, we gave thanks for the success and grieved our loss.

We moved to Ohio. The voice to open our hearts and home to foster children was not silent. Again, we were trained, home studied and licensed. We became a family of four boys as two brothers joined our two sons. Their parents’ ability to provide a safe home for them looked grim but, in time, they succeeded. The family’s reunification was a heart wrenching loss for us. Blessedly, our two families have remained connected.

Soon after the two brothers went home, we were asked to foster an eight-year-old boy. It was expected to be a very short placement. But, it wasn’t. Eventually, this boy’s parents, unable to care for him, released him for adoption. He could remain not only in our hearts, but in our home. In the courtroom as the adoption was about to be finalized, the judge told this boy that he could ask us for anything and we would have to give it to him. Our son said, “I want them to love me forever.”

Rev. Sandy Huber

**Prayer:** Gracious and holy God, open our eyes and ears to listen for your call and to have the courage and grace to respond. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 27

*Ah, Holy Jesus*

*Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,  
that we to judge thee have in hate pretended?  
By foes derided, by thine own rejected, O most afflicted!  
Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,  
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,  
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving.*

*Words: Johann Heermann (1630)*

*Music: Johann Crüger (1640)*



*Were You There? by Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
A Sanctified Art Group*

## Tuesday - March 26

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*  
John 1:5

A few days before Christmas last year, I received a frantic phone call about one of my best friends from college. Her husband had gone into cardiac arrest and the situation was dire. They needed a miracle. I prayed on my hands and knees, crying out to God and begging for this needed miracle. The next morning, I traveled to North Carolina to be with my friend at the hospital while she waited at her husband's bedside. I have never witnessed another person experiencing such raw pain and grief. It was life altering to see. I rubbed her back and held her while she bravely asked difficult questions and made impossible decisions. That evening, her husband passed away. In an instant, my beloved friend became a widow at the age of 35 and is now a single mother to her two young boys.

How can these things happen? How are they allowed to happen? I've thought about these questions every day since. The answer is, I don't know. So, I must cling to the truths I do know. My friend is in the darkest season of her life. That is true. However, there is never darkness without light. That is also true. As followers of Jesus, it is both our duty and honor to be bearers of the light. To show up for people in real, tangible ways when they are broken. To hold them up. To not let darkness have the final word. To be a reminder that heaven finds a way.

Natalie Brown

**Prayer:** Dear God, We are often looking for the light when we and those we love are in seasons of deep sorrow. Help us to remember that the light, Your light, is in us. We are bearers of the light and are called to spread it to those in the darkness. Work in us and through us as we meet people in their darkest seasons and offer your light. Amen.

## First Sunday in Lent - February 18

*Luke 5: 1-11*

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

## Monday - February 19

*Jesus said [to Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26*

Agents of H.O.P.E.

I boarded my flight to Seattle and a young woman named Amy sat beside me. Her service dog Poppy rested at her feet on a leash. He looked up at me with dark eyes. She told me that before Poppy she was so depressed, she sat at home in tears most days. But when God brought Poppy into her life she was energized to live again. She has a job, travels by plane, talks to strangers like me, and fully lives her life.

This led me to think of HOPE and an acronym for what I saw through Poppy: Helping Others Perceive Energy. Poppy was the 'other' who helped Amy perceive the energy that changed her life. Isn't that what God did through Jesus? Jesus certainly helped Lazarus perceive the holy energy that enabled him to walk from death back into life, and his sisters to deal with their grief. He helped people see the energy to overcome hunger, to walk again, to see again, to speak again, even to live again.

Fishermen became fishers of people for God, tax collectors learned to give love, zealots stopped fighting the Romans and battled evil. Jesus was the Agent of Hope that aided Mary Magdalene find the energy to be rid of evil spirits. God energized Paul to withstand torture and imprisonments, and to bring many to Christ.

With Christ's help God can make us all into Agents of H.O.P.E. enabling persons near and far to accomplish daring things they have only dreamed of doing.

Rev. Dave Woodyard

**Prayer:** Holy God of Loving Energy, come and give me HOPE for our hectic society. Enable me to do what I can to Help Others Perceive the Energy that can transform the world near and far so your kingdom can come, and your will be done. Amen.

## Monday - March 25

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever. Psalm 118:1*

Wow ... here it is the first part of January, and it is already time to write a Lenten Devotion for Powell UMC's use during this preparation season. This is my fifth year of writing a brief message but this one is entirely different. On August 31, 2023, I was told that my fourth cancer was incurable and that I would be lucky to even be alive in two months. So, I may or may not be here existing on earth when this Devotional is printed.

I have been battling one form of cancer or another since 2006 and have had chemotherapy, radiation, and immunotherapy fighting this disease along with physical therapy to handle the aftereffects of treatments. I am still here beating the odds now at five months. I truly cherish that feeling I get from above when my feet touch the floor in the morning as I should have transitioned to heaven already. I have been touched by Heaven above in so many ways.

In the past few weeks I was able to visit my 96 year old Mother in Richmond, VA, celebrate my wife's birthday, enjoy Christmas with each of my three children and their family units, welcome in the new year of 2024, and attend my oldest grandson's wedding. I am blessed each day that I have here on earth. I do not understand why God's grace flows down and around me as I continue to share my testimony with others, but I shall continue to share the good news. And whether I am still here on earth or whether I have transitioned to Heaven, either way I win.

