

Peace Beyond Understanding



LENTEN DEVOTIONS 2024



The Presbyterian Church of Traverse City

Lenten Devotions
2024

Peace Beyond Understanding

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7

This booklet of daily devotions is presented for your use during the Lenten season. We thank the members of our congregation who have generously participated by sharing their faith through these writings. It is our hope that this important time in our church year will be made more meaningful through these inspiring thoughts. May the time you spend reading this booklet leave you feeling closer to our Savior Jesus Christ.

The Evangelism/Membership Committee



February 14

Maybe it's the political climate or perhaps all the reports of climate change that does it. Who knows, it could just be the winter grey skies over Traverse City. Sometimes I feel like the grey permeates my very soul.

So here comes Lent. Should I give up sugar again or maybe just chocolate this year? Every time I give up something for Lent, I find myself reflecting on Christ's humility and the importance of letting go of my comfort-seeking way of life. But this year I am filled with so much despair. So many problems -- with wars and people suffering. How can I rise up and be salt and light in this world when the despair can be so debilitating?

Ahhh, maybe that is my challenge this year, to find the light! Maybe I need to look up from the morning headlines to watch the snow falling on the branches and see the hand of God touching the earth. Or what about looking into the smile from a complete stranger and see God's heart awakening the love between people. This will be my quest. Every day through Lent I will give up despair; I'll look for the light and proclaim it in the midst of the darkness!

This will be my Lenten resolution: to give up despair. May hope fill our hearts this season.

Marsha Hanson

Thursday, February 15

Passing The Peace

Those who work to bring peace are happy. God will call them sons and daughters.

Matthew 5:9

At the end of our Sunday church service we have been asked to pass the peace to those sitting near us. "May the peace of Christ be with you." But what does it mean to pass the peace to others? We have all known people who seem to radiate peace. Being with them gives us a feeling of being accepted and safe. We feel we can be our real selves around them. Perhaps these people have taken the peace of Christ as an unearned gift; a gift that can be freely shared. This Lenten season may we all accept the peace of Christ into our hearts, then find ways to live that peace.

"Peace is not something you wish for. It's something you make, something you do, something you are, and something you give away."
John Lennon

**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.**

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Pam Davis

Friday, February 16

The summer of 1983 was a memorable time for our family. The night of July 2 was a very hot night with a severe thunderstorm. We were awakened at 3:00 a.m. by a loud crash of thunder and lightning. I checked on our 2 year old son, and he was asleep in his crib. John looked out a window at our roof and saw sparks. He told me to grab Cooper and get out of the house. We stood in the front yard and watched as those sparks ignited our roof and took most of our breezeway down. I ran to a neighbor's house (before cell phones), awakened them, and asked them to call the fire department. By the time they arrived, a portion of our house was gone, and the rest badly smoke damaged.

We were out of the house for 4 months while it was being rebuilt. During those months we lived in a 1 bedroom apartment with our son. We tried to make it an adventure for him, living in a new place and checking on the progress of the house every day. He loved talking with the builders and asked lots of questions. Our house was old (built in 1935), and needed several changes, which we were able to make with insurance money. This was the silver lining to the house fire.

Although it was a traumatic experience, we felt a peacefulness after, thankful that the important things were not lost. We still had each other, our son, and our cat. The other things lost were just "things."

Thank you, God, for helping us to realize what is really important in life.

Anne McKinney

Saturday, February 17

There once was a king who offered a prize for a painting that best depicted peace. Many artists accepted the challenge. With one exception, the king received beautiful paintings of serene landscapes. The exception was a painting featuring a rocky mountain peak that was nearly devoid of vegetation. Ominous storm clouds dominated the sky, which was dark except for regular bursts of lightning. It looked like a terrible storm was approaching.

The king examined the painting closely and saw what others missed. He declared it to be the winning painting. What the king saw was a barely noticeable, tiny, green bush growing from a crack in the rock. On that bush was a bird's nest and in that nest was a mother bird calmly incubating her eggs.

One can easily be filled with inner peace and joy while lying on a beach on a beautiful sunny day. The message in the painting is that one also can find inner peace when surrounded by turmoil. That mother bird knew there was nothing she could do to calm the storm or prevent the nest from being washed off the side of the mountain. She chose not to worry about what could happen and instead remained calm. This is the message of Paul in his letter to the troubled members of the early church in Philippi. He urged them to not be anxious about any threat that confronted them. If they had faith and prayed to God for inner peace, He would provide it beyond anything they could possibly comprehend.

Tad Minor

Sunday, February 18

Peace – What does that mean? How do we achieve it? What is God’s role in it?

As I have written before, I am the queen of the “but what if” society; my normal is having a mind filled with one concern after another. The first time I remember feeling totally at peace was as a child. I was in the Methodist Church, my home church in Manistee, and as we were all standing for silent prayer, I remember saying “Okay, God. I turn it all over to you. Whatever outcomes you want, let that be.” Frightened as I was to say that I suddenly felt a total sense of relief – peace – that I did not recall ever feeling before.

What is God’s role in peace? I wish I could say. I am not sure God really intercedes in personal or global issues. When Russia first prepared to invade Ukraine, people all over the world prayed that Russia would change its mind – would not go after these good people. Even Russian citizens prayed for peace not wanting to lose their own sons and daughters. Clearly God chose not to intercede. So, while praying brings me peace, I am not fully convinced that God answers these prayers. I look at the world at war, people in pain, hungry, cold – and while I have to believe that is not God’s will, he apparently chooses to leave it to us. Or does my faith need to be stronger? Do I need *to do* more?

Lord: The answer to the two questions above is no doubt YES. May we all continue to grow our faith – to seek answers – to continue to learn – and as someone said - to be and do a little bit better every day.

Barbara Shimnoski

Monday, February 19

Hope and I have a sticky relationship. I often vacillate between the pie in the sky kind of hope that is attached to wishes, and feeling rather angry at hope for misleading me. Hope says all things are possible and we are given scripture to back this up:

Isaiah 40:30 - 31

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.

Yet my feelings of hope as a double-edge sword persist. I could see the possibilities of what might be stretched out in front of me, and yet it always seemed just out of reach. Hope, what good is it? I then read Kate Bowler's advent devotional for the first day of Advent (yes, I know we are in Lent, I'll get there). Its title is "Hope as Protest." Kate goes on to say "Advent hope is gritty. It shirks all optimism. It is *hope as protest*. Hope in the face of impossibilities." I believe that the marking of Lent is where we really dig into *hope as protest*. In Lenten hope we hear the story of Jesus being celebrated then being abandoned and denied. We hear of Jesus asking for another way, but accepting God's will, and ultimately being crucified. During Lent we see a continuation of *hope as protest*. In Lenten hope we see hope in the presence of the Holy Spirit, hope present in communion, hope in the forgiveness of our sins (mistakes and faults), and hope in the love and care of our brothers and sisters. I think that it is time that I set aside my disappointment and cynicism, and instead see hope as a radical protest against fear and hate.

