

ST. JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

130 TOM HALL STREET FORT MILL, SC 29715

THE SEASON OF LENT

PRAYING.

FASTING.

ALMSGIVING.



Ash Wednesday - February 14, 2024

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, and Valentine's Day. So, for the next forty days, excluding Sundays, I will invite you into a season where we prepare ourselves for Easter. Traditionally, during this time, we enter into a period of self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, self-denial, reading and reflecting on scripture. Forty days and forty nights brings to mind another time in the scripture with Noah. He and his family were trapped on that Ark with two of every kind of animal and for the ones of you that have pets, you could only imagine. After dealing with the smell and the lack of fresh air for forty days and forty nights I think the course of action suggested for the season of Lent is not such a bad option. The reality is I am probably guilty of judging others more than I judge myself. I am sure there is much I need to ask forgiveness for. I am sure the Lord would like to hear from me more when I need something or when I need to skip a meal, and giving those funds to the poor sounds like a good idea until lunchtime. Lord you know I have a passion for reading but sometimes those words are hard for me to understand.

Prayer: Lord, I want to journey with you through this season of Lent. My reality is that the only way I will succeed is if you go with me, guiding my steps and thoughts throughout this season, and when I arrive at Easter, I will know you better.

Pastor Karen

Thursday, February 15, 2024

“What Are You Giving Up For Lent?”

The first thing a lot of people think of when talking about Lent is.... “What am I going to give up for Lent?” I asked myself “How did giving up something for Lent ever get started?” So, I looked up the origin of Lent itself. Lent as a Christian Season is not talked about in the Bible at all. According to many sources, Lent was created during the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., a gathering of representatives from all the Christian sects. There were rules established as to how to celebrate the season. It was determined that it should last for 40 days, after the 40 days that Christ spent being tested in the desert. Those observing Lent were to only eat one meal a day during the period. And meat, fish and animal products were off limits.

Over the years, the rules got watered down and fish was allowed. And for some Christian religions, fasting is now only observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

But the purpose of observing Lent is to prepare for the coming of Easter to get closer to God and repent of your sins. Thus, the point of giving up something is to do penance. What you give up should have meaning and significance in your life and should be done for the right reasons to the glory of God.

SO: “What Are You Giving Up For Lent?”

Rick Diak

Friday, February 16, 2024

PROVERBS 3:5-6

5. Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

6. in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Trust: who? The Lord.

To what extent? With all your heart.

Lean not? I don't have to depend on myself and my own understanding but God's understanding.

Submit to Him. Believe that God will take care of things after you turn it over to him.

Result. A straight path (God will lead you into the right direction and help you make correct decisions.

This really sounds easy, and is, if we believe what is written. First, and as often as we can, we study the Bible to learn what God instructs us to do in different situations. In these two short lines of scripture, we learn that we do not have to depend on our own strengths or worry about our weaknesses. We can lean on the greatest strength I know, the strength of God. In addition, Jesus left the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and an added help.

Walk a straight path which is easy if this short scripture is remembered and believed.

Prayer: Lord, help us learn your word by faithful study and apply your truths to our lives. Amen

Brenda Stowe

Saturday, February 17, 2024

PLANTING A LENTEN GARDEN

Here's what you need to plant in your garden.

Three rows of squash.

- 1. Squash gossip**
- 2. Squash criticism**
- 3. Squash indifference**

Seven rows of Peas.

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. Penance**
- 3. Perseverance**
- 4. Politeness**
- 5. Preparedness**
- 6. Purity**
- 7. Patience**

Seven heads of Lettuce.

- 1. Let us be unselfish**
- 2. Let us be charitable**
- 3. Let us search the scriptures**
- 4. Let us not be weary in well doing**
- 5. Let us be obedient**
- 6. Let us be truthful**
- 7. Let us love one another.**

No garden is complete without Turnips.

- 1. Turn up for Bible study**
- 2. Turn up with a smile, even when things are difficult**
- 3. Turn up with determination**

Conclude with Thyme.

Thyme with God. Thyme for fun, thyme for rest.

Water freely with patience and cultivate with love. There will be much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.

Ruth Orwig

Monday, February 19, 2024

Peter and a Rooster

(Matthew 26:69-75 KJV)

69 Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. 70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. 71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, this fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. 72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. 73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, surely, thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. 74 Then began him to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. 75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

It took a rooster's crow to remind Peter of your words, Lord. When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered what you had said about his denial, and he felt ashamed. Not only had he denied knowing you, but he had forgotten what you had warned him about in just a few hours. (Peter denied Jesus because he was afraid of being arrested, persecuted and maybe killed by the Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders who were persecuting Jesus.) What does it take for me to remember you? Does it take the harsh reality of Lent –

Monday, February 19, 2024 continued.....

witnessing your terrible suffering and death again this year, to realize your wondrous love for me? So be it. I will watch and wait again this Lent. I will remember you. Help me, Lord, to remember you more often. This is written for warning to us, that we sin not after the similitude of Peter's transgression; that we never, either directly or indirectly, deny Christ the Lord that bought us, by rejecting his offers, resisting his Spirit, dissembling our knowledge of him, and being ashamed of him and his words, or afraid of suffering for him and with his suffering people. (Taken from a child's Lenten devotion book)

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for listening, for guidance, for inspiration, for encouragement, and for being here. And most importantly for being a part of my journey. Amen

Jo Ann Kane

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

A Spiritual Reflection

As I reflect on what the life of Christ and Easter and new life mean to me, I cannot escape the memories of past Easters. Betty and I chose new dresses and hats for our two girls to wear for that was one way the community in which we lived celebrated Easter. Betty would usually wear a colorful dress and hat, and I would usually wear a colorful tie. But praise be to God and his grace other memories flood my soul. They are about a young boy sitting almost spellbound as dedicated Sunday School teachers spoke about Jesus and the meaning of Easter. I recall my teenage cousins singing duets and in quartets and the choir. After I became a believer, God and others chose me to teach and then to preach about the true meaning of Easter as the Holy Spirit moved my heart to do so.

