



2019 Lenten Devotional

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Introduction

Lent is a season of preparation before Easter, the forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter, not including Sundays. We can use this season as a period of fasting, reflecting on Christ's sacrifice, and engaging in spiritual renewal by practicing spiritual disciplines.

Our theme for the year is FBC Connect: Called to Love.



The symbol of the cross clearly illustrates our call to love and to connect with God and with others. The vertical beam stretches from heaven to earth, representing a disciple's ever deepening love for God. The horizontal beam reaches outward like the arms of Jesus to embrace the world, representing a disciple's growth in love for others.

As a disciple community we are called to love God and our neighbors as we love ourselves.

During this time of Lent we will reflect on how we can grow in our love for God and others and hear the stories of how our church is loving God and others.

We will consider how we, as a community, can love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength through: Worship, Prayer, and Spiritual Formation (represented by the vertical beam of the cross). And we will reflect on how we, as a community, can love others through: Care, Missions, and Witness (represented by the horizontal beam of the cross).

As the connected community of faith named First Baptist Church, Frankfort, we connect with God and we connect with our neighbors.

Thank you to our many authors who shared their stories and reflections.

Schedule

Except for the week of Ash Wednesday and Holy Week, the devotionals will highlight a different theme each day of the week:

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|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sundays – Worship | Wednesdays – Missions | Saturdays – Reflection Questions |
| Mondays – Care | Thursdays – Spiritual Formation | |
| Tuesdays – Prayer | Fridays - Witness | |

Together these devotionals teach us what it really means to be God's church.



Wednesday, March 6

Ash Wednesday

Luke 4:1-13

Keith Felton

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the season of Lent which marks a forty-day period representing the time Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism. This almost six-week period is reserved for reflection, prayer and fasting in preparation for Easter. Many Christians will attend an Ash Wednesday service where ashes will be applied to their forehead in the shape of a cross. The ashes are a symbol of penance which is an outward expression of an inward commitment to the principles of the Lenten season.

When we traverse through the deserts of our own journey, we realize just how dependent upon God we truly are. Most of our ‘desert’ times are unexpected and circumstantial, while other times we put ourselves in the desert through sin and bad choices. Either way, we find out who we are and who God can be to us during these times. When Jesus went into the desert after his baptism, it was not because of sin, bad choices, neither was it accidental or because of some tragedy. Jesus went there intentionally knowing the sacrifices and adversity would bring growth, wisdom and connectivity with God and humanity. I believe this is how Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season can be for us as we follow Jesus into the desert. Christians observe this season in various ways. Many fast or give up something desirable which they hope will help them focus and rely upon God more. Others use this time for self-examination and penance.

In whatever ways you observe this season, I encourage you to remember this: Jesus ultimately connected to us through sacrifice. What do we sacrifice in order to connect with God and others?



Thursday, March 7

Loving Your Neighbor

Luke 10:25-37

Keith Stillwell

When an expert in Jewish law tested Jesus with the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life,” Jesus put the question back to him. The lawyer answered with what has been called the greatest commandments, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus affirmed the lawyer’s answer, but the lawyer had a follow up, “And who is my neighbor?” He wanted to know the limits of neighbor love. To whom do I show love and more importantly, who can I avoid. The assumption was that my neighbor is the person near me, those people across the street who look like me.

Jesus answered with a story—the well-known story of The Good Samaritan. It is difficult for us understand the shock Jesus’ audience must have felt when Jesus introduced the hero of the story as a Samaritan—a hated Samaritan; a people whom many of Jesus’ listeners would have considered to be of the wrong religion, race, and nationality; an enemy. In Jesus’ telling of the story, his fellow Jews, were in the position of the half dead man in the ditch, and it was the despised Samaritan who came to the rescue.

Read the story again and fill in the blank. Who is your Samaritan? Who is that person or group that you find hard to connect with? Who do you find hard to love? Honestly, it makes me uncomfortable to read the story with me in the ditch and some person, or group, I don't like coming to my rescue, but that is the point of this story.

We are called to love all people with mutual love and respect. Not only do we give love, we graciously receive love from others. Especially the unloved, the despised and rejected, those of different race, nationality, religion and culture, because all are our neighbors. And it just might be that Samaritan neighbor that offers you the help you need.