Anne Donn

Tuesday, February 20

Not in Control...

Last year's theme was "Grace and Gratitude" and I had much to be grateful for. I could easily write about that same topic this year. However, this year I'm writing about the peace which came with new uncertain circumstances! My siblings always reminded me that I followed in our mom's "worrier" footsteps (what farm wife doesn't worry?) I loved growing up on the farm but never wanted to marry a farmer...NO, not because of the hard work! It had more to do with Mother Nature always 'being in control' with a change in the weather at the wrong time, insects/fruit disease that were more plentiful than normal, etc. My father, on the other hand, seemed to not let these "Mother Nature episodes" bother him, and I think that is where my attitude about things we have no control over came from.

Two ER visits in February and finally diagnosis/back surgery to remove a tumor on my lumbar spine. With five screws and three rods, I became "bionic" but haven't felt any super powers as depicted by Lindsay Wagner! Biopsy results came back showing melanoma (that "sneaky" cancer that shows up where you least expect it). Radiation began immediately with immunotherapy infusions...a two-year process...starting while still doing radiation. I found myself immersed in that "not in control" feeling!

But something nudged me to share all this with family, friends, church family, plus others...learning in the process that by sharing and explaining to others what was happening...what I was going through...to ask for prayer warriors to come to my aid, I was able to let this "not in control" feeling go and have been blessed with a PEACE that I don't UNDERSTAND.

Lord, thank you for my dad's influence...and help me in this continuing fight to rely on You and my Prayer Warriors.

Linda Rea

Wednesday, February 21

My mother passed away last winter. She was 94 years old and had led a charmed life. My siblings and I have lovely memories growing up with Mom. She planned holidays, took us places, attended school events, dried tears, and rejoiced over accomplishments. She was the kind of mom who would sit up all night with you talking about life. And she loved being a grandmother! Her children and grandchildren were everything to her. Yet in the final weeks of her life, she was agitated, spiteful and, well, not herself. In the hospital, when her physician suggested residential hospice, she became angry, lashing out at me, livid that I would not take her home. She after all had nursed her sister, her mother, and my father in their final days. Yet, I knew this was not something I was capable of. First of all, I was alone. My sister was on a foreign trip with her husband. My brother and his family live in Maryland. My husband was needed at home 250 miles away to help our daughter who had medical issues herself. In the end, I transferred her to a nursing facility close to her home. The staff was endlessly kind, even as Mom, in the end stage of renal failure, was not. Then, a few days into this, a nurse softly shared that this night would be the last. The nursing staff stayed with me as we lovingly told her it was okay to go. In spite of the February chill, they opened a window so her spirit could leave when the time came. And it did, lovingly and peacefully for both mom and for me. The peace that surpasses understanding. A gift.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. John 14:27

Vicki Shurly

Thursday, February 22

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice...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...whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, if there is any excellence or anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Paraphrase of Philippians 4: 4-9

This chapter from Philippians has always been one of my favorites. When I wake in the night, worrying, it is repeating these words that allows me to return to peaceful sleep. When I stress during waking hours over things beyond my control, these words give me peace. Focusing on God's many blessings fills me with gratitude.

All of nature is filled with God's wonder, and I am amazed by sunrises and sunsets, waterfalls and beaches, birds of the air, graceful swans, deer and woodland creatures, dogs and cats, flowers, shrubs, weeds and trees, changing seasons...the list goes on and on. Such diversity! I am particularly touched by the sight of eagles (which remind me of Isaiah 40:31 *they shall mount up with wings like eagles*) as well as butterflies.

I was recently asked what butterflies symbolize, and to me their emergence from the cocoon indicates life after death, resurrection in a beautiful new life form. Online, alexandani.com states that "*in ancient Greece, the word for butterfly, 'psyche,' literally translated means 'soul.'* Native Americans have considered butterflies as symbols of transformation, hope, and rebirth. In Chinese culture, the symbolism of butterflies evokes the qualities of freedom, earthly beauty, love, and the human soul."

Simply by being, the butterfly reflects God's beauty and His promise of eternal life. May we do the same.

My prayer for each of us is that we may see and experience God's love all around us, and in that Love, be enfolded in His Peace beyond understanding.

Friday, February 23

Romans 12:18 NIV *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

When I was teaching, I did my best to implement Romans 12:18 in my classroom without stating it.

What depended on me was to read the cues of what my class needed ~ each year the dynamics of my classroom changed but what did not change was:

~ We can all learn to be kind to everyone in our room. Each student knew no matter what, I cared for them and in turn they would show this same care to each other. (Mrs. Nickel calls this unconditional care).

~ We can find the best in each other (Put ups - no put downs). Leaving a positive note on each other's desk. Every student received at least one from each student by the end of the year.

~ Each one of us is gifted in some way and can cooperatively and kindly share those gifts with each other.

~ We will make mistakes we can learn from and this may mean extra practice or accepting help from Mrs. Nickel, a parent or a friend.

~ We will be asked to choose behaviors to help the learning (**depends on each of us**). Be prepared for Mrs. Nickel to ask, "Are you helping or hurting the learning?" Depending on the answer ~ this might mean a visit to the responsibility table.

In June what does living peaceably in the classroom look like?

Each one in the class feels more comfortable sharing, takes thoughtful risks, is able to ask questions and learns there is kindness and help when feeling challenged.

It was a blessing to see it was possible for each class to come together peaceably.

Wherever you are, if it is possible, live in peace and share Christ's peace.

Saturday, February 24

Psalm 16:8-9. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

A year ago I made my first trip to Malawi in support of a Rotary project where I have been involved. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world and it became more obvious as we made the five-hour ride from Lilongwe to Mangochi in the southern part of the country. Small thatch roof houses on parched land this time of year told the story of a daily struggle to find water and enough food for families. Most live off the land, now eating green mangos in this dry season. By any measure, life is challenging. I wondered; how do they manage? When we drove up to a small village far off the main road, I was amazed at what we saw, joyful welcoming communities of people that love to sing! So much joy with so many challenges, how can they do it? They live within tribal rituals but melded with a faith in God to provide. The population in this area is majority Christian with a large Muslim minority both living and working together in community. Seeing God's providence among these people gave me hope but their circumstances are truly beyond my comprehension. It is only by God's Grace that I believe these people survive and much more, that they live their lives together with joy.