I am rich in memories of how my spiritual journey joined that of others including you who have shared parts of my life with me. As you reflect on the events leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during these forty days and the true meaning of each, may you be blessed with memories dear to you, and may you have opportunity to join in meaningful spiritual worship on Easter morning.

Rev. Bob Romanello

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Isaiah 40:29

In the midst of life's challenges, Isaiah 40:29 reminds us that God is our source of strength. "He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless." When we find ourselves weary and burdened, it is comforting to know that our Heavenly Father offers renewal and fortitude.

Life often brings moments of exhaustion, whether from physical fatigue, emotional strain, or spiritual battles. In those times, turning to God becomes a source of hope and restoration. His promise to give power to the faint speaks to the divine exchange that occurs when we surrender our weaknesses to Him. In our vulnerability, God's strength manifests, lifting us up when we are unable to stand on our own.

The journey of faith is not exempt from weariness, but it is in these moments that we discover the depth of God's grace. As we draw near to Him, acknowledging our limitations, He imparts strength that transcends our understanding. It is not about relying solely on our own might, but rather on embracing the divine empowerment available to us.

May Isaiah 40:29 be a beacon of assurance for your soul. When you feel depleted, remember that God is ready to infuse you with His strength. Take refuge in His promises, for in Him, you find the resilience to endure, the courage to persevere, and the unwavering assurance that you are never alone on this journey of faith.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being a source of strength throughout our life. May we cling close to you during life's most difficult moments.

Russ Williamson

Thursday, February 22, 2024

Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plan I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Early in my career, I was on a road trip with my co-worker. As we traveled through the remote areas of South Carolina, we quickly found ourselves surrounded by trees and no cell service. My co-worker handed me a map which I promptly opened and proceeded to navigate us. It was later (much later) that it was determined I was reading the map upside down and thus sending us farther and farther away from our destination.

Since this occurrence, Russ has taken over as the head navigator in our home. Each time we travel, he takes the time to download maps of our destination and takes the time to plan out the routes. We still occasionally take wrong turns, but quickly correct our errors and get back on track.

Life is much the same way. God is our Pilot and He has meticulously planned out the map for us. However, we sometimes take a wrong turn and find ourselves driving farther and farther away from God. We can become so lost that we lose all sight of Him. When we become lost in the trees and the noise of the world, we need to just pull over and listen. God is always watching and if we be still and listen, He will always be calling us back to Him. We can never be so lost, that we cannot make a U-Turn and navigate back to Him.

Prayer: Father God, open my heart and guide me in the direction You will have me go and use me for Thy Service. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Elisabeth Williamson

Friday, February 23, 2024

I was raised a Catholic child and my neighbors' father was a deacon in the Baptist church. He invited all the children in our neighborhood to Awana (a Bible-based, Christ centered program for children). It is an international Bible centered youth ministry club whose primary goal is to teach boys and girls the Gospel of Christ and train them to serve Him. We would get into the back of Mr. Hewitt's truck with a topper laughing and anticipating our destination to Awana location. We would learn our songs, play, and recite our new Bible verses. Then on our way back home we would sing songs and say our versus. This always makes me think of Psalm 100.

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. Today, when Grandy and Papa take our grandchildren out to dinner we sing in the car, we sing and dance, we pray with song over our meals. We will continue to sing to our lord.

During this Lenten time... we will give up some of our favorite dinner items, but not our joy to sing to the Lord. Our prayer is that you come as a child to the Lord and bring a joyful song.

Jimmy Wolfe



Saturday, February 24, 2024

ALL BECAUSE OF JESUS

**O' Lord how my heart longs for
Your intimacy with me.
Knowing that I can come to You
with my hurts, sorrows, and
vulnerabilities.**

**You always have time for me,
Even when I don't take time for You.
How foolish of me Lord.
Please God, forgive me?**

**From the bottom of my heart
To the depth of my soul;
I desire to say
Yes to Your Will
Yes, to Your Ways.**

**Written by:
Dr. Bill Mayes**

Monday, February 26, 2024

Luke 1: 75-77 "In holiness and righteousness before him in all our days. And you child will be called the prophet of the Lord to prepare His way, to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the forgiveness of their sins."

These verses are often referred to as the steps to the Christian way. Zechariah was told of what his son, John the Baptist, would be preparing for the coming of God's son, Jesus. It is said from this that (1) "All life is a preparation to lead us to Christ." Then there is (2) knowledge of God. The Greeks thought of their god (s) as a "passionless God, beyond all joy and sorrow." This is not comforting or helpful for us. The Jews thought of God as a "demanding God, whose name was law... a Judge." which was not much comfort either to us. "Jesus came to tell us that God is Love." One of the functions of the incarnation was to bring men to the knowledge of God. (3) There is forgiveness. While there are consequences of our sins, we can be restored to God and reestablishing a relationship with God and a love of our souls. (4) There is a concept of peace. It does not mean freedom from trouble, but "through Christ a man is able to walk in the ways that lead to everything that means life, and no longer to all that means death." May you seek God's peace and understanding during this Lenten season and throughout your life.

George Dickinson

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

A Solid Foundation, New Aspects of Faith

Growing up, I was fortunate that my parents took me and my brother to church and Sunday School each Sunday.

Additionally, we attended Lutheran School K-8th grade. So, it's safe to say that I went out into the world with a solid faith-based foundation.