I am one blessed man!

Harry Poston

**Prayer:** God, thank you for always being here for us and showering down Your Graces upon us. May we stop our busyness and appreciate each and every day that You give us here on earth to make a difference in the lives of others. Amen.



## Palm Sunday - March 24

*John 12:12-16*

*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord-the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.*



*Then They Remembered by Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
A Sanctified Art Group*

## Tuesday - February 20

*Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Matthew 5:42*

As I became a mother my sole purpose in life became caring for a little human who could not take care of himself. I am blessed beyond measure to have the support of many people who assisted in collecting necessary items to care for my child. I am also grateful that both my husband and I have employment and the financial means to provide what is needed to take care of our child.

It was not until one day when my husband asked about donating some of our extra, out grown diapers that I became truly humbled and realized I needed to look beyond myself and help other mothers. You see when we inquired, we were told that diapers were in such high demand that they were only able to give 5 diapers out to each family per week. If you have ever taken care of a baby, they can go through this and more in one day! I realized that even though my brain was telling me to "save our unused diapers for the future," having these sit in the back of a closet was no way to help bring the Light of Christ to our community. Some mothers probably felt as there was no hope, they would not be able to properly care for their children.

This began my journey to give back to those in our community who were asking for help. When we were asked to sponsor from the Angel Tree at Christmas, I was so excited to go shopping. Knowing I could bring a little hope to a child who would not receive much more for Christmas warmed my soul. Heaven may have touched these families who were a part of receiving from our ministry but I believe God also broke through to me and allowed me to begin living by his word "Give to the one who asks...do not turn away."

Alyssa Thiele

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I pray that you humble those who have the means to provide for themselves to reflect and find something they may be able to give to those in need. I pray that they feel your presence guiding them in a way to build a stronger community. Amen.

Wednesday - February 21

Oceans

*You call me out upon the waters*

*The great unknown where feet may fail*

*And there I find You in the mystery*

*In oceans deep my faith will stand*

*And I will call upon Your Name*

*And keep my eyes above the waves*

*When oceans rise My soul will rest in Your embrace*

*For I am Yours and You are mine*

*Your grace abounds in deepest waters*

*Your sovereign hand will be my guide*

*Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me*

*You've never failed and You won't start now*

*So I will call upon Your Name*

*And keep my eyes above the waves*

*When oceans rise My soul will rest in Your embrace*

*For I am Yours and You are mine, oh*

*Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders*

*Let me walk upon the waters... Wherever You would call me*

*Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander*

*And my faith will be made stronger*

*In the presence of my Saviour*

*Songwriters: Joel Houston, Matt Crocker, Salomon Lighthelm (2014)*

Saturday - March 23

*Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Psalm 51:10*

I have been downsizing for a few years now off and on. I go through a box or two at a time looking at the articles of memories. It has been bitter sweet remembering the joys and pain associated with them. Then I have to make a decision. Which box does this memory go into; toss, donate, or keep. Ok, I have another box, one with a question mark, in a waiting pattern to be decided later.

I found all my past report cards from grade 1 on up through college. The joys were so sweet but the lows still stung a bit. I read each one and thanked God for each. Looking back I could see how God was working in both the good and the bad times. I made peace with these and put them in the toss box.

Going through ornaments was especially difficult because so many are tied to old memories. So I set many aside to give to my daughters. But there was a little angel I remember being on the Christmas tree when I was young. It reminded me of my family, most have passed. But the little angel reminds me of the family picnics, vacations, big holiday gatherings with relatives. This one little angel I kept.

I ran across an old letter from someone who had attended a talk on women of the Bible I had given years ago. My memory was that I had done a poor job and just wanted to crawl away. But as I reread her letter, I remember her finding me after and telling me how my words had opened her heart and how she had learned so much about biblical women. I remember how surprised I was. Did she have the right person? But I learned that God can use even our inadequate words to bless others. I will keep this one letter to remind me that God can use even me.

Nancy Heaver

**Prayer:** God of love and forgiveness, guide our steps as we take inventory of our actions, attitudes, and beliefs. Help us decide what we need to toss, to keep, and to change to be more like You. Holy Spirit, begin a transformation in us and envelop our souls so that we may reflect Your holy love. Amen.

## Friday - March 22

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law tested him with this question. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. Matthew 22: 34-40,*

This has always been one of my favorite sets of verses from the Bible and actually what sums up Jesus' entire story and purpose. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior all we need to do is love - love God with all we are and love others the same. Everything we do should be in love. If it's not, then it's the wrong decision or action.

It sounds simple and easy enough, but it is not. We as humans complicate things. We want them to be ordered. We like rules and regulations because they separate us - the good, the bad, the important, unimportant, lazy, hard-working whatever. We want labels and lists to follow. God wants us to keep it simple - love. That's it. That is what makes heaven real to me when I realize Jesus didn't call us to be separate. He called us to be part of this world while sharing God's love as we live it. Real love is raw, fierce, courageous, unwavering, breathtaking, and sometimes heart breaking.

This is how Jesus loved us. He calls us out when we are wrong but holds us at the same time. It is like a hurricane that sweeps us off of our feet and carries us through the storm but doesn't necessarily stop the storms.