God, help each of us extend our hands to others as an instrument of your Grace. May we strive to see everyone we meet as one of your children to love and celebrate. Amen.

Kip Nickel

Sunday, February 25

As I contemplate my spiritual journey within this community, the memories of our shared traditions and the evolution of them fill my heart with gratitude. They've influenced my spiritual growth and serve as milestones in our shared history.

As we've grown, so have our experiences and connections. A particularly transformative moment occurred during last spring's Camp Henry retreat. In the midst of nature and a camp-like setting, we rediscovered the strength of lifelong bonds and forged new connections. All of which have most certainly enriched the tapestry of our spiritual lives.

In the ever-changing landscape of our faith journey both old and new traditions are threads woven into the fabric of our shared identity. They serve as reminders that while the specifics may evolve, the essence of our devotion remains unwavering.

Dear God, as we continue to walk together, may we embrace the evolving tapestry of our faith community, finding joy in both the cherished traditions of the past and the exciting possibilities of the future. Amen.

Beth Price

Monday, February 26

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18

To think of peace in a world that suffers from war, hate, and ignorance can be challenging. How can we find peace amidst society's great turmoil? Where can we find peace when our brothers and sisters are starving and a wish for "world peace" has become cliché?

As a Christian, sometimes I struggle to understand why God would allow for such horrible things to happen. As a young adult, I find it frustrating that I can only do so much to promote a better world. Many people struggle with these same problems but at the end of the day all we can do is do our best and trust that God will persevere. When solving the world's problems is out of our control (and most of the time it is), we can make peace our *goal*. When peace seems unattainable, try this:

- Check in on your friends.
- Apologize and build understanding if you find yourself propelling conflict.
- Google search "What can I do to help *insert world crisis here*?"
- Trust God and pray for those who need it most (and everyone else too).

Guide us to do right by our neighbors and help us to live at peace with everyone. Please help us to do our best to do good. We are blessed to live under your peace. We pray that you would continue to foster this peace across the world. Amen.

Sophie Nickel

Tuesday, February 27

Peace Surpassing Understanding

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.

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and let my worries overwhelm me. It makes it difficult to get back to sleep. Then I remember my "mantra," the phrase that quiets my mind. "Praise God for my life!" It works every time. When I turn my mind to God and remember that he is the source of all things, I can release and relax, and go back to sleep.

Call it what you will, a "mantra," a "reminder" or a "motto" – what it really is, is a prayer, however brief. And that prayer reminds me that I need to let go of what I can't control and "let God." God will take care of whatever I am worrying about and he will handle it in his own way, in his own time. That brings the peace that I need in order to return to a quiet rest.

That is the peace that surpasses understanding, that brings a smile to my face and joy to my heart. That is the peace that God gives to us freely. I think each of us can find a prayer that works for us, that reminds us that we need to turn ourselves over to God's will.

Dear God, Thank you for watching over me and bringing me peace. Amen

Jill Beauchamp

Wednesday, February 28

We're traveling toward Easter, but the Christmas carol, "I heard the Bells on Christmas Day" still echos in our heads with the striking lyric: "In despair, I bowed my head—there is no peace on earth I said. For hate is strong, and mocks the song of 'Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men.'" (and we assume, Women)

We can't control Gaza, gun violence, Ukraine, or political divides. But God's love accepts no excuses. What are the baby steps toward peace we **can** control and initiate? The good news is that every one of us can find a role that helps.

My book club is reading and discussing How to Know a Person. The author, David Brooks, has some valuable ideas. He reminds us that the key to good mental health and peace is the ability to genuinely see, hear, and understand others. There are skills we can develop. We can listen to others with the intent to learn, not just to respond. We can practice empathy and ask open-ended questions. In his words, we can be "illuminators" not "diminishers."

In addition: we can vote, we can all write a letter to our congress people or TCAPS or local government. We can volunteer, call a friend or relative who needs a boost. We can join a church committee, teach English as a Second Language, bring muffins to a neighbor, and we can pray. Baby steps, right? But that is how we get to the last, triumphant verse of that Christmas carol: "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep, The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men." (and, of course, women)

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."
(St. Francis of Assisi)

Nancy Schulte

Thursday, February 29

PEACE

A formal definition of "peace" is:

Freedom from disturbances (tranquility)

A state or period in which there is no war or war has ended.

As an individual, my desire - or probably anyone's for that matter - is to have peace. If that is not possible, then we pray for leaders to promote peace.

Presently, there are 32 armed conflicts taking place on this earth, but what most individuals will focus on is Ukraine/Russia or Israel/Hamas. This is what the media deems newsworthy. This is not to say these conflicts are not important, but what about the other conflicts and the resulting consequences that humanity deals with on a daily basis?

Peace is an essential element to the realization of all human rights. Peace is a product of human rights: the more a society promotes, protects and fulfils the human rights of its peoples, the greater chance it has of curbing violence and resolving conflict.

I do not or cannot control any one thing in the world by myself. But I can turn to prayer. Collectively the power of this instrument (prayer) has been the subject of many a debate over the years. But if you have faith, I believe this power has tremendous potential.

Matthew 21:22 *And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.*

Mark 11:24 *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

AMEN

Scotty Shimnoski

Friday, March 1

In Traverse City, in a church stands tall,
Presbyterian, welcoming to all.
As a teen, I find solace in its embrace,
A place of hope, love, and grace.

With friends, we gather in this space,
Sharing stories, laughter, and embrace.
Youth group meetings full of cheer,
Guided by leaders we hold dear.

Through music and song, our spirits soar,
The Melodies filling hearts to the core.
In Sunday sermons, wisdom flows,
Simple words that touch our souls.

The stained glass windows, vibrant and bright,
Reflecting the love that feels so right.
In this church, I find my way,
Guided by faith, day by day.

Traverse City's church, a beacon of light,
A place where love take its flight.
As a teen, I'm grateful for this home,
In the Presbyterian church, a place I can call home.

In steadfast faith, the Presbyterian light,
Guiding my soul through day and night.
With principles strong and values true,
In Christ's embrace, I find home.

A haven of wisdom, where minds unite,
Seeking the truth and shining bright.
Through trials and storms, I find my way,
In Presbyterian love, I choose to stay.

Christianity's beacon, a beacon of grace,
A steadfast path in life's endless race.
In loyalty firm, my heart does soar,
Preserving the faith I deeply adore.