As I go through the various stages of life, that solid, faith-based foundation is challenged... heavily and often. However, it has stood firm. What would I do and who would I be without it?

About three years ago, it hit me. What about my kids? How do they get the firm, faith-based foundation that I'm so blessed to have? Is it something that just happens? How was mine built, facilitated, and nurtured? The earthly and spiritual answer is the choices and commitment of my parents!

At this point, my eldest child was in kindergarten, had been baptized, but only attended church occasionally and really had no idea about his Lord and Savior. What a deeply sobering realization. I am directly responsible for initiating and fostering my children's faith-based foundation. Wait, you mean we need to go to church every Sunday if we are able? What if my kids cry, misbehave, or resist? Despite my fears and hesitations, I knew it was time to add a new aspect to my own faith: guiding my children to the Lord. Time to stand on my firm foundation once again!

Thank you, Lord, for walking with me as I add and strengthen this new aspect of my faith. Thank you for your grace and forgiveness when I fall short! Thank you for my parents who gave the building blocks for a firm foundation in you!

"On Christ, the solid rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand."

-Hymn: "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less" by Edward Mote

Adriane Starnes

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

I have learned over the years that to understand a particular situation it's important to understand its history or the circumstances and decisions that eventually produced the outcome. Which brings me to Lent.

I grew up in the Methodist Church. I remember when the church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church. This was 1968. There was no Lent or Ash Wednesday in the Methodist Church or United Methodist Church.

According to church history John Wesley eliminated Lent for Methodists in 1784 and there was no ritual for Ash Wednesday until the 1965 Book of Worship. That service made no provisions for the use of ashes. In 1992 this changed with the addition of an official ritual for Ash Wednesday but with the optional use of ashes (it's hard for me to think of "Ash" Wednesday without ashes).

Ashes are mentioned in the Old Testament and often with sackcloth (sackcloth was a coarse material usually made of black goat's hair, making it quite uncomfortable to wear). The ashes signified desolation and ruin and were also a public sign of repentance and humility before God. Sackcloth and ashes were used as an outward sign of one's inward condition: humility. It's an outward sign of a changed heart that demonstrates the sincerity of one's repentance. In Psalm 30:11, David celebrates "You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy".

Lent is a time to repent, remember who we are, who we'd like to be, and accept the forgiveness that can make this change happen. Amen.

Les Spencer

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Proverbs 3:5-6 - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

This scripture is important to me because I am always striving for more. I want to achieve great things, but doors do not always open in the times I want them to. I sometimes feel stuck and tend to begin doubting myself and wondering if I am good enough. However, I can read this scripture and remember that the Lord has plans for me that I cannot change. He knows what I need and when I need it, I have to trust in him.

Mandy Shamblin

Friday, March 1, 2024

Isaiah 55: 6-7 "Seek the Lord while he may be found...let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts, let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Wicked? Unrighteous? Certainly not me! I go to church regularly, teach Sunday School, volunteer in other ways, too. But there was that time when I fumed at the delay in the checkout line, shared someone else's secret, resented the offer of help that made me feel like they saw me as an "old lady."

Sometimes it takes me a while to recognize these thoughts and impulses as the sins they are. The Old Testament script lists many ways to make amends or offerings to atone for various sins. Our Christian faith teaches us that God has not given us a list of ways to earn God's forgiveness-we can't ever 'earn' it. Through Christ's sacrifice we have been offered grace whenever we repent (turn around) and return to the Lord. We are promised mercy and pardon, the help of the Holy Spirit to walk more closely with God.

As Pope Francis said about Lent, "Fast from words and be silent so you can listen" to God's word for your life.

Barbara Gaither

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Last year, I led my first-ever study at St. John's; we used a guided journal to work through healing our relationships with God, ourselves, and one another. Never did I imagine how powerful it would be to explore prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with such a supportive and engaged group. It was raw and hard some days; and other days we laughed with joy in our hearts.

On just the second day of journaling, the prompt for reflection read: "As you feel the Lord's gentle tug on your heart, where would the Lord like to encounter you this Lent? Is it to a place you've already decided or someplace new? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you."

And, my response: "What a different question to ask - not where I want to encounter Him but where He would like to encounter me. From yesterday's equation of my life feeling like a "4", I told my sister "God don't want no 4s!" How untrue! God wants to restore in me the broken, the fragments, the worry. I think (I hope?!) God sees me and meets me where I am - the 1 of 100 sheep which is most important to bring home. I hope he sees the parts to be reconciled to the whole - for myself, for His relationship with me, and to be the best steward in His earthly kingdom."

The simple prayer for this day is one I hope you'll pray with me this Lent: Lord, help me to hear and to be faithful to your inspirations this Lent. Amen.

Lise Turner

Monday, March 4, 2024

"Because he delights in me, he saved me." (Ps. 18:19)

And you thought he saved you because of your decency. You thought he saved you because of your good works or good attitude or good looks. Sorry. If that were the case, your salvation would be lost when your voice went south, or your works got weak.

There are many reasons God saves you; to bring glory to himself, to appease his justice, to demonstrate his sovereignty. But one of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite a while. "As a man rejoices over his new wife, so your God will rejoice over you" (Isa. 62:5)

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. And the Christmas gift he sent you in Bethlehem? Face it, friend. He's crazy about you.

From "A Gentle Thunder" by Max Lucado

Avis Wilson

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

My devotion is about a time that was difficult, and I had to put my trust in God that he would lead me in the direction that he had planned for me, while also holding onto me through the hard time. It was definitely a time I had to pray and find peace in scripture to get through.

Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I never thought when I went into teaching 18 years ago, I would ever find a time that I didn't want to continue doing what I loved doing for so long. As I walked into another year teaching, I told myself this was the year that it will all change. I would regain my passion for teaching, and I would find a way to keep going in this profession. I had worked really hard all summer to regain my passion through rest and prayer. By the second month of school everything was going downhill. I was coming home from school crying and wishing that I didn't have to go back the next day. Each night I would read scripture about anxiety, fear, judgment, and change. I was afraid of change, and I would rather stay where I was, than make a move. By winter break, staying was not an option. I either had to make a change to a new school, or I had to make a professional change. I LOVE teaching, but at that point I had lost my passion for teaching because I couldn't see through all of the sadness and chaos. I started to look for a school with an opening and I decided to apply to a school closer to home. I NEVER wanted to work in the neighborhood where I lived, but I prayed on it, and I just felt God say, "go for it." I felt like HE was telling me to not be afraid and be courageous! So, I went for it, and I got hired. At the end of that year, when I walked out, I knew I was leaving all the fear, anxiety, sadness, loss of passion, judgment, and lack of confidence behind. As I started

Tuesday, March 5, 2024 continued.....

the new year at my new school, I had a whole new love for teaching and a whole new feeling of joy. The school, the administration, my team, my students, all of it is beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I love going to work EVERYDAY and I love seeing my students and team. I am so GRATEFUL to God and for taking that leap to make the change.

Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

This scripture led me in my change and helped me make the leap. I knew that God was leading me to this school, and this is where I was meant to be. I now look back and think even though I went through a lot for more years than I would like to admit, it has given me a whole new outlook. It has helped me forgive, give grace, and think before I pass judgment. I am not angry with the situation I was placed in because I learned a lot. I am grateful God led me out and brought me to a place that has renewed my passion for teaching!

Brianne Natoli

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

1 Peter 1:13

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Watching the Australian Open Tennis Tournament this week, I was amazed at the physical stamina and expertise of the women athletes. They must prepare for years to compete at this level. Yet the announcer would sometimes observe that an athlete had all the physical capabilities to win, but questioned if she had the mental stamina to win.

Fortunately, as Christians, we don't compete, but Peter is encouraging us to prepare, not just our bodies, but our minds. My NIV Study Bible says, "be self-controlled" instead of "being sober-minded." I would use the word "focus" and think that Peter was encouraging us to not let the trivial take over our minds, and therefore our lives. When we focus, we can more fully see actions that might elude us otherwise. As active Christians, we hope and believe fully in the grace that will be ours in Jesus Christ.

Set your sights on Jesus, our Savior and Lord, and prepare your mind each day by prayer and reading God's word.

Elaine Cryderman

Thursday, March 7, 2024

“Control”. Such an interesting word. Some good connotations and some negative ones. We don’t want to be “out of control.” But yet, do we want to be “controlling”? “Losing control” is not something we want to do but to be a “control freak” is equally undesirable. Control is something we may often feel lacking in the complicated world in which we live. Sometimes it seems just out of reach.

The newspapers and television bring “breaking news” that gets more and more alarming by the day. War, violence, man’s inhumanity to man, discord and controversy seem to dominate the headlines. Whether we like it or not these issues have an impact on our daily lives in far-reaching ways. How do we deal with it all? It is hard to see where one person, concerned as they may be by events miles or even continents away, can make a difference or contribute to a solution.

John 16:33 offers a comforting and empowering answer. It suggests that in the grand scheme of things we may have very little control at all. But the God we worship is in control of history in ways that we may not see or understand.

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Let us rejoice in this assurance that God is in control.

Nancy Stark

Friday, March 8, 2024

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

Ephesians 2:19-21

Since coming to St. John's in 2018, I have had the honor to participate in the Confirmation Class process. It is without a doubt one of my favorite parts of my job! Getting to know the kids on a deeper level, watching them ask questions and wrestle with their growing faith is not something I will get tired of.

Every year there comes a point in the process that the Bible gets laid out for them as a whole. Where the stories and lessons start connecting to a bigger picture. Where they can see how Adam connected to Moses, how Ruth connects to Jesus, and how Jesus defines what we believe in a solid and whole new way. The Bible is not just a bunch of stories put together in one book but an epic arch of the greatest narrative from God. It is this grand story of God putting back together our brokenness and turning us into a new creation. It all crescendos to the resurrection of Christ on Easter morning! That is the moment where all God has said, all He has promised is proven true.

Friday, March 8, 2024 continued.....

When we come to Easter morning, the plight of God's people, their days of forgetting God's instructions, their disagreements and fights find themselves forgotten on the truth of the reality of a risen savior. I often tell myself that we as believers can disagree on a lot of things. Where we should put the signs, the color of the carpet, how many times we should do communion a month, and all the other fights we have had throughout centuries of our faith. But one thing remains true, we find ourselves all agreeing with the words we quote most Sundays: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only son our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day, he arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting Amen."

On that we can agree. On that we can put our hope. And on that we can unify to be vessels of grace and love.

Mallory Capps

Saturday, March 9, 2024

God is Always Here When We Need Him

**I will lift up my eyes to the hills-
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**He will not let your foot slip-
he who watches over you will not slumber;
Indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**The Lord watches over you-
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.**

**The Lord will keep you from all harm-
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.**

Psalm 121 (New International Version)

My son and his family live on a farm. They have the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets that are not hindered by city lights. My daughter-in-law recently posted pictures of a beautiful sunrise. She shared the following:

Saturday, March 9, 2024 continued

“When the daylight is short, the trees are bare, the grass is dormant, and the yard and pastures are muck, it’s so easy to fall into the enemy’s trap of feeling a little BLAH. But then the Lord gives us a morning like this. That lights up the blah and reminds us that he commands the sun to rise each morning, and lights up our days.”