Friday, March 8
Loving God
Luke 10:38-42
Keith Stillwell

Mary's experience of sitting in Jesus' presence, listening attentively, has often been held up as an example of prayer, meditation, and devotion. "Mary has chosen the better part," Jesus said, "which will not be taken away from her." It was not wrong for Martha to work at cleaning house and preparing a meal or whatever these "tasks" were. Martha was attending to the important task of offering hospitality to a guest. When Jesus sent out the seventy missionaries (Luke 10:1-12), he offered a special blessing to all who received them, "peace to this house." And, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus commends the Samaritan for his action and says, "Go and do likewise." Martha's problem was not that she was active, but that she allowed her "many tasks" to distract her from recognizing God's presence in her home. Martha's daily chores, as necessary as they may be, are temporary. Mary's prayerful relationship with Jesus is eternal.

Sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus, just being in God's presence and loving God, is always a meaningful experience for me. But too often, I fail to stop, be still and listen to God. The "To Do" list hangs over my head. Deadlines are approaching quickly. Like Martha, I get busy with tasks that may be important, but none so important that I should neglect to sit at Jesus' feet. I need to show my love and devotion to God, to listen and learn, to find the peace of God that passes understanding.

We, as a church, need to sit at Jesus feet together. We show our love for God through worship, prayer, and spiritual formation. Having spent time with God, we learn and grow, our priorities become clearer, work becomes more focused and caring, and God's mission for our church is discerned.



Saturday, March 9

Loving Yourself

Luke 10:25-28

Steve Hadden

Are you kidding? Jesus taught: “deny yourself, take up your cross, lose your life to find it.” St. Francis in “Lord, Make Me An Instrument of Thy Peace,” declared, “for it is in dying that we are born into eternal life.”

Jesus also taught, “love your neighbor as yourself.” (and we probably do!) If we cannot be patient and kind with ourselves, it will be a challenge to treat others that way.

A bit of paradox? Do we have to die to self in order to be re-born into a healthy self-love? Glenn Hinson, one of my favorite seminary professors, introduced me to Bernard of Clairvaux’s thought on a progression of love:

Love of Self for Self’s Sake (selfish love)

Love of God for Self’s Sake (dependence on God)

Love of God for God’s Sake (intimacy with God)

Love of Self for God’s Sake (being united with God’s love)

John Claypool also influenced my thinking on self-love in one of his sermon books. The paragraph goes like this: “In my judgement, there is no issue of any greater practical significance than this issue of self-image. How do you view the gift of God that is yourself? All depends on your response. To accept yourself positively and live creatively on the basis of what God has made you is the way to joy, but to deny and reject God’s gift of yourself is the way to ruin” (*The Light Within You*).

Ann Lamott has a great insight as well, “Being full of affection for one’s goofy, self-centered, cranky, annoying self is home. It’s where world peace begins.” Perhaps self-love and self-care are primary to loving God and our neighbors?

“by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10a).



Sunday, March 10
Loving God Through Worship
Isaiah 6:1-13 (vs. 1-8)
Richard Summers

Praise/Adoration

One of the most powerful moments of praise I have ever experienced occurred several years ago on an Easter Sunday morning. On the Thursday evening previous we had held our first Tenebrae Service. The Tenebrae service had left us in darkness as the Christ candle had been extinguished at the conclusion of the service. On that Easter morning the choir was singing “Resurrection Celebration” as the Christ candle began being processed down the aisle. Spontaneously, one of our fine members, Bettye Kerrick, rose to her feet as the Christ candle passed her row. Row by row, as the Christ candle passed, the congregation followed suit until the entire congregation was standing in honor and praise of the risen Christ, symbolized through the Christ candle. It was a moment that still brings chills to my spine every time I recall it. That is a great example of praise and adoration!

Isaiah tells in his vision of seeing God and his first response is praise. When we truly encounter God there can be no other response. His glory and holiness befits nothing less. The truth of the matter is that God is ALWAYS present with us. Praise comes when we actually acknowledge it. It’s not an easy task as we fill our lives with so many things that even on Sunday mornings when we gather for worship we often times don’t “see” God. May we strive in these days of Lent to become more aware of God’s presence and offer Him the praise He is due! Bettye Kerrick could not help herself that morning. She saw God and had to stand knowing she was on holy ground. May we do the same.



Monday, March 11
Loving Others Through Care
Psalms 71:9
Mike Luscher

Caring for the Homebound and Nursing Home Residents

“Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.”
(Psalm 71:9)

I thank GOD for FBC Frankfort staff, deacons and members for showing Love through Care. As a shut-in, I can name four specific recent instances of FBC Connect:

- a. FBC Christmas Caroling Group, who visited our home and sang wonderfully, and it allowed me to meet Marcus Pernell, the new Minister of Students;
- b. FBC staff establishing the technology, allowing me to participate in classes remotely on my laptop;
- c. FBC Deacon serving me Communion, after 16 months; and

- d. FBC staff creating the “live streaming” of our Sunday morning services on our FBC website and Facebook account.