Tyler Wellington

Saturday, March 2

Peace Beyond My Understanding

I'm remembering when some years ago as I went out with my classical guitar providing therapeutic music for hospice patients, I had a unique session with a long-term client. She loved music and was always so complimentary of my visits. As I played for her, she would lie back in her chair, often close her eyes, smile, sometimes sigh, sometimes compliment me on my playing of a particular song I chose. But during this particular session she was quiet; in fact, as I played for her, I thought she might have fallen asleep, which many of my patients often would, being lulled by the gentle soothing sounds of the guitar.

When I finished and began to quietly depart, she opened her eyes and spoke softly. "Thank you, Doug. Your music helped me resolve in my mind some old issues I had with my mother. Now I am ready to die."

Upon leaving, I was dumbfounded. What ever could I have played that would bring her to that profound resolution? The music selections were the same pieces that I utilized over and over during my sessions, nothing seemingly that special to me.

What I had learned over my hundreds of therapeutic sessions is that music is like a key. I never knew what it might unlock in the hearts of my patients, but my role was to play at their side, support them through their journey, and let the music tenderly assist their emotional and physical needs in the moment.

About 2 weeks later, she passed away ready to join her Creator.

Go forth humbly and freely share your gifts, for God has made us instruments of peace to the world. How wonderful and so beyond my understanding at times.

Doug Hansen

Sunday, March 3

A Google search for Bible references to peace returns around 50 passages, most of which are familiar to me, but one in particular caught my attention:

Romans 12:18 (NRSV) says "*If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all,*" paraphrased in The Message as "*If you've got it in you, get along with everybody.*"

I started writing this thinking that I would describe a life experience where I felt God's "peace which passes all understanding," and I have had such experiences. But this passage in Romans led me in a different direction.

I wasn't thinking about the idea that living in peace with everybody begins with me. Amid the conflict and polarization of our society, particularly as it's reflected in politics, it's sometimes very difficult for me to look on those with opposing views with peace. In fact, it's even difficult to respond to everyday experiences like impolite or irresponsible drivers without getting angry. How am I meant to "get along with everybody" in moments like these?

And this raises the question, do I have it in me to get along with everybody? The answer is, no, I don't without God's help.

Dear God, help me to extend peace to everyone, especially when I don't think I have it in me to do so.

Mark Ferris

Monday, March 4

PEACE AND LOVE

As you all know, I have three dogs. Sasha, Holly, and Buster. Sasha was our first who was 16 years old. Our Holly is 6 years and Buster is 8 years old. These last two are our first and last foster adoptions.

Holly has known Sasha since we got her at 2 months old. Sasha does not like little puppies, but Sasha grew to like her sister the older Holly got. Buster, being older and male, liked Sasha and she liked him. Just do not get in her way.

Being that Sasha was the oldest, she was getting less and less mobile. She was partially blind, deaf to hearing what she wants, selective hearing, and her back hips were not as stable as they should be.

We loved her so much that we had to really think of her quality of life. We talked it over as a family and decided that December 1 was going to be the day.

The vet hospital was so kind. We had the whole family in the room with Sasha. Holly and Buster were there as well. It was hard to do, but once Sasha passed over the Rainbow Bridge, it was a peaceful time. Sasha was on a beautiful quilt blanket, looking like she was just sleeping. Holly and Buster were checking her out, and Ford, Tia, Beth, David, and I were crying and hugging one another and saying goodbyes. I felt such a peace and calm knowing that Sasha was with our other German Shorthair Pointers, learning how to find birds and having fun with God.

Lord, thank you for the help in knowing when to let our loved ones go, whether they be two or four legged.

Josie Powell

Tuesday, March 5

It is up to You

The theme for this year's devotional comes from the very familiar verse Philippians 4:7. If one reads all of Philippians 4, it sort of sounds like Paul is providing guidance to us modern day Americans. We have Euodia and Syntyche in some type of disagreement, and Paul entreating believers to help them settle the dispute. He then goes on with a little "pep talk" advising the Philippians on gentleness, prayer, thanksgiving, truth, purity, admiration, and excellence; encouraging them to put these into practice. He ends with thankfulness for their generosity in supporting him.

When one turns on the news these days, there is not much of a feeling of peace, is there? So, what are YOU going to do about it? While advocacy is not a Biblical gift, God nonetheless provides us examples of righteous advocacy. Think of Moses advocating to the Pharaoh for the Israelites and Esther risking her life advocating to King Xerxes for her people. Here at PCTC we have ample opportunities for those with an advocate's disposition to become involved in local causes such as Racial Justice, Earth Care or perhaps even evaluating if we want to become a Peace Church.

How about those of us who don't fit the organized "advocate" profile? Well, that doesn't leave you off the hook. Take a few moments, get your Bible out and read Philippians 4:8-9. Meditate a few moments on a phrase or word that resonates with you. Now turn to Romans 12:9-12 and repeat the process. We can't control external events, but we can control how we react to them. If you practice what Paul has written in these passages, you will not only be more at peace yourself, but also be an advocate for peace in someone's life.

Wayne Swallow

Wednesday, March 6

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

By H.G. Stafford

“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Maybe it’s an early morning mist surrounding a lake, cattails, beach grass swaying in the summer breeze, loons calling out their song...

Or

Maybe it’s the gentle waves lapping the shoreline and a soft yellow sunset against a pink painted sky, the quiet stillness of an early autumn evening...

Or

Maybe it’s the full moon of November, shining bright against a stark winter sky, stars twinkling like fireflies in the dark of an inky black sky...

Or

Maybe it’s the newborn babe you hold in your arms for the very first time that reminds you of the Christ child born so long ago, who brought hope to the world then and brings hope to our torn and broken world today.

Whatever it is that brings you peace beyond understanding, whatever scene brings a deep contentment to your soul, know that God will lead you to that deep abiding peace when you listen for His voice in your world.

Becky Gagnon

Thursday, March 7

Peace that surpasses understanding is a supernatural peace that God offers us in the midst of trials. It defies explanation and human logic. It is pure grace.

Our anxiety or guilt may refuse to accept God's forgiveness immediately. He gives us peace in times of stress.

Telling our Father about our needs opens the door for His blessing. To surrender our lives to Him helps us trust Him and know that He is in control. It takes the focus off of our problems and puts it on God.

Thankfulness is the road.
Prayer is the vehicle.
Peace is the goal.

Faith Sanko

* * *

Friday, March 8

God showed us a path to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. He showed us how to live & love. He wants us to reject sin and embrace love.

God gives us His grace & the ability to embrace "kindness" & to practice kindness & compassion. We can choose to be "kind".

We can be the change God wants to see in the world. We can ask Him for help. We can listen with our own heart. We can practice compassion. We can stand for justice. We can offer hope to others. We can work for the common good and be the change God wants to see in the world.

Each morning we are "born again". We cannot let hate effect our heart. We can wipe out hate with love and decide to be "kind."