Kristin Martin

**Prayer:** Dear Lord - Thank you for your unwavering, protecting, heart pounding love. Please may my words, actions and thoughts always be in love for you so others may be pointed to you as well. Amen.

## Thursday - February 22

### Lenten Journey

As we begin traveling this long Lenten Journey together  
Remember Christ our Lord is with us Forever  
Lent is a season of forty days and forty nights  
But in the end there will be lots of light  
During this Lenten Journey we can fast and pray  
During the night or day  
We can spend quality time to help and assist others  
Not just our sisters and brothers  
This Lent we can visit someone in a nursing home  
Or spend quality time with someone who is desolate or alone  
Be that special person who simply says "Hi"  
Or just be there when someone needs to weep or cry  
It can be as simple as opening the door  
Or taking an elderly person to the grocery store  
These forty days you can spend quality time with the Good Shepherd and Lord  
By reading and listening to His Holy Word  
Remember we are all followers and apostles of Jesus Christ  
Because He is the Eternal Light  
In whatever you do  
The Messiah is with us through and through  
Our Savior fulfilled His Father's call  
By laying down His life for us all  
At the end we will celebrate the Resurrection  
We will be forgiven of all our sins  
During this Lent go that extra mile  
Make someone grin or smile  
Remember we can serve Jesus Christ in many ways  
Throughout these Forty Days  
Forty Days may seem very long  
But in the end the Lenten Journey makes us strong  
Jesus Christ Resurrected from the grave  
Because He was sent by His Father to save

## Friday - February 23

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4*

I said, "...they're not entirely wrong."

But, couldn't I have just said they were right (or at least partially right)? Why didn't I just say they were right? Would it be so painful to admit they could be right, that I could (at least partially) be wrong? Am I letting my own pride, my own need to be right or righteous get in the way of my relationship with someone else...or possibly the need to mend a relationship with someone else?

I could use this space to tell a story about how I believe my faith in God made me right in a situation. Maybe, I could draw a parallel to how I was like David on the righteous side of his conflict with King Saul, or how I was like Daniel when he risked his life to stand up for what his faith told him was right. In extreme arrogance, I could tell a story that compares me to Jesus sparing with the Pharisees.

I really wish I could tell you that I was a hundred percent in the right the majority of times I was in conflict and that I handled those situations with the grace and wisdom that my faith has instilled in me. The truth is, most of the times that God has broken through and touched my very soul, it has been those moments when I begin to realize that the fact I let a conflict or argument persist in the first place is proof that I was wrong...sometimes very wrong. It's that deep, sometimes piercing touch of the Holy Spirit that reminds me that David, Daniel, and Jesus showed compassion and grace more than they worried about self-righteousness. It is in that moment, when God touches my very guarded heart and reminds me that being right isn't what's important, that I can begin my to share the same grace God has given me with those I have been withholding it from.

Drew Thiele

**PRAYER:** Most Generous God, continue to touch my heart and fill me with grace. Remind me in my times of self-righteousness that you have not called me to be seen by others, but to let you be seen by them through me. In those times where my heart hardens towards others, let your loving touch soften it and refocus my mind on the importance of love and relationships over self-righteousness and arrogance. As you fan the flame of the Holy Spirit within me, let me work to lower my defenses and bring my lamp out from under the bowl so that the same light you gave me may help shine your light on those around me who deserve it just as much as I do. All honor and glory be yours. Amen.

## Thursday - March 21

*Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4*

Many people see cardinals after a loved one dies. It seems that God has blessed our family with the sighting of a Cooper's hawk upon the death of a loved one. In April of 2020, our nearly 14-year-old Golden retriever passed away. We made the decision to euthanize Crosby as he had completely stopped eating and could no longer stand up on his own. The passing of Crosby and the experience of euthanizing him was the hardest situation I had ever experienced in my life. I was truly devastated; it seemed impossible that my day-to-day shadow, companion and source of comfort, would no longer be by my side after 14 years of his presence. When we returned home without Crosby, wondering what to do next, God decided to break through from heaven to tell us that Crosby was ok and that we would also be ok. My husband happened to glance out the door to our back patio. There sitting on one of our patio chairs was a Cooper's hawk. This hawk was a beautiful, regal creature, and we had never before seen one in our yard, let alone right outside our door. The hawk sat there for a few minutes, swooped through our yard where Crosby used to spend time, and then was gone. We knew with certainty that that Cooper's hawk was Crosby's spirit or the Holy Spirit sent by God to give us peace in our sorrow.

A little over a year later in August of 2021, my mother-in-law passed away at the age of 65 after a few months of declining health. After a week spent in Pittsburgh for her funeral and trying to help my father-in-law get settled, we returned to Powell. My husband was outside grilling, as he tried to process the new reality of life without his mom here on earth. He silently asked his mom (or God) to please let him know that she was ok. He let the thought go, but a few minutes later came back inside the house and glanced out of the front windows. There on a bush in our front yard was a Cooper's hawk just sitting there looking at him. My husband experienced an overwhelming feeling that again this Cooper's hawk was sent by God for him in his time of grief.

Of course, the pain and sadness did not immediately dissipate in these situations when we saw "our" hawks, but we felt grateful that God blessed our family with a sign of comfort through these beautiful creatures. These two experiences helped both of us to move forward in our grieving process.