All of these provide a connection between FBC and myself. No shut-in wants to be forgotten by our Church family. If you were not involved in the above, you may need to put your Caring Love in motion.

In John 21:16, Jesus, after confirming Simon Peter’s love, said “Take care of my sheep.” How does one show love and care to someone who cannot attend Church any longer? First and foremost, “Pray for the shut-ins and those in nursing facilities.”

Additionally, there are many ways you can show your Care. You can make a phone call, ask what you can do to help them, make a visit, send a card, assist them in getting to their appointments, etc.

Prayer: *GOD, help me express my love to shut-ins and those in nursing facilities.*



Tuesday, March 12
Loving God Through Prayer
Luke 11:1-4
Tom Midkiff

The Lord’s Prayer in Luke

This is what the model prayer means to me. I should love God and talk to God often as I would to a close friend or relative. I should look for ways to help make God's will happen wherever I am and be grateful that I have everything I need each day. I need to ask for forgiveness when I fail and forgive other people who fail. Finally, I need to ask for God's help to keep me from being selfish.

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial. (NRSV)



Wednesday, March 13
Loving Others Through
Missions
Luke 19:1-10
Vicky Mitchell

Payday Lending

We marvel at how things have changed - the phone, electricity, and look at technology now! Yet some things have remained the same since Jesus was on the Earth – the call for us to love our neighbor and even the plight of those taking more than their fair share from our neighbor. In Jesus' time, Zacchaeus was a despised tax collector who took more than his fair share...much like our payday lenders of today. Who would ever say that 400% interest is fair and yet payday lenders get away with this!

First Baptist Church answered a ministry call when we began the Payday Lending program. Through this program we love our neighbors as Jesus calls us to do. We meet with a prospective client, and once approved for the program, they get a loan at a partnered financial institution for around 3% interest rate with reasonable payments. First Baptist Church's share secures the loan – a risk we are willing to take because we love our neighbor.

One client was a Veteran paying \$168 a month to cover his interest only. He was able to get the new loan and pay \$52 once a month for twelve months and be finished! Two of our most recent clients were both over 80 years old. These ladies are feeling the love of First Baptist Church as they have relief from the pressure and stress of the payday loan.

We have helped 35 clients in the two years since the program began February 1, 2017. We have loaned over \$19,000. Thank you for your generous donations to the program. Pray that God sends those that need us so we can continue to answer FBC Connect Call to Love!



Thursday, March 14 Loving God Through Spiritual Formation

Luke 18:15-17
Jenny Luscher

Spiritual Formation of Children

I am one of several people in the church around my age who grew up here, went away for a while, and have come back to the church. I truly believe this phenomenon comes from our feeling of this church as ‘home.’ As children, we were surrounded by a group of teachers, mentors, and elders who took time to truly see us. To love us. To teach us how to be part of God’s people and show His love to others.

The commitment to the spiritual development of children at First Baptist has never faltered. The most recent iteration of this commitment is Godly Play. According to Jerome Berryman, founder of Godly Play, we should “...teach children classical Christian language in a way that fosters playful orthodoxy. By this I mean that children need to be both deeply grounded in classical Christian communication and at the same time be open to new people, new ideas, and the future.”

Godly Play is designed to help children explore their faith in a fun and interactive way through stories of God’s people. But, it also gives them a language to talk about deep questions of life, the existential limits of aloneness, freedom, purpose, and death. The stories provide them with a knowledge of how people have struggled with these same questions for thousands of years and how God has been with them throughout that time. They are not alone.

The time, knowledge, and love given to the children of our church is invaluable. Through Sunday School, missions, Godly Play, and choirs, they are being provided with a firm foundation on which they will build their spiritual life as adults.

Won’t you come play?



Friday, March 15
Loving Others by Bearing
Witness
Luke 5:1-11
Gary and Angie Scott

Gone Fishing

When I read these verses in which Jesus speaks to a crowd from a boat, directs a fishing expedition, and calls several men to be on His team, I believe He is already giving clues as to how He intends for us to live, organize ourselves, and proclaim His word.

Jesus began His ministry by gathering together a team of people to proclaim His teachings—the beginnings of the “body of Christ.” We in the present have the advantage of fully knowing the whole story of His ministry. However, in the early stages of Christ’s mission, these fishermen simply may have been intrigued, but certainly could not have fully understood what was ahead. Still they followed. The circumstance of being in that place at that time created an opportunity. His disciples began with a faith based on Jesus’ actions to mobilize them, and then acted as a group to achieve Jesus’ immediate goal. Although the actions were routine and not “heavenly,” they were crucial to the success of the event.