Thanks be to God.

Joel Secrist

24

Saturday, March 9

Mount up with Wings like Eagles

Bald Eagles, our national bird, are an amazing sight as they fly by. "There's an eagle" someone calls as it flies across the field. Its squawk, way too small a sound for such a large bird, called me to watch as it landed in a nearby tree. Now, I frequently see bald eagles and know the location of several nests.

But long before sighting bald eagles here in Grand Traverse became common, I watched eagles during some very special occasions:

Taking the Alaska Marine Highway (ferry) up the inside passage (Alaska panhandle), eagles were numerous. Soaring across the water to the big fir trees, diving to catch fish, the bald and golden eagles were fun to watch.

As I lead a worship service on the Olympic Peninsula, I watched two eaglets in their large stick nest. Close to full grown, they were huge.

But my favorite memory of an eagle was in Alaska. A friend took us into his family's hunting cabin: down the road, into a boat and up a river, looking out for mama and baby moose as mama would protect her calves by viciously attacking, seeing red fox with their large bushy tails, catching sight of bears. For worship we took the boat to a large bare hill. Suddenly, we saw an eagle soaring below us. In wonder we watched it spiral up and up and up, wings spread, never flapping, until it was out of site. What an awesome illustration of Isaiah 40:31 and this song:

They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not grow faint.
Teach us Lord, teach us Lord to wait.

Barbara Morrison

Sunday, March 10

Psalm 22:19. *But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, Haste Thee to help me.*

I was commanding a crew of firefighters trying to cut off the advancement of a structure fire on the third floor of an apartment building. The fire was advancing up from the lower stories. The hose crew that was with me was out in the corridor awaiting my assessment of the fire's progress so that they would know where to "set up" to open a hole in the floor to hose down the advancing fire.

I had just stepped into a bathtub of one of the apartments. Bathtubs, by the way, are supposed to sit on a part of the floor structure that has been reinforced to carry the weight of a tub of water as well as the person bathing.

Well, this floor did not get reinforced like it should have. The next thing I knew, I was falling through the floor and I landed in an area that was full of flames. And I couldn't move from my waist down. I was stuck, I was lost, it was extremely hot, and I was on fire.

You know how people who have faced death sometimes say that their whole life passed before their eyes? Well, it wasn't that way with me. The only thought that I had was Psalm 22:19.

Suddenly, the whole area I was in was filled with steam! The fire was being extinguished by a crew member operating a fire hose. As the fire abated and the steam and smoke dissipated, I could see the firefighter who had "opened up" on the fire and saved my life. He was with a crew that was in the basement of the complex and saw me break through from the floor above! I had actually fallen through three floors into the basement and right into the seat of the fire which had started from a malfunctioning clothes dryer.

Obviously, God was with me. I have always been a "believer" and I've never doubted God's presence in my life. My faith never left me then and it has grown even stronger over the ensuing years. Every time I recite the Lord's Prayer there is special meaning for me when I say ",,,Thy will be done on earth...." Every day I pray, "**Dear Lord, thank you for your gift of my life. Amen.**"

Monday, March 11

"Faith", what is it?

I have a friend who once told me they keep a loaded gun under their bed, just in case. We were talking the other day and this same person said, "I live my life by faith, not fear". I really had to tromp on my tongue!

But then I got to thinking that perhaps I didn't know what faith was, so I googled it.

"Complete trust or confidence in someone or something."

"Strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension, rather than proof."

Spiritual apprehension? So then I had to look THAT up.

"An awareness or understanding that comes through the spirit, not through the ..." and it did not finish the definition.

Some more definitions of Faith:

"Faith almost always implies certitude, even where there is no evidence or proof." "Belief" "Trust"

Before I googled I had already scribbled down a couple of my own thoughts, and I guess I wasn't too far off.

Faith to me is a deep abiding trust,
A quiet assurance,
A whisper.

I will close with this:

God, you are here! You know who I am! You love me!
That's all I need to know.
Amen.

Tammie McLain

Tuesday, March 12

My family and I affectionately remember my mother as “the Midwest Coordinator of Guilt and Worry” because she worried constantly about just about everything. If she couldn’t think of anything to worry about, she would worry about that! I think some of that inclination rubbed off on me because I tend to be a worrier as well.

There is certainly enough to worry about in this world that is so full of suffering from wars, disasters, hardships, political divides, disease (I could go on). I can usually think of a few things to worry about in my personal life as well. Often these are minor things that don’t warrant a second thought, much less worry.

I am also a planner and often struggle to live in the present moment, even though I know that letting go of future anxieties can lead to contentment and peace.

Whenever I find myself starting to worry about something, I remind myself of some helpful scriptures:

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not worry 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.

Matthew 6:27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Dear God, help us to find peace by putting our trust in you, knowing that you will equip us for whatever comes our way. Amen

Cheryl Wheeler

Wednesday, March 13

What can I do to help promote Peace at home in Traverse City in Michigan and the world? Here are words/actions to consider!

- P.** Pray
- E.** Engage others
- A.** Attend
- C.** Collaborate
- E.** Encourage

- B.** Breathe
- E.** Exemplify
- Y.** Yearn
- O.** Organize
- N.** Navigate
- D.** Discuss

- U.** Unify
- N.** Negotiate
- D.** Debate
- E.** Embody
- R.** Reflect
- S.** Study
- T.** Teach
- A.** Act
- N.** Notify
- D.** Defend
- I.** Investigate
- N.** Neutralize
- G.** Give

In one way or another we are all able to be part of sharing the **love** and **peace** of **Christ**.

Steve McLain

Thursday, March 14

“Weathering the Storm”

On September 28th, 2022, Hurricane Ian ripped its way through the Gulf, entering land just west of Fort Myers, Florida. It is a storm that our family, as well as many others, will never forget. As people were buttoning up their homes, we decided to head southeast with our 14 month old. We would be out of the storm’s destructive path but abandoning our home in the process. In addition to our two pups, we traveled light with only some clothes, toiletries to get us through the next few weeks, and a bin with all of the important files. I still remember the eerie feeling in the air like it was yesterday; like you knew things weren’t going to be the same for a long time. Looking back now, I realize that there was some peace in preparing for the storm. Lessons to be learned. At some point through all of the worry and anxiety, you take a step back... you let go... you listen. You realize that God is in control and there is nothing that you can do about it. All we can do is lean in on our faith and pray.

Proverbs 16:9 says, Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Weathering the storms of life, whether it be literal or figurative, makes you realize what is truly important. It’s not your property or possessions. It’s not your status. It’s your faith. Your relationships... family. Like my favorite hymn says, “Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say it is well, it is well with my Soul.” Praise God!