Christy Liba

**Prayer:** God, please help us all to see signs of your presence in our lives, and to remember that you are with us during difficult times. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 20

### These are the Days

*People out there, people out there Let go of your cares*

*Turn your cries into loud hallelujahs*

*This is what we came for, oh*

*Leave all your worries behind We know the future's burning bright*

*This is the great jubilation*

*This is what He came for, what He came for*

*Oh, these are the days, these are the days*

*These are the days we've been dreamin' of*

*So don't look away 'cause these are the days*

*These are the days, better get 'em while they come*

*We thought we'd never see the sun through the dark skies*

*(through the dark skies)*

*But all the signs are sayin' it's lookin' up*

*These are the days, these are the days*

*These are the days, we've been dreamin' of, oh*

*Open your eyes, open your ears*

*I'm tellin' you why You'll see Heaven inhabit our praises*

*This is what we came for, oh*

*Singing a song of paradise*

*Believing the good news is alive*

*This is the great jubilation*

*This is what we came for, what He came for*

*Oh, these are the days, these are the days*

*These are the days we've been dreamin' of*

*So don't look away 'cause these are the days*

*These are the days, better get 'em while they come*

*Songwriters: Jason Ingram / Lauren Daigle / Mike Elizondo /  
Natalie Hemby (2023)*

## Saturday - February 24

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.*

*Proverbs 3: 5-6*

Not flesh of my flesh nor bone of my bone, but still miraculously my own!

Never forget for a single minute you grew not under my heart but in it!

Our son, Alan, was three months old when he came into our lives. Don and I had waited nine years on an adoption list with Catholic Social Services. After much prayer, various interviews, and several home visits to be sure we would be fit parents, Alan belonged to us! What a joy he was in our lives. Don and I put our names back on the list, hoping to adopt a second child.

Because Don's job was going to transfer us out of state, we would have to start the adoption process all over in the new location. We knew we did not want to wait another nine years, so we decided we would be content with just one child.

While I was busy preparing to sell our home and buy another, making plans to move in January, Don working out of state, and taking care of a two year old, God showed up! I received a call from Catholic Social Services saying they had a baby girl for us! Erin, who was two months old, came to live with us on December 23. What a beautiful Christmas blessing! God is always in the midst of things: never give up hope.

Jan Moore

**Prayer:** God, I let it all go completely, trusting in You and living with an open hand. I believe in the promise of Jesus that he will work it all out. I believe because you always surprise me with an answer to my prayer. Amen.



## Second Sunday in Lent - February 25

*Matthew 14:22-23*

*Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. And after He had dismissed the crowds, He went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone.*



*Seventy-Seven Times by Lauren Wright Pittman*  
A Sanctified Art Group

## Tuesday - March 19

*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.*  
*Proverbs 16:3*

In the year 2023 my family and I saw and witnessed the mighty hand of the Lord as we were all getting ready to travel to the US. We had no idea where and how we would be able to get ourselves on the plane ready for this adventurous leap of faith journey. Two months before we could travel to the States we had no idea where we could get money for our flight tickets. We had no other option than to pray and believe in the miraculous working hand of God. As we kept on praying and believing in him, God came through and provided for what we needed even in abundance. An experience tangible in our very souls and spirits. This for us was Heaven touching Earth and God did break through. We are grateful for what God did and continues doing for us. What a mighty God we serve!

Jackson Swallo

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you so much for what you did for me and my family. Thank you for always ordering our steps and seeing us through even in the midst of confusion and despair. Thank you for helping us in our most desperate moment. You truly are the author and the finisher of our faith. We have seen and experienced your most tender love and care in all the seasons of our life. Father, I also pray for those who are waiting to hear from you concerning their life and what you want them to do for the kingdom. I pray that they would be Able to hear your most sacred voice and be able to discern what you are asking of them. Those that are seeking and praying for provision of any kind, may your wonderful hand touch them and be the answer to their prayer. Amen.



## Monday - March 18

*And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to follow Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" Luke 9:23*

Growing up a little boy in Ohio, Sunday mornings were predictable. Dad made everybody get up, put on nice clothes, and we went to church. "Here are two quarters for the offering plate," he would say as he dropped the coins in my little hand. There wasn't much talk about church or God during the rest of the week. God and church were primarily a "Sunday thing," and I knew that next Sunday there would be two more quarters waiting.

Now that I'm a father, I look at my beautiful children and I am reminded of God's beauty every single day, not just on weekends. Christ's love is much more than a "Sunday thing" and following Christ's lead should be more than a "once a week thing" too. Nobody is perfect, but Christ asks us to try to live by His example. This is not a Sunday morning kind of walk, it's a daily walk.

We all have different strengths, different weaknesses, different things we prioritize, and different things we choose to overlook. However, Christ asks us to find our own personal crosses and to confront those selfish interests every day. I would hope my children see my walk as more than a Sunday morning Christian and I know that how they remember me will be based on the entire week they see me, every week, for as long as I have time with them.

Chris Martin

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for giving us Jesus as a role model. Please help me remember that I am asked to follow His example and His lead each day, and not just on Sunday. Please help me show my children the love of God daily by example and help me bear my own personal crosses. Amen.