Just think of the many different people who worked to make the scene unfold as it is relayed to us:

- someone owned and maintained the boat (He chose Simon’s)
- someone held the boat while He climbed in
- someone rowed the boat away from shore and held it steady while He spoke
- several operated the nets (although initially a bit skeptical)
- several more “partners” (Luke’s word) helped haul the loaded nets ashore

This cooperative effort to accomplish seemingly mundane tasks led to a remarkable calling to become “fishers of people,” and the decision made by several of the fisherman to devote themselves to Jesus’ ministry. Amid other questions, one can ponder if we would have had enough courage to physically leave everything as they did. Although for us it is not so dramatic, in many ways our decision to follow Jesus and live by His teaching does indeed show similar courage and conviction.

This is a lesson for us as we conduct ourselves in everything we do both as individuals and as a Church body. We cannot always know the end result of our accumulated collective actions through worship, missions, and daily interaction with others, but we should understand that through each of those efforts we grow the “body of Christ.” Jesus made it clear that each of us is a part of the body and we present our unique talents to make up the whole—while some get to row, some get to hold the boat steady, and then others pull in the catch.



Saturday, March 16
Worship: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Think of a worship experience that has helped our community of faith connect more fully with God and helped us grow in our love for God. What made it special? What did this experience mean to you and to the church?
2. How can you/we connect with God more fully and love God more deeply through worship?
5. Take a moment to thank God for the gift of worship.



Sunday, March 17 **Loving God Through Worship**

Isaiah 6:1-13 (v. 5)

Elaine Greer

Confession/Repentance

I was born in 1950 into a deeply devout Southern Baptist family. I really was at church “every time the door was open.” Altar calls were a normal part of worship. I would watch, as the front of the church would fill with my Sunday School teacher, my family, all the familiar faces in my church, as they knelt along the front, many crying, others praying aloud. Church provided a safe place for Christians to confess their sins.

So what happened? We do not go forward at the invitation to confess or rededicate our lives to God. Confession requires an honest self-awareness without which we cannot grow spiritually. Otherwise, we are just fooling ourselves into thinking we can keep secrets from God.

Isaiah 6 recounts Isaiah’s vision. He cries out, “Woe to me, I am ruined. I have unclean lips...but now I see the King, the Lord Almighty.” The seraphim shout, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.” In the Old Testament, the chief attribute of God is holiness. The Hebrew word for “holiness” means to separate. In this scripture, Isaiah reminds us of the immense difference between our humanity and God’s holiness. It was not until he was able to take ownership of his personal sin and to proclaim God’s holiness that Isaiah was able to see God.

Let this be a season when we honestly confess our sins before a Holy God who seeks to cleanse us from the inside out and restore us to the joy of salvation.



Monday, March 18 **Loving Neighbors Through** **Care**

Luke 18:35-43

Rick Mason

Caring for the Sick and Hospitalized

In Luke 18:35-43, the blind beggar has faith that Jesus will heal him. In spite of being told to be quiet by others who were there, he continued to ask Jesus for mercy. We know that Jesus knew what the man wanted but he still asked to see. Jesus healed him, and then credited his faith saying, “Receive your sight, your faith has healed you.”

Some are called to be in the healthcare field where they have a more direct role in caring for the sick and hospitalized. As members of a church family (and larger Christian family) we can provide spiritual support that will help our sick brothers or sisters maintain the strong faith that is

key to keeping a positive attitude. Having a positive attitude, especially when bolstered by Christian faith, has been proven to aid in physical healing. Hospitalized or homebound friends can easily get down and almost always appreciate a visit.

While we can't heal the blind man as Jesus did, we can help people by walking some part of their journey with them and showing them that we, like Jesus, care. And as a bonus, I've never made a visit to a sick friend that didn't leave ME feeling better.



Tuesday, March 19
Loving God Through Prayer
Luke 11:5-13
Hope Mitchell

Perseverance in Prayer

Victoria Mitchell and Garth Brooks taught me everything I needed to know about perseverance and prayer.

“And I say unto you,
Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be open unto you.”
(Luke 11:9)

She managed to turn that verse into a jingle that still lingers in the recesses of my mind 20 years later. Even more exciting than a room full of 4th graders bursting at the seams, all trying to be the first kid to finish that verse though, is the great news Jesus is giving us! He is letting us know we don't have to have all the answers. We just have to be willing to look. You can show up late, woefully unqualified, even in two different shoes, but if you are willing to seek him persistently, Jesus will see you through. That really takes the pressure off if you ask me.