We wish you many blessings this 2024!

With love,
Kristi, Nathan, and Audrey Fish

Friday, March 15

PEACE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

"The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is PEACE."

Saint Theresa of Calcutta

Recently I was online searching for technical help on a computer related issue. After getting the information for which I was looking, a second video started with the announcer/narrator extolling how this singer had the most beautiful rendition of Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah." I listened to a portion of it and had to agree; it was indeed beautiful. Later, I returned, to view the piece in its entirety¹

The quality of "peacefulness" heard in the beginning gives way to a greater intensity as the singer's voice becomes more exultant. An internet reference reminds the listener that the song also makes reference to the "dark side of humanity"; Cohen even goes so far as to say that "love is a cold and broken hallelujah".²

I could see how he might say this, but I tend to agree more with Cardinal Sean O'Malley when he quotes Saint Theresa of Calcutta. Just as the intensity (degree of exultation in the song) increases, so do the challenges and decisions we make in life. The end result is that we can recognize that things won't go smoothly all the time; but, when we know that God is with us, we can have a "PEACE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING." A "peace" that if sung would ring out with the most intense "Hallelujah."³

Dick Teubert

¹ GOOGLE: Hallelujah-Lucy Thomas-(Official Music Video)-YouTube

² web site: americansongwriter.com>behind-the-meaning-of-hallelujah-by-leonard-cohen

³ GOOGLE: The Top 50 versions of Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah'

Saturday, March 16

What Happens After the Glitz?

After the glitz of the holidays and the joy of Christ's birth, we arrive at a more sobering event Lent. Christians vary greatly in their observance of this Holy season. How much thought have you put into it? Has faith been a part and perhaps been thoroughly tested? Hopefully, you have been a part of a group or with friends to study the Bible. We will never know it all so a continuous process it should be. I've always been fascinated by the many interpretations that various churches and religions have...all on the pathway to heaven. So best wishes to all of us who proclaim to be Christians as we establish a stronger faith to guide us along the way.

And a special welcome for newcomers to our Voyagers potlucks the second Tuesdays of each month at 12:30 p.m. JOY is one of my favorite words that covers our social potluck meals as we are blessed to be "getting to know each other" during our meetings with always an interesting speaker or program. Sign up in the narthex, bring your special dish, your own place setting and ENJOY.

Peace to All,
Marge Eckert

Sunday, March 17

"Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. Every breath we take, every step we take, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment."

-Thich Nhat Hanh

The writing and teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh really resonate with me because they speak to an issue that I struggle with - being present in the moment.

I love the simplicity of the ways he suggests to be more present. Slow down, be grateful, smile, connect; actions that we can all incorporate into our lives that will bring joy to ourselves as well as the world around us.

Being mindful is a challenge for me. My mind races to the next thing I have to do, while I miss what is right in front of me in the present moment. A moment I can't get back. But I can try again the next moment, and with practice, I can get better at it. I have noticed that I am more mindful when I am walking in the woods, doing yoga, and praying. I could certainly benefit from doing more of all these things! God promises us His peace if we bring our worries to Him in prayer.

I plan to use these 40 days of Lent as a starting point to focus on being more present, more aware in the moment that is right in front of me, and experiencing more peace, joy, and serenity.

Kris Wendland

Monday, March 18

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

Four years ago today, my husband, Dick, looked at each individual in our living room with him, especially a long time at me, closed his eyes and passed to be with God. It was an extraordinary moment, and each person felt it.

In the next year, my last sibling, childhood friend, and other special friends have joined him. Those losses were also extremely difficult for me to accept. Had it not been for Christ's peace that I experienced through trust and prayer, as well as the outreach of family and friends who trust in the Lord, I wonder where I would have been today. I turned my anxious thoughts over to Christ, and He has given me peace and continues to walk with me each day.

Liz Pomeroy

* * *

1 Peter 3:11 *They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.*

Peace – according to Webster is a state of calm and quiet; public security under law. My focus today is on peace of mind. To obtain that, one must be cognitive of the needs of others – both locally and far away. Directing our actions in those areas will lead to an inner peace. Assisting, anonymously, of course both financially and spiritually, can achieve wellbeing in others and in ourselves. When that happens, we will experience a healthy peace of mind.

Jeanne Eleanor Franklin (Barb Shimnoski's sister who enjoys our devotional writings and wanted to contribute)

Tuesday, March 19

As I thought about the topic of Peace Beyond Understanding many thoughts went through my mind, but the most persistent thought was of the deep, unexplainable inner peace I felt during a difficult and stressful time of our lives.

In 2006 Mark and I took a huge leap of faith and moved to Michigan from the west coast. The move enabled us to have a very different (slower) lifestyle. Mark, self-employed, worked from home, and I became a stay at home mom for the first time, to our then 11 year old. We bought our first home and got a dog. Life was good.

In 2008 the US was experiencing a recession. In January 2010 when I was beginning to feel we may be safe, Mark lost his job. Our lives were about to change. Neither of us were working or eligible for unemployment benefits, and employment of any kind was hard to find.

The year that followed was full of anxiety and fear because of having a mortgage, health insurance, and bills. This, coupled with the changes, uncertainty, and instability, was especially hard for our over anxious daughter. But in spite of the fear of not knowing how long we were going to be underemployed, I experienced a deep sense of peace and comfort, and a feeling that we would eventually be ok. Rationally these feelings made little sense considering what we were experiencing but God's peace transcends all understanding.

Praise be to God. Amen

Maxine Ferris

Wednesday, March 20

HOW'S YOUR LIFE DOING?

Your Spiritual Life, that is. Lent is a good time to refresh the walk with the Lord, to recharge the spiritual batteries. There are many possibilities for that to happen if we open ourselves: put up our spiritual antennae. Seek blessings, expect them; You may find your soul refreshed in a line from a hymn, a poignant witness from a friend, laughter from a child, a prayer answered, a broken heart on the mend, a comforting thought from a sermon, an uplifting anthem from the choir, a warm conversation, some encouraging phone chatter, other surprising times and places. Be ready; it will happen.

If you would really like to "take the plunge" into Lent, read the intimate Gospel according to John at one sitting or a chapter at a time. You will have a Companion on your Journey.

Jesus, as you walked, talked, and prayed with your Followers of old, we are grateful that you continue to do so. Amen

Arthur Van Eck

* * *

I believe in God.
I believe in Jesus.
I believe in the Presbyterian Church.
I believe in my friends.