## Monday - February 26

*You, LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. Psalm 18:28*

During our family vacation to North Carolina last summer, we were able to enjoy a family outing to Cape Lookout National Seashore. After spending most of the morning riding ATV's around the island, I decided to take a walk to explore the Cape Lookout lighthouse. First, just the beauty of the lighthouse with its black and white diamond design on the tower was stunning. After touring the inside of the lighthouse, I was able to sit on the front porch of the lighthouse keeper's house. Just sitting there taking in the sites, sounds and smell of the ocean was amazing. I thought about what life would have been like many years ago living there. How very quiet, peaceful and lonely it must have been to live on the small island and to maintain the lighthouse. But what an important job the lighthouse keeper and his family had! They were responsible for tending and caring for the lighthouse, particularly the lamps and lenses that generate the light. This beacon of light was a navigational aid to warn mariners of hazards, helping them establish their position and guiding them safely to their destination.

This reminds me that God is our ultimate lighthouse. God is a beacon of light for my life and for yours. He is a fortress that defends and protects us in times of trouble. His light will never go out or grow dim. In Him, we have hope, we have peace, we have guidance and we have safety.

May we always look toward His light.

Song to listen to: My Lighthouse by Rend Collective

Karen Curren

**Prayer:** God you are the light of the world and you call us to be the light for others. You have always shown us the way from darkness into the light. May Your light and love blaze in us and all the world, today and always. Amen.

## Tuesday - February 27

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:44-46*

I want to tell a devotional story about how God is breaking through to me, but I don't have that kind of story to share. I feel I may be afraid of thin places. A thin place is where the space between heaven and earth seems to touch. As Will Willimon put it in our advent study, "God uncomfortably close." Susan Robb, in her book *Seven Words*, tells of a monastery on Iona, an island off the coast of Scotland where for centuries pilgrims have been coming to experience a "thin place where only tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual."

I worry that my thin places would be ragged and torn, where God would see all I'm not. But avoiding thin places leaves me un-empowered, with no hope to share, and unable to change. However, Robb continues her story. "Those who witnessed Jesus's death might have felt like they were in the opposite of a thin place - somewhere that God seemed to be absent rather than overwhelmingly present. But when all seemed lost, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, God and humanity reconciled, and all the earth becomes a thin place through Jesus Christ."

This Lenten season, I pray I can invite God to come "uncomfortably close" and be intentional about seeking those thin places where God can make more of my life, to look for places in my life that remind me of God's presence and treat these opportunities when I allow God to come close with reverence.

Mike Ott

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help me to accept and embrace the thin places where I am invited to be close to you. Amen.

## 5th Sunday in Lent - March 17

*Matthew 18:15-22*

*If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*

*Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?" As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."*

## Saturday - March 16

*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Psalms 36:7*

If you take a moment to observe nature, you will notice birds often fly in packs. They move as a unit. Stop as a unit. And stay in close quarters with each other when they are perched on a tree branch. They help one another make nests for their eggs and together they protect those eggs at all costs. Birds are never alone. No matter how far they migrate or how they try to stray away from the group, they will always be met by another bird.

God is like a bird. You can hear his unique call in the early hours of the morning when you drink your coffee and have a conversation with a loved one. You can feel His presence when you are alone with no one who can understand. You have a helping hand to protect your family when you can't do it yourself. And when you try to outrun the shadow of His wing, you never reach the end because His love is unfailing and never-ending.

God touches earth and gives us a glimpse of heaven in the form of a bird, or in the form of a pastor who shares a scripture with you that saves you from the rut you have been in. Or even when your Mom gives you her comforting and warm maternal hug that makes your bad day not so bad anymore. God touches down on earth in so many small ways, which impact us in monumental ways. Take a second and notice all of the little things in your life, and you will be sure to feel God right there with you.

Leah Wenner

**Prayer:** Dear God, I thank you for your never-ending love. When life here on earth starts to feel loveless, I know I can count on you to restore my faith. I pray to find you, God, in all of the little things in life that I love, and be overwhelmed with gratitude for the beautiful home you have created for me. I pray to live in the comfort of your wings forever. Amen.

## Wednesday - February 28

Take my Life, and Let it Be

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.*

*Take my moments and my days;*

*let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.*

*Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.*

*Words: Frances R. Havergal, 1873*

*Music: Louis J. F. Hérold, 1839*

*United Methodist Hymnal #399*

## Thursday - February 29

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13*

We were with our daughter, Jennah, and her family, celebrating our upcoming 50th wedding anniversary while camping in Moab, Utah. It was October 11, 2023, and we were getting ready to head out to explore Arches National Park when we received the fateful phone call. The fact that the phone rang should have told us immediately that God was touching us because cell phone connectivity had been an issue in that area. The call was from our daughter-in-law, Marissa, who informed us that our 40-year-old son, Chip, had suffered an ischemic cerebellar stroke and was en route to the hospital in Fort Myers, Florida, where they live.

So many “God touches” happened after that to get us to the point where we can happily say that our son returned to his job (while still managing some limitations) on January 4, 2024, where he works from home as a computer analyst, and his family is on track to return to their pre-stroke life. We felt God’s presence throughout this process and saw His hand in so many ways, such as: cell phone connectivity when it was needed in Utah; flight connections that “popped up” to get us to Fort Myers quickly; the nurse that held the phone to our son’s ear when we were laid-over during our flights so we could tell him we loved him and that we were on our way to be with him; the remarkable work of the medical team who saved our son’s life; the overwhelming prayer and financial support for our son; and the presence of God that helped us manage our emotions were all just the beginning.