Our help, comfort and joy comes to us as we look into the heavens and seek the God who created us and cares about us. The words to the song “I Need Thee Every Hour” remind us of this help, comfort, and joy. The verses show us that God is with us every hour of every day. Take the time today to read the words.

Thank you, God, for your presence in our daily lives. Amen.

Karen Rowe and Rachel Lovick

Monday, March 11, 2024

2 Corinthians 9:6-8(NIV) "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

When I first started attending St. John's in 2016, I experienced my first Stewardship Moments. I didn't know many people yet, but I believe it was Betty Tysinger who spoke about Giving. I'll be honest, my income was not a huge amount, and I was barely covering my expenses. I knew I couldn't part with any money that wasn't "necessary". I was giving my time and presence as I was helping with Sunday School, attending services and other church events. She explained how her husband was always adamant that no matter what their circumstances they would always give their tithes. Even if they had to eat beans for dinner because they couldn't afford anything else. Her story really moved me, and I started thinking about all the ways God had blessed me. I realized I should give back to Him a portion of what He had given to me. It was hard, but after I started Giving, I still managed to have enough to pay my bills on time, feed myself and everything I needed then and now. God has always provided. If God had not prompted Betty to share her story that day, I may still think I couldn't afford to Give, not that I didn't want to, but couldn't. I feel like The Lord laid on my heart to share as hard as it is to talk about money. I hope you will start thinking about sharing your own stories because as in my case, you never know when your story is going to touch someone else's heart.

Amber Boan

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

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

With the presidential election looming, most of us in the United States are on edge. Our candidate choices are slim. As a nation, we are in major debt, mass shootings occur daily, our border is open for anyone to cross over, many people are homeless and starving, and illegal drugs are sold on street corners. The free will that we are given by God allows us all to make choices that are not always the ones that God would want us to make.

As a Senior citizen, I worry about the burdens that will be placed on my children and grandchildren in the future. However, after constantly praying about this, I realize that, ultimately, God is in control. My children were born into the world during a time that God gave them to me. Worrying will accomplish nothing. No matter who our next President is, or what problems we face every single day, God will win in the end. It is our job to LOVE everyone and to SPREAD His word.

HE is in control; not me, and not the next President of the United States!

Anne Purcell

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

I love to read and study scriptures about our great Father. I read this devotion for Lent, and I would like to share.

In the Lamb of God....

In the Lamb of God, we have God's Son come to earth as the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus is made known to us as both God and Man, full of grace and truth. He has come into the world to seek us out—you and me—to rescue us from the power of evil, and to make us His beloved children forever.

Jesus was born for sacrifice and servanthood. As God's beloved Lamb, He intimately joined our lives in the flesh, compassionately healing, teaching, and loving us as our Good Shepherd. On the cross, He gave His life for our transgressions, and three days later He rose triumphant in victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Prayer: Lord, help me to dive into this season of Lent with intentionality and purpose. I want to know you better, love you more fully, and accept your grace more readily. Draw me closer to you, day by day....Amen

Shawne Heeren

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Years ago, one of my students gave me a book called Words to Warm a Teacher's Heart. A short prayer that really struck me was by Gloria Gaither.

"When my hands mold the clay of this child's life, may the impressions be, in reality, made by the movement of Your hands and directed by Your perfect thoughts." I love the idea that we are God's hands and hearts on earth. I pray that I see my students through His eyes and listen with my heart so that I will know what guidance and love they need.

Then I thought back to all of the people who have molded the clay of my life in God's honor. My parents of course but also other family members, Sunday School teachers, friends, and neighbors. Who would I be without them? They all took part in creating the person I have become, and I am so very thankful.

It's never too late to be God's hands and hearts on earth for others. Look around you because you never know who is in need.

Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and You are the potter. We are all formed by Your hand.

Isaiah 64:8 NLT

Amy Bartholomew

Friday, March 15, 2024

Growing up I never had the opportunity to go on a mission trip. When my girls were in school, they went on several. I was able to chaperone a few! Near the end of one mission trip to eastern North Carolina, we had a foot washing service. I was very nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of foot washing, but I found the service to be humbling and it deepened the bonds between the mission team members, chaperones included. Was I self-conscious about someone washing my feet? Absolutely! Boy, could I relate to Simon Peter. But I found washing someone else's feet to be a service to a child of God.

Of course, we don't often have foot washing services. Nor do we have the opportunity to wash the feet of strangers. But we can certainly serve in other ways! Within our church we can participate in the music program, teach or assist with a Sunday School class, serve as an usher or greeter, help with Real Kids or Youth, cook, clean, etc. Outside our church we can feed the poor, help with utilities and medical bills, mow someone's lawn, clean up litter, volunteer in a school, help at a shelter, etc.

The point: Jesus set the example for us to be a servant. We want to be covered in the dust of our Rabbi, to follow his example and SERVE!

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:15

Nancy Rivers

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Walking the Trail

The Walking Trail is a part of Fort Mill enjoyed by all ages. Riding by, you may see someone walking alone, friends engaged in animated conversation while walking, dedicated joggers, a parent pushing a stroller, a youngster skipping ahead of the family, couples stopping to admire a peach orchard in bloom. Maybe you have walked this trail? When we accept Jesus, He walks with us on life's journey. He is with us all the time...

**the good times,
the bad times,
the hard times,
the sad times.**

When do you reach out to Jesus the most? When can you feel Him walking with you? When do you feel closest to Him?

God has given us many promises for our life's journey. Here are some of my favorite assurances. Isaiah 54:10 "Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken." Hebrews 13:5 "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Which assurances have you "hidden in your heart" that help you?