Tom Antaya

Thursday, March 21

A Clear Sign

I was very fortunate that my mother chose to move from Connecticut to Traverse City as she began her decline into dementia. She found an apartment where she could walk to most things she needed, and she happily settled in for several years. As her abilities diminished, I was able to fill the gaps. I knew she would eventually need to move into an assisted living facility but felt I would somehow know when that was necessary. The evidence supporting a move became more and more abundant, but it still did not seem urgent.

Then a day came when I was driving through downtown near Mom's home. It was an icy, wintry day, and as I turned onto Front Street, there standing on the corner was my mother. In spite of warnings to not venture outside, including a sign on her door to call me if she needed anything, **AND** here she was on an icy street corner. I pulled over and greeted her, "Hey, Mom! What's up?" She said she needed to go to the bank but could not remember where it was. She was one block from the bank and two blocks from her home of seven years but could not find her way. This was my sign: Mom on a street corner in winter and lost!

I do not believe that it was merely luck that our paths crossed on that day. I believe it was God sending me a clear signal that it was time for her to move. It was a sad day but also a relief that we could move her to a place where she would be safe and cared for. I thank God for the clear sign and for allowing me to be near her during her journey to the end.

Laura Jacobson

Friday, March 22

With the recent passing of my Mom this past November, I have been spending a lot of time with my Dad. He is 91, was married to my Mom for 71 years and he really misses her.

My Dad is a Korean War veteran and served in the Army/Infantry from 1952 to 1954. He spent most of his last year on the front lines, pretty much in steady battle. To say that it is a miracle that you are reading this is an accurate statement. He narrowly escaped death many times and as a 19 year old kid, became a squad leader and sergeant commanding many soldiers.

In one of his largest and most lethal battles, Outpost Harry, he spent 8 straight days and nights in constant battle. Despite being outnumbered 30 to 1, he survived. Of the 200 men in his company, he and 48 others walked off that hill.

My Dad has a peace about him when telling us these stories....one that he describes as if God had wanted him to live so he could return home to his young wife, start a family of four boys and serve the Lord for the rest of his life. He is an example of someone who, despite surviving against all odds and losing his most loving wife, is at peace with the world and his life. I know we can all learn something from my Dad...I certainly have.

Mark Guy

Saturday, March 23

When I was in college I would fret and worry about an upcoming test or an especially difficult assignment. This angst would translate into sleeplessness. My Mom gave me a suggestion to keep my night-time anxieties at bay. She'd say, "In your mind, picture everything that you're worried about and imagine placing it into a big bag with a drawstring at the top. Once everything is in the bag, draw the string tight and then mentally put it beside the bed. Leave it there, knowing that in the morning you can "open it" and deal with your worries in the light of day."

That worked for a while. As the years passed and life became more full and complicated with family, extended family, a career, civic responsibilities—the virtual bag with the drawstring wasn't cutting it. Sleep eluded me and still does to this day. Getting to sleep is fine, the problem is staying that way.

I've talked to lots of people—especially women—who have this same problem. It doesn't help to know there are other sufferers. I'm concerned for them too! Worry. Anxiety. Stress. Tension. Angst.

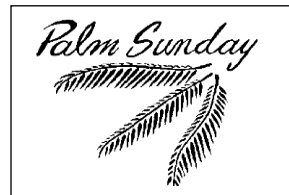
We hear lots of tips and techniques from self-help authors, bloggers, and counselors. Praying isn't typically at the top of their lists. But it should be at the top of ours. The Lord IS near! In the past few years I've been focusing on prayer when I lie awake. Often it works as I drift off mid-conversation with God. On the occasions when it doesn't, my fallback is the "Travel with Rick Steves" podcast!

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.

Kathleen Guy

March 24



Peace is something we would often like to have in our lives here on earth. Unfortunately, many of us, so busy in our own life, have too many responsibilities. Sometimes, the best laid plans that we worked on for so long, will not come to fruition because of an unexpected interruption to our plan which brings more stress or feelings of frustration. I think that we can all recall those times in our own lives when we had similar situations. Perhaps we should take more time to relax, take a breath, and give thanks for all the gifts we have.

How to find Peace? Let me count the ways I find peace. Take time to spend time in nature by taking a walk on the beach, TART Trail, Boardman Lake Trail and don't forget to stop along the way to appreciate your surroundings and give thanks to God for the beauty all around you. Lie on a hammock (or similar) and listen to the birds, see the leaves and clouds above you, the feel of the wind, smell the scents around you and give thanks to God for creating all these things for his children.

What peace beyond understanding for me is this: Knowing that God is always there to share your good times and difficult ones. Whether you acknowledge his existence or not, God is there, waiting for you to find him. God's calming presence in times of despair soothes the soul. This is peace beyond understanding for me. God is my Rock.

Blessings, Kerry Secrist

Monday, March 25

Peace Beyond Understanding

In the book Where to Find It in The Bible-The Ultimate A to Z Resource by Ken Anderson (copyright) 1996), I looked up both "Peace" and "Understanding" and found these two appropriate entries:

Peace – 1st Corinthians 2:9-10

But, as is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human hearer conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Understanding – Effect of attitude or understanding.

Matthew 13:13 Jesus was questioned why he spoke in parables. He is quoted as saying in verse 13 – *The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand."*

Both of these are very relevant in how we interpret these scriptures and leave me wondering if we need more parables.

Both of the Biblical interpretations are from The Access Bible,* and will likely be worded differently in other Bibles.

*The Access Bible New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha, Gail and David Peterson, Editors, copyright 1999 Oxford University Press, Inc.

Betty Koons

March 26

I was excited yet a little hesitant to make my first mission trip last spring. Excited because it was a chance to be with friends on an altruistic journey to help others yet hesitant about my own reaction to inner city poverty, homelessness, and injustices.

It's hard to explain the sense of compassion and empathy we all experienced that week which now makes me wonder if our help was **answering someone's prayers**. Were we somehow vessels of God's answers for them? What could be the relationship between their prayers to God and pure altruism?

If pure altruism involves helping someone else, a stranger, without any reward or self-aggrandizement and is motivated by personal values and morals, then we know God's answer is in our own church's mission creed:

Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

I hope we continue to be kind and empathetic, to look for opportunities to help others, and understand that God is helping us find the way.

Rick Cooper

Wednesday, March 27

Oh, how I long for *peace beyond understanding!* Raising teenagers, working in the medical field, managing people, navigating strained family relationships, and financial stress leaves me feeling most unpeaceful most of the time. I imagine you can quickly name situations or circumstances in which you long for peace right now as well. It is surely a deep ache of the whole human existence.

My husband and I have a small goat farm in the woods of Leelanau County. People ask us all the time, "What made you decide to do this?" It seems counterintuitive with our already very busy lives to take on something more, but I think this little farm is the closest thing I've found to a peace that passes understanding.