God’s interactions didn’t end there ... Ask us about them when you see us, and don’t overlook when Heaven touches Earth and God breaks through in your life.

Chuck & Mary Ring

**Prayer:** Loving God, we did not get to explore the wonders of Arches National Park with our daughter’s family during that trip, but we were (and are) overwhelmed with the wonders of your love and mercies and the surrounding comfort of prayers. Thanks to our relationship with you and to those who instilled our faith throughout our lives, we can truly say that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us! Amen.

## Friday - March 15

*I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power on high. Luke 24:49*

Jesus was telling his disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit which we know happened on Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. Each of us who say yes to God’s calling are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said He would always be with us, that we will never be alone.

In October, we said goodbye to Dad. He was 92 and the time had come. My Dad was a perfectionist. This was evident in his work, his music and seasonal gardening. The staked rows of tomatoes in his garden were straight. He played piano for Church services attended in West Virginia, Ohio and Florida. Music for the Lord was to be played right. Growing up in our hometown EUB Church in West Virginia, Dad led youth choirs and Christmas Cantatas several years. We siblings remember.

We gathered in Dundee, Ohio for a Celebration of Life service for Dad. He was a perfectionist but like all of us, he was not perfect. I spoke at his service and reminded family and friends that the Bible is full of stories of imperfect people whom God chose to use for His purposes. We know the stories. Many of the people were in the lineage leading to the time of Jesus. We firmly believe God uses us for His purposes. In all of our imperfection, we have a place in God’s plan.

On a daily basis, the Holy Spirit guides and directs us. It is uncanny the prompts and prods received as we pursue life and work. In awe and reverence, I can only pause and say, “thank you, Lord.” Sometimes, I attribute these gifts are from Guardian Angels or Messengers from God, but they are all gifts made possible by the Holy Spirit. No, I have not received powers as those at Pentecost received. However, Jesus said He would never leave us alone in this life and He has kept His promise.

Alan Moore

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we give thanks for the life and ministry of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our days of living for your purposes. Amen.

## Thursday - March 14

*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me. Psalms 13:5-6*

Shortly after Tom and I joined PUMC, I was asked if I would be interested in co-directing the Youth Dinner Theater. I was excited at first, but that was shortly replaced by sheer terror, thinking that I would not do a good enough job, that the kids would reject my ideas, that I would let everyone down. My friend, Joe Franz talked me down from the ledge. The teens were amazing in the play, and I got to enjoy the whole process and got to know the teens. I thought it was ending there and then. Little did I know God and the teens had something else up their sleeves.

The teens decided that I would make a good middle school youth leader and decided to tell Pastor Ed Lewis that it should happen. After several panic attacks and heartfelt conversations with Tom, I decided to go ahead and do it. I am so glad I got to serve in that role for two years.

I learned so much from the teens. I learned that they were open, vulnerable, and wanting to share at 2 A.M. during a lock-in prayer circle, because a safe space was created. I learned that I could help create a safe space. The teens believed that I had something to offer them. With God's help, I spent two great years creating experiences for middle school youth. Without God's grace, I would never have been able to take on two roles that I felt totally unqualified to perform.

Rita Stevenson

**Prayer:** Dear God, You see potential, even when we don't. You make things happen and put people in roles they never imagined doing, all to carry out Your plans. Your blessings are bountiful. Thank you for all you have done for me. Amen.

## Friday - March 1

*God said to Moses, "I am Who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.' God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." Exodus 3:14-15*

At one of our Monday morning sessions, we were shown a list of 60 names that are used for God. We are not certain who prepared the list but since that morning we have enlarged the list by at least 10 additional names. You can find them in the Bible, hymns, devotional books, or descriptions of who God is. Examples include: Yahweh, Shepherd, Counselor, Emmanuel, Friend, Abba, Rock, Salvation....

"I Am" is a name above all names that reminds believers that God is in control and that He cares for all His children. He is the self-sufficient, self-sustaining God who was, who is and who will be. He is all things to all people. No matter your situation He is with you and for you. God is infinite, He is sovereign over our lives, He is Who He Is.

Who do you call God and how will you see, feel or relate to Him during this Lenten season?

Upper Room Ladies

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father we are so grateful we can come to you with our concerns, joys and sorrows at any time. Keep us ever mindful of the blessings you bestow upon us and we thank you for always being present in our lives. Amen.

## Saturday - March 2

*As Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17*

When I was attending the University of Toledo in the mid 1960's, the library was always a quiet place to study. I could sit at one of the large oak tables where 8 to 10 other students were deep in thought. If someone did speak, I could barely hear their whisper.

One day, my friend Jeff came up to me, sat down and started talking to me... NOT in a whisper. He was excited to tell me about a meeting called College Life, sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, where songs are sung and Jesus is celebrated! I was embarrassed that Jeff was speaking so loudly in the library. And, I was embarrassed that he was speaking so loudly about Jesus! I said we should continue our conversation in the hall. We spoke a bit more and then he invited me to the next meeting. I said I'd think about it. I did think about it, wondering why I felt so embarrassed. After all, Jeff and I were a part of the same youth group, grew up in the church and believed in God and Jesus.