As we look back at Jesus' journey from Lent until Easter, we remember His strength during times of temptation, the rejections He experienced, His pain and sacrifice for us. How do we say thank you?

Joyce Kimbrell

Monday, March 18, 2024

I was given a book for Christmas by a friend. He and I had a conversation last year at some point about prayer and worry. When he saw this book, he thought of me. I thank God for working through him to bring me a book to read to calm my worries and fill my heart. The following is a devotion from the book, "One-Minute Prayers to Unwind a Worried Mind" by Hope Lyda. When I feel my mind becoming bogged down with worry or fixation, I pull this book out and read a page or two and allow the words on the page to help me calm my brain and settle my heart.

Left With Everything

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27

Examine my heart, God. Do you feel the weight of it? I collect worries rather than confront, process and release them. This isn't a hobby for a healthy life, but how do I stop? And what would fill the space now occupied by this collection? Lord, have I become so used to this ever-present sensation of pressure that I'm hesitant to make a change?

What would have a chance to grow if I gave my difficulties and fears to you instead of accumulating them? The thought of this exchange brightens my mood. Through you and your grace, I can have a heart emptied of stale sorrows. I wouldn't be left with nothing; I would be open to everything that flows from your peace.

Jemma Hardinger

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Jellybean Gospel:

In the beginning was God. God created everything, including Adam & Eve. Adam & Eve disobeyed God, & brought sin into the world. Sin separates & keeps us away from God. But God loves us so much that He wanted us back. He sent Jesus to live & die for us. Jesus was crucified, buried in a tomb, & everyone thought that was the end of the story. But on Easter Sunday morning, Jesus rose from the dead. He was alive again! Jesus died for us so that we could have our sins forgiven and be a part of God's family. We can be happy because of what Jesus did for us. Aren't you glad that Jesus loves you!

Perhaps you gave up sweets for Lent and have not eaten jellybeans, so the next time you do you can reference this prayer:

RED is for the blood he gave
GREEN is for the grass he made
YELLOW is for sun so bright
ORANGE is for the edge of night
BLACK is for the sins we made
WHITE is for the grace he gave
PURPLE is for his hour of sorrow
PINK is for our new tomorrow

**An egg full of jellybeans
Colorful and sweet.
Is a prayer, promise,
Is a special treat.**

Judy Tilly

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

I am the world's worst worrier. I worry about all the problems we face in this country and how those issues will affect the future of my children and grandchildren. As chairman of our church council and a member of our finance committee, I stress about discerning God's will and not my own when participating in discussions regarding the future of the ministries and programs here at St John's. These days, I worry a lot about my job, is it time to retire, does God have other plans for me or does he want me to continue in this crazy mortgage business, helping people achieve their goal of home ownership.

For a compulsive worrier and ultimate control freak, life can sometimes seem very overwhelming. But then I remember the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery into the desert, where they wandered and complained. First, there was no clean water, but God solved the problem once he heard their cries. Then they were hungry, once again God heard their cries and rained down manna and quail from heaven. Finally, after some more moving around, they once again found themselves in need of clean water to drink, questioning why God would have brought them out of slavery in Egypt only to let them die of thirst in the desert. Moses cries out to God once more and we see the Lord's answer in Exodus 17:5-8.

The Lord said to Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will stand there before you by the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will

Wednesday, March 20, 2024 continued.....

come out of it for the people to drink." So, Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

When I think of the Israelites and how one minute, they trusted God and the next moment they didn't, I am reminded of the old saying, "the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree." It was human nature then to complain and it still is today. We still try to solve problems on our own, but in reality, we know taking our burdens to God is our best option. It is only prayer that can quiet our thoughts and emotions, reminding us that God is among us and ready to help discern his will for our lives, if we will just stop and listen.

In my first Bible study here at St John's, I remember the words of a wise member of our church family, who has since gone to be with the Lord. She said, "Let go and let God," a relatively simple suggestion, but yet, quite a challenge for many of us. My prayer this Lenten season is that instead of worrying about things we can't control, we would all spend some quiet time in prayer, asking God to help us let go and allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our lives.

R. W. Edmondson

Thursday, March 21, 2024

"O Sacred Head Now Wounded"

"They don't write songs like that anymore." In a sense, this phrase is every bit as applicable in the church as it is in the secular world of music. While many have written beautiful worship music in our day, we continue to need older hymns to help round out our worship experience. Fewer Christian songs are as "out of date" as Bernard of Clairvaux's "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." Perhaps that's why we need it now more than ever.

Who was Bernard? Bernard was born in Burgundy, France in 1090. When he was twenty-five, he helped found a monastery. Here he kept a strict regimen of physical and spiritual discipline, though, unlike many monks of his day, Bernard was very much involved in churchly activities.

This hymn contains stanzas addressing the various parts of Christ's body hanging on the cross. The stanzas that appear in many contemporary hymnals confront us with three important facets of Christ's suffering: the graphic nature of it, the grace that flows from it and the gratitude with which we are to respond when we embrace it.

"O Sacred Head Now Wounded," helps us better understand that the Gospel is grounded in Christ's sacrifice not in our faithfulness. It also helps us affirm that those who are restored to God through Christ's sacrifice enter a new friendship with God.

To read unabridged article, written by William Boekestein, go to <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/o-sacred-head-now-wounded>

**To listen to the hymn, go to:
<http://tinyurl.com/sacredheadhymn>**

Jennifer Isenhour

Friday, March 22, 2024

**Jesus Christ came in this world to save us.
He was crucified, dead and buried.
The third day he rose from the tomb.
He beat death. He conquered Death!
Whoever believes in Him will have everlasting life
and not perish.**

The Lord Jesus Christ has laid this on my heart.