Homesteading beckons me to a simpler time. I get outside. I get my hands dirty. I taste my sweat as I muck goat stalls and work on fences in the Summer. I see my breath as I crack ice out of water buckets and shovel my way to the chicken coop in the Winter. While it is hard work, it is also deeply satisfying.

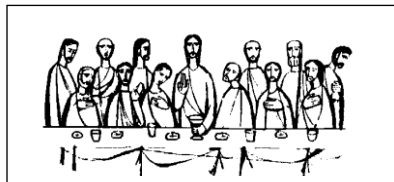
In the barn, everything is quiet except for the breathing animals and the chirping birds and rustling leaves outside. As I milk the goats, happily munching on grain, I am aware that we are partners: caregiver and cared for. We give each other what we need in a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation. It is simple and beautiful. In the barn, nothing can find me. I am protected from the rat race and the countless undertakings vying for my attention.

Philippians 4:7 says, "*and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"

While we may find protection for our peace in life's simple joys, and the pursuit of our God-given talents, passions, and hobbies, we must also seek out community and connection with Christ. For it is only in the Gospel truth and promise that our relentless pursuit for soul-satisfying peace can be found.

Stefany Comeaux

March 28 Maundy Thursday



"I am giving you a new road to walk," he said. "In the same way I have loved you, you are to love each other. This kind of love will be the sign for all people that you are walking the road with me."
John 13:34-35, First Nations Version

An Invitation to the Table

Come you who have been walking the road for a long time and you who are just now packing your bags to begin the journey.
Come you who rejoice in your faithful traveling companions and you who have felt betrayed.

Come you who have been stumbling over the pot-holes of injustice and you who have been doing your best to repair the road for those traveling behind you.

Come you who have taken a detour into the lands of despair or hate, or retaliation and you who have stayed steady on the road of love.

Come all you who are hungry from the long journey, you who need food and drink and rest to keep walking.

Come you who long for peace even knowing how this night will end and how the world treats those who try to walk this new road.

This table is our peace, our oasis, our home. Jesus welcomes us here to remind us why we are on the journey, to nourish us for the journey, and to remember that he is the beginning and ending of our journey.

Come. This table is for you.

Julie Delezenne



March 29 Good Friday

Jesus said to Peter, "*Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?*" John 18:11

As they left Gethsemane, Jesus and the disciples were confronted by Roman soldiers' intent on making an arrest. Peter had devoted his whole life to this man! It's no wonder he felt compelled to oppose by force. But Jesus would not have it. After leaving blood, sweat, and tears in the garden, he knew what he had to do. It was time.

This means Peter was left to watch his Teacher and Friend fall into the hands of a violent empire. In a moment when his *instinct* was to fight, his *instruction* was to maintain peace and accept Jesus' fate. Can you imagine how difficult that must have been?

We're all confronted with similar moments in our faith journey. So often we're tempted to defend, to fight, to oppose. But Jesus' call to us often echoes that same moment with Peter. Lashing out with intent to harm does nothing to make things right, as human history proves over and over. True strength reveals trust in a God that is working above and beyond this moment, though we may not see it now.

As we reflect upon the events of Good Friday, I invite you to prayerfully meditate on the repeated lyrics of the song "Weapons" by Son Lux. You can simply read them below, but I recommend finding the song online and listening to the whole thing. What weapons does Jesus call you to set aside? How might you let him in today?

"Put down
all your weapons
Let me in
through your open wounds"

Jordan Starkenburg

Easter Saturday, March 30



In May 2022, the church mission team spent a week in Manistique at Habitat for Humanity. The Habitat building was a beautiful, brick school about 100 years old.

Habitat's wish list of jobs involved painting a large room, which had a fireplace and stage area, presently serving as a conference room and restoring a nearby house that had been stripped down to its shell. We were also informed that new drapery panels for the stage needed to be hemmed so I took my sewing machine in case it was needed. There were also meals to prep and serve and we all helped with that.

Most painted the conference room, and some worked at the house. As it turns out, the drapery panels were still needing hems raised so I volunteered for that and finished early.

Everyone was concerned about the short period of time to do all the work. After the drapes were done, I went to help in the conference room and was amazed how quickly all was falling into place. The walls were done, touch-ups and trim almost so, and one of us had taken up an unplanned chore of cleaning and restoring the woodwork. Although we were busy at work and enjoying each other's company, there was plenty of time for more relaxed fellowship during breaks and evenings.

This adventure fulfilled a long-time dream of mine. It was another way to respond to God's grace. Author Philip Yancey discussed the implications of Grace in *What's So Amazing about Grace?* Two of these were "Grace teaches us to extend kindness and compassion even when it is difficult or inconvenient" and "Grace encourages us to give without expecting anything in return."

Joan Cooper

Easter Sunday, April March 31

In 2019, I had the privilege of going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a group of colleagues. I've been reflecting on the experiences we had there recently as violence has once again escalated in that region.



On one of our last days there, we were able to wander Old Jerusalem. I, along with hundreds of other pilgrims, wandered into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is also known as the Church of the Resurrection. According to tradition going back to the 4th century, the church contains not only the place of Jesus' crucifixion (Golgatha) but also his resurrection (the empty tomb).

I waited in line first to touch the stone on which the faithful have believed for centuries Jesus was crucified. The place of the crucifixion was up a flight of stairs and then sheltered by a large glass case. One had to bend down, kneeling on the ground, reaching into a small space to touch the stone that millions had touched before.

Most pilgrims were somber and quiet as we waited to touch this holy space. Just in front of me in line, however, was a girl about 4 years in age along with what appeared to be her mom and grandma. From their look and dress, I guessed they might be Ethiopian Orthodox.

She had as much energy as any 4 year old and showed her "reverence" much differently than the adults around her. As her adults bent down to touch the stone, she managed to climb on top of the glass case that encompassed it. With her successful climb, she laughed and swung her feet back and forth without a care in the world.

A guard raced over angrily just as her mom was emerging.

The scene was quickly over. But the experience stuck with me. Joy and peace even in the face of death. Joy and peace beyond our understanding- and yet a child might lead us there. It seemed to be a most fitting scene for this place that held both death and resurrection.

It's the joy and peace Paul instructs the Philippians (and us) to live by: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice... The Lord is near... And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

IN MEMORIAM

'Bob' Allen Robert

Ross Baylis

Jim Couling

Marilyn Curtiss

Neil Gilbert

Sylvia Johnston

Brenda Kerrigan

Miriam 'Mim' Longcore

Pat Metzker

Paul Morris

Bonnie Rhoads

Velma Roberts

Barbara Sisco

Edith Stephenson

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