So...I decided to go the meeting where I had a great time singing upbeat songs and hearing a short, meaningful talk. I took home a booklet called *The 4 Spiritual Laws* which helped me better understand my relationship with God. I had thought I was doing pretty good at this thing called "Religion." I had given some sermons on youth Sundays and was leading a youth Sunday school class. I knew that "God so loves the world." If the world was a beach, He loved the whole beach of humanity. After praying that I wanted to have a more personal relationship with God, my eye and heart were opened to understand that He saw ME....one tiny grain of sand on humanity's beach! Heaven came down to earth through Jeff. I met my wife at that College Life meeting. Coincidence? I don't think so!

Tim Kreps

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for people who help us see you! Thank you for seeing me, so that we can have such a wonderful personal relationship. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 13

### Even If

*They say sometimes you win some Sometimes you lose some  
And right now, right now I'm losing bad  
I've stood on this stage night after night Reminding the broken  
it'll be alright*

*But right now, oh right now I just can't  
It's easy to sing When there's nothing to bring me down  
But what will I say When I'm held to the flame  
Like I am right now*

*I know You're able and I know You can  
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand  
But even if You don't My hope is You alone  
They say it only takes a little faith To move a mountain  
Well good thing A little faith is all I have, right now*

*But God, when You choose  
To leave mountains unmovable  
Oh give me the strength to be able to sing  
It is well with my soul*

*I know You're able and I know You can  
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand  
But even if You don't My hope is You alone  
I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt  
Would all go away if You'd just say the word  
But even if You don't My hope is You alone*

*It is well with my soul  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

*Songwriters: Bart Millard / Ben Glover / Crystal Lewis / David Garcia /  
Tim Timmons (2017)*



## Tuesday - March 12

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18*

Before Aunt Kristi passed away she gave me a whimsical pair of blue bird earrings. I spent a lot of time with her and Uncle Rick while she went through cancer treatments. She told me the joy the blue birds brought her reminded her of me. It always meant a lot to me that she had chosen them for me. I smiled each time I have looked at them over the years in my jewelry box.

Just a few weeks after saying goodbye to Kristi, Uncle Rick showed up at the hospital as we welcomed Lily. As he held that tiny baby girl in his arms his face lit up. For the next few years these two became an inseparable pair. Uncle Rick loved reading to her, taking trips to the park, and sneaking to Chick-fil-A for milkshakes. There were times when I felt like Aunt Kristi was watching over these two as they brought joy to each other's lives.

This December, Uncle Rick lost his own battle with cancer. The family asked if I would help to lead his service. As I prepared for the day I put the blue bird earrings in. They became a symbol of God's presence and joy in the midst of grief. I felt like Aunt Kristi had shared Uncle Rick with us over the years as our children have grown. Now we were gathering to give Uncle Rick back to God and celebrate his reunion with Aunt Kristi.

On that day the little blue bird earrings were a reminder of God's presence for me in the form of those we love and share our lives with. Heaven was bending near to earth as we gathered that day to celebrate his life.

Carrie Schwab

**Prayer:** God of blue birds, may your presence be felt in the midst of our broken hearts. Amen.

## Third Sunday in Lent - March 3

*Matthew 16:13-20*

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

## Monday - March 4

*By your words I can see where I'm going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path. Psalm 119:105*

*Shout the news of his victory from sea to sea, Take the news of his glory to the lost, News of his wonders to one and all! Psalm 96: 2-3*

As I emerged from a dark season in my life, God broke through to a friend of mine who gave me the book, *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. At the time my friend gave me the book I didn't know that she received it from a friend when she was going through a dark time. I had years of Sunday School and youth group in my life and yet had never truly developed a dependent relationship with God. Starting each day by reading scripture from that book was transformative in enabling me to see and follow The Light.

A few years later I was in one of my favorite clothing boutiques where our family vacations each year. This beachy boutique also has a nice selection of Christian jewelry and Christian books. As I was looking at the books on display, a conversation began with a young woman working there and noticed *Jesus Calling* on the shelf. I asked if she was familiar with it, and she answered "no." With enthusiasm I blurted out to this complete stranger the impact this book had on my life while healing from a hard time and the look on her face changed. Her expression was sober. She walked over, grabbed the book and said, "I think I need this book in my life". I hope reading the scriptures each day helped this stranger find the light I found. I know that was God breaking through!

Kristina MacKenzie

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I praise you for Your Word that is powerful and transformative! I pray that when opportunities arise, I will be more open and willing to blurt out how Your Word can bring healing and light to those who are in need. Amen.

## Monday - March 11

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

The loss of a child shatters your existence and understanding of mortality. In the quiet corridors of grief, intense sorrow looms and questions linger. But if your heart and mind allow, the intersection between despair and divine grace will start to unfold. Each new day brings dependence on receiving the grace of God. Morning walks with our dogs are full of prayer. Prayers that lead to a daily discovery of that needed divine grace. I let my tears be lifted higher to a God that reminds me "I am here, even in the deepest valleys of your sorrow."

I begin to perceive subtle signs of my daughter, Willie's heavenly existence. Through a delicate and crazy dance of faith and grief, the heavens touch the earth and God breaks through with the assurance that love endures beyond the physical. The grieving process becomes a sacred ground where the divine and the human converge. I am learning to find solace not in the absence of pain, but in the presence of our Lord.

Tara Schmetzler

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, please continue to bring your peace into our hearts and minds. Please allow our faith to grow deeper and seek to believe without understanding. Amen.