Romans 15:13

Matthew 4:1-17

I Corinthians 15:57

Matthew 6:16-18

Matthew 6:1-4

I John 1:9

Matthew 6:33

James 3:17-18

Matthew 5:7-12

James 5:19-20

(Ephesians 6:24)

May Gods grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Darren Edwards

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Just two months ago we were thinking about and writing about advent----- the birth of our beloved Savior. Now we are preparing for the death and resurrection of our Savior in Lenten season. "We are assured and know that (God being a partner in their labor) all things work together and are (fitting into a plan) for good to and for those who love God and are called according to (His) design and purpose." Romans 8:28

It is the power of the resurrection on the horizon ahead that draws us into repentance toward the cross and tomb. Through the intervention of God's gracious resurrection, lifelong changes in our values and behavior become possible. By turning from the end of the "old self" in us, Lenten repentance makes it possible for us to affirm joyfully, "Death is no more!" and to aim toward the landscape of the new age. Faithfully adhering to the Lenten journey of "prayer, fasting and almsgiving" leads to the destination of Easter. During the Lenten season, we begin to prepare ourselves for bright spright colors and budding trees. God Reminds us that with the resurrection of His Holy Son, a new life, a new year is beginning.

If we have not already made a habit of daily scripture time with God, now is the time to begin that habit. If you have a difficult time visualizing the new life God is giving us, think about a butterfly. It begins as a worm, feeds on a leaf, through the magic of God. It forms into a chrysalis. During its quiet time there the magic of creation occurs, and a beautiful butterfly appears. Resurrection.

Margaret Bryson

Monday, March 25, 2024

Pass It On

Acts 20:35(NIV} "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus said himself: "It is more blessed to give than receive."

There is an old camp song in the Methodist Hymnal (572) called "Pass It On." The first few words of the song say, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going. And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing." The song has a very special meaning in that we can be true servants of Christ by being kind and giving to others. My Mom has always said say hello to people, give others a smile, shake their hand, and let them know you care.

Recently, George and I had a beautiful couple come into our lives. A friend of ours, who works with veterans, told us about a 93-year-old veteran who is a shut-in. He had become very depressed because he could not get out and talk with others. All Leon wanted was to sit and talk with someone about military issues etc. He is a veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Leon and his lovely wife, Joyce, were so glad to have us visit. They have become good friends, and we visit them every two weeks. Leon and Joyce told us how much we meant to them and were appreciated. I had to turn the tables because George and I have received so much from our new friendship. Get that fire going through mentoring, volunteering, writing a kind note, and doing something to help others. During this season of Lent and every day after, let people know they are important, no matter what their race, religion, or circumstances are.

Lynn Dickinson

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

1 Corinthians 13:2

How perfect is the start of Lent on Valentine's Day?! 'God is Love' and he invites each of us to love...recall God's sacrificial love for us and our show of love for Him in return through our own small sacrifices. To study and see how his love for us is greater than our circumstances, problems, than any barrier. Hearts can be overwhelmed, hardened, afraid and left without grace, compassion, care, concern or even empathy. Paul reminds us in this verse that other gifts are rendered void without love; without love, we are nothing. Paul helps us to remember, the importance of God's love in our own lives.

What are we, and these other gifts without love? Nothing! What is our response? To love one another, and tell of God's great love for us. During this Lenten Season, use this as a time to remember God's great love for us in the person of Jesus Christ and how he invites each of us to love.

Lord, you bless us richly with gifts daily; none more important than your great love for us, demonstrated in the gift of Jesus. We are filled with love, remind us that if we do not acknowledge and share Your love, we are nothing. Thank you for the blessings and for Jesus' death, which promises your love for eternity. In Christ's name, Amen

Minda Siebert

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

In Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27, Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us. In today's world, as divided as people have become, we seem to attribute "enemy" status to anyone who has hurt our feelings or even has a different opinion.

Even if our "enemy" is a friend or family member, I believe that we should pray for the person and show love for them. Was not our Lord Jesus doing the same for us – dying on the cross to save us from our sin. "Enemy" status does not have to be a permanent state of being. Sometimes our "enemy" is a person we love very much.

How do we do this? Especially if the hurt is deep or our fear is overwhelming? Through prayer, let God know we have embarked on this journey and ask for his help. He will open the eyes and the heart of the "enemy" and will give you the words to say, if needed. Remember –

- 1. Acts of kindness speak louder than words.**
- 2. God did not condemn us, but saved us. Amazing Grace!**
- 3. Expect nothing in return, but you will be set free from the slavery of nursing your wounds over and over.**

Martha Jones

Thursday, March 28, 2024

THE TALE OF THE STARFISH

Many of you have likely heard this tale before, but some may not have, and this story contains a message I pray we all embrace.

AS THE STORY GOES...

A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement. She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied,

"Well, I made a difference for that one!"

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved.

Thursday, March 28, 2024 continued.....

There is much wisdom coming from this little girl, which also shows us how we all have something to offer, and we can all learn from anyone, not just an exalted teacher or subject "expert".

Sometimes we resist taking action as we do not see how our actions will make a difference. Think of it as compounding interest, a small effort grows to a much larger impact over time as demonstrated in the story by the old man joining her efforts. She changed his viewpoint.

And often we will never know how we have impacted someone's life. Know that we all impact everyone around us, either positively or negatively, every day. Let's all try to make it a positive impact. You never know how the seemingly most insignificant act could make a profound impact on the life of someone else. Be the INSPIRATION!

Wayne Bouldin

Friday, March 29, 2024

We have heard it said many times in the weeks leading to the season of Lent that “Easter is early this year”. My late mother-in-law sent me an email many years ago that I still have in my inbox that explains Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon (March 25) after the Spring Equinox (March 19). She referred to this as the Easter Law.