## 4th Sunday in Lent - March 10

*Matthew 16:21-23*

*From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*



*The Descent by T. Denise Anderson  
A Sanctified Art Group*

## Tuesday - March 5

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." Psalm 46: 1-3, 10*

Tory and I met as hall-mates at Otterbein University. Our friendship grew from 2011 as college freshmen, through long distance as I went to seminary in DC, into first time motherhood as we each welcomed our babies in 2022. She is and has been, my best friend. There has never been a trial in my life when I have not looked to Tory to seek comfort, guidance and love.

In October of 2023, Tory's mom was unexpectedly diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I guess that's how it often works, cancer greeting you unexpectedly and unwanted. Tory is a nurse at OSU. When her mom's diagnosis came I knew that Tory would not only navigate this journey as a daughter, but also as a medical professional.

The first day of Tory's mom's chemo treatment I stared at my phone, begging God to help me with something to say. Then a song came on the radio, "Quiet." We had just listened to it in GOG and the girls loved it. Its words were real and simple, with an invitation to be still and welcome God in the silence. Despite our decade long friendship, Tory and I didn't openly talk about our faith. She has supported me on my ordination journey from the beginning, but she was reserved about her own faith. So, I sent the song hoping God would break through. Hours later, Tory told me that she played the song as her mom had a severe reaction to the chemo. Tears filled the room as they endured one of the hardest moments, with God filling the silence.

Hannah VanMeter

**Prayer:** Holy God, thank you for breaking through to meet us wherever we are even when we least expect your presence. The peace and security you offer is something that we so earnestly need, though we may forget how to ask for it. Thank you for surrounding us with your love, through music, scripture and your beloved children. May we always be reminded of that gift. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 6

### Are Ye Able

*“Are ye able,” said the Master, “to be crucified with me?”*

*“Yea,” the sturdy dreamers answered, “to the death we follow thee.”*

*Lord, we are able. Our spirits are thine.*

*Remold them, make us, like thee, divine.*

*Thy guiding radiance above us shall be a beacon to God, to love, and  
loyalty.*

*Words: Earl Marlatt (1926)*

*Music: Harry S. Mason, (1924)*

## Saturday - March 9

*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an  
example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*

*1 Timothy 4:12*

When God breaks into your life, it doesn't matter what age you are, it is a transformational time.

When I was four years old, somehow, I understood something about God. I “felt” God in my life. We lived in a suburb where there was a church at each entrance. Each time we passed one of the churches, I longed to go in. I asked my parents, finally, if we could go there. As an adult now, I am astonished that they did take our family to that church. And from then on, I was a member and active participant in whatever church was near me.

When I turned eight, my aunt and uncle gave me a Children's Picture Bible. The inscription inside said, “May you have many blessed hours reading this book. Happy Birthday.” I devoured it. I loved reading and looking at the pictures. I have not stopped loving studying scripture. And I still have that Children's Picture Bible, and many others besides.

I am consistently blown away by the children and youth in our church who can express their faith and ask questions about God in a very profound way. I am enlightened and encouraged by what they say. God's breaking in can happen in a “feeling or nudge” that we get, or it can be a person who helps us “see” God. But it might be you who helps another understand the breaking in of God's love into their lives.

Kim La Rue

**Prayer:** Lord, help us watch for you in our everyday lives, and help us partner with you to help others see you. Amen.

## Friday - March 8

*I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will bear even more fruit...I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15: 1-2, 5*

When we face difficult situations, we tend to rely on ourselves. We think we need to work harder, to pull ourselves up by our boot straps. As a familiar current saying goes, how's that working for ya?

Jan and I recently heard a speaker named Kyle Idelman. I have been reading his latest book *When Your Way Isn't Working*. Idelman's point in the book is that we all need help in tough times and there are two sources we can rely on. The first is our connection to Jesus and through Him to the Father. The second is our connection to each other.

Remaining connected to Jesus - the vine - provides the nourishment needed to be strong in the face of trouble. Cut off from Him, we are dead sticks. In a vine, the branches are intertwined and support each other. Similarly, we need to rely on each other in difficulties, accepting support and help when you need it.

If you are separated from the vine, don't give up hope. The gardener is willing to pick you up, clean you off and graft you back into the vine. The process of preparing the fallen branch and reattaching it to the vine is called bleeding, something Jesus already did for us.

Don Moore

**Prayer:** Father, Keep me attached to You. Remind me I am not alone - that I can and should depend on You and on the other branches of the vine. Amen.

## Thursday - March 7

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. 1 Peter 1:3-4*

October 31, 2023. My son and his wife were vacationing in the Dominican Republic, celebrating their anniversary. I was home with my 17 year-old grandson and our pets. My granddaughter joined me to hand-out Halloween candy and we were watching the snowflakes come down. The following morning, the house was quite chilly so I called my son to ask where the thermostat was so I could heat the place up. He said he'd take care of it and to my surprise, a few minutes later the house was warming up! He turned on the heat from the Dominican Republic!

It came to me in that very moment, that I could never question how God could create earth from Heaven, come to us incarnate in Jesus and change us forever through His son's Resurrection.

Debi Randolph

**Prayer:** Holy God, thank you for daily reminders of your beautiful and gracious power which transforms us. Amen.