One great part of an early Easter is that Lent now begins relatively early in the new year. I know many of us attempt each year to take on a new resolution to improve ourselves in some way in a new year, and I am sure many of us have fallen short of staying in compliance with a new year’s resolution. The season of Lent seems like an ideal time to me for each of us to reconsider taking on a new resolution to improve ourselves over the next 40 days as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.

I am writing this not long after the 2024 church council workshop was completed. During this planning and dreaming session, I was amazed by the number of opportunities available to each of us to get more involved in the life of the church. Advent bible studies, Missions, United Methodist Men, United Women in Faith and even Wednesday night vespers are just a few of the many opportunities available to each of us to become more involved in the life of the church. I would encourage each one of you to consider becoming more involved in at least one of these additional activities during the season of Lent, and I think you will find you will want to remain involved well after the celebration of Easter.

Steve Siebert

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Psalm 105:4 "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."

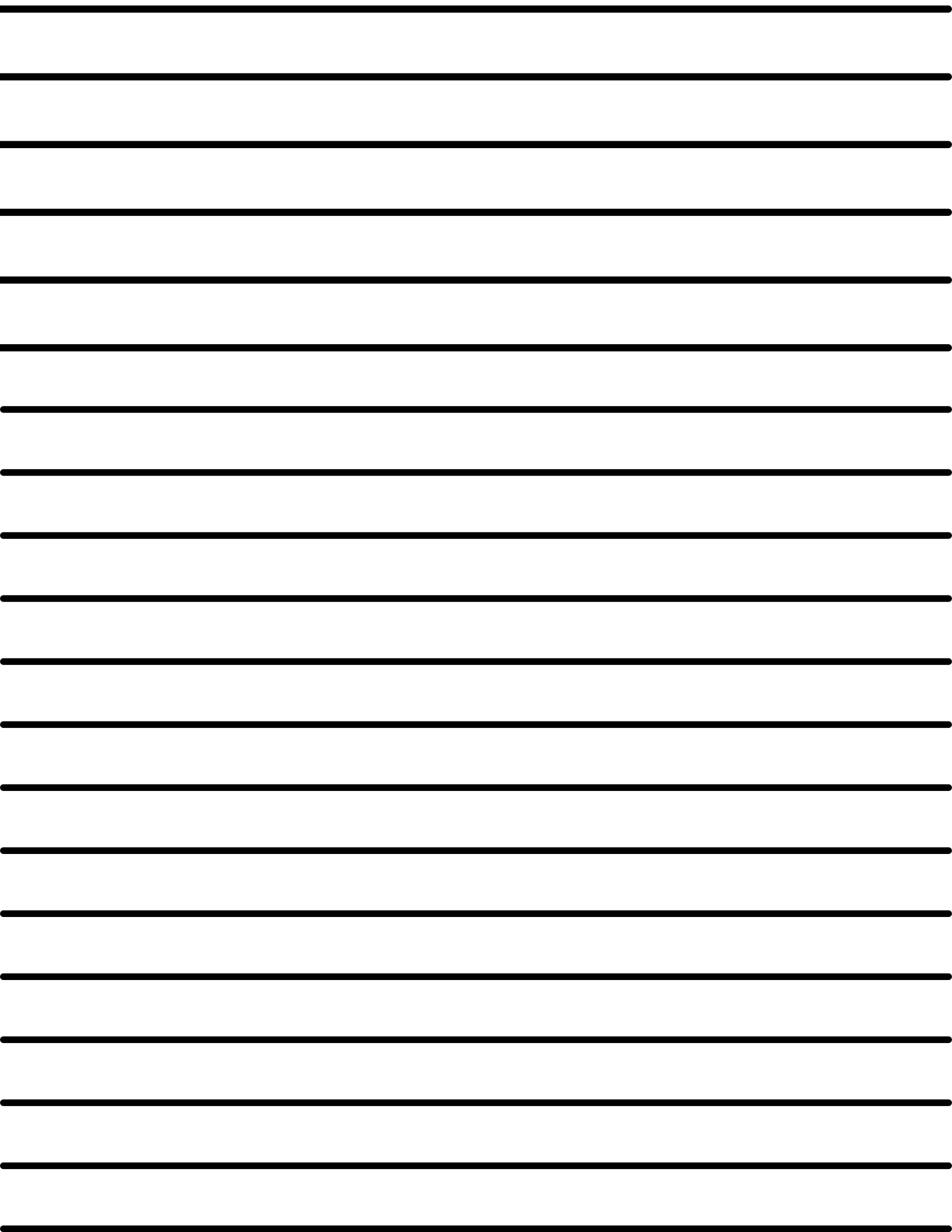
The Hebrew word for "face" in the Old Testament is often translated "presence." When we seek the face of God, we are seeking His presence. The call to seek God's face was issued to His people because they had abandoned Him and needed to return to Him.

A person's face reveals much about his or her character and personality. We see the inward emotions of a person expressed outwardly on their face. We recognize a person by looking at his or her face. In a sense, one's face represents the whole person.

In Psalm 105:4, God's faithful ones were called to "seek his face always." Even if we have not abandoned God, there are times when we neglect to pursue Him. God's face, His holy character, is often hidden by our human condition and fleshly desires. That is why the Lord urges us to seek His face continually. The Lord desires to be our constant companion in every experience of our life. He wants us to know Him through and through.

During this season of lent spend time looking to the Lord for his strength; seeking his face, for fulfillment and allowing him to be your constant companion. God loves you.

Debbie Rouse



CHRIST HAS RISEN
HE HAS RISEN INDEED