To better illustrate what he meant, Jesus told of a man on a mission for a loaf of bread and then asked us to think about the relationship between a parent and a child. The man came away with his bread not because he was the baker's favorite customer, just his most irritating customer. Jesus concluded by asking us to consider our innate, but human desire to provide for the needs of our children...but on a divine scale. So, we must ask ourselves, how must the Lord WANT to fulfill our needs and wants?

As Garth reminds us,
“some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers...
just because He doesn't answer doesn't mean He doesn't care.”



Wednesday, March 20
Loving Neighbors Through
Missions
Matthew 25:31-40
Gary Forman

Clothes Closet

What a blessing it is to see people clothed through the efforts of the FBC Clothes Closet. People of all ages come on Wednesday nights to see what treasures they might find in our well maintained “shop”. They may fill one large plastic bag per household, every other week. On a typical Wednesday, 30 to 35 overflowing bags of clothing leave the fourth floor. The ministry begins with people donating used or new clothing. On Tuesday mornings, a small group comes in for several hours to sort and neatly hang the clothing and place the miscellaneous items ready for Wednesday nights. “Shoppers” arrive to get a number indicating when they will be allowed to go in for 20 minutes. Volunteers are ready at tables to receive their selections. Behind the scenes, other volunteers are sorting and hanging to add to the racks out front.

The blessings come when a mother with seven children is able to find clothes in the right sizes for each one, or a young child brings a book or a toy to the table with the biggest smile. On two separate occasions, a young man and woman came in for the first time seeking something to wear for job interviews. In both situations, they were very excited to find just what they needed. On cold winter nights, coats, sweatshirts, sweaters, jackets and other warm clothing are proudly brought to the tables.

At the end of the night, we are confident we have given some element of hope and shown Jesus’ love to our neighbors as we are called to do. Jesus says in Matthew 25:40, “Truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Answering the Call to Love is clearly evident in the FBC Clothes Closet Ministry.



Thursday, March 21
Loving God Through Spiritual
Formation
Luke 2:41-52
Marcus Pernel

Spiritual Formation of Youth

By no means is this passage suggesting, “Kids, run away from your parents! Let them worry!” Instead, I think this is less about Jesus’ “disappearance” from his parents than it is a foretelling of who and what Jesus is about- his Father’s house and business. As such, I’m of the belief that Luke orients our attention toward Jesus accepting his purpose on this earth during his pre-adolescent years. Had Mary and Joseph known this, that Jesus was at the temple studying with teachers for three days, would their anxiety have been calmed? Would they have responded the same because their son was missing?

What then could Luke 2:41-52 say toward our youth, like it does to 12-year old Jesus? “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” I think in one way this passage could offer encouragement for our youth to actively pursue God as they form their identity, sense of self, and even ask questions as to who they are. While they (and all of us as a whole) are, and constantly will be, forming their identity, having it shaped and molded in Christ makes this process more wholesome and meaningful. Like Jesus in this passage, it is in spending time with the Scriptures, asking questions and seeking discernment, and even surrounding oneself with godly folks, that their identity formation may come to flourish in ways that lead them down paths Christ walked.

May the peace and discernment of Christ be with you this Lenten season!



Friday, March 22
Loving Others by Bearing
Witness
Luke 5:27-32
Ralph Divine

Follow Me

“We are known by the company we keep” is an expression we often hear and is a practice we tend to follow. We are more comfortable with people who share our interests in family activities, sports, hobbies, religious beliefs and who share our social and economic status. We are reluctant to step outside our comfort zone—outside the box.

Jesus called Levi to be one of his disciples with the simple invitation of “follow me.” Levi was a tax collector who worked for the Roman government and was not liked by the people. They considered him a “cheat,” or a sinner, not one to be trusted. But he accepted Jesus’ invitation to follow him and promptly held a banquet for Jesus. Luke 5:29b says, “and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.”

Luke presents Jesus as a friend of sinners. Jesus associated with all kinds of people and that practice did not meet the approval of the Pharisees. They made every effort to separate themselves from sinners willing to accept them only after they repented and became a Pharisee. Jesus practiced salvation by inclusion and associated with sinners in an effort to lead them to God and a new life. Like today, there was not a closer relationship than table fellowship and Jesus used the opportunity to share a time of close fellowship at Levi’s house.

When he was challenged by the Pharisees for eating with sinners, Jesus used the analogy of a physician who goes where the sick people are. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31, 32). Jesus calls us to follow as he did Levi. The example he wants us to follow is to spend more time with people with spiritual needs.

As we consider our group of friends, who is most pleased with our choices, Jesus or the Pharisees? What does this group of friends reveal about us? What might I do to cultivate a relationship with someone outside the church?



Saturday, March 23

Care: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Think of an experience when our community of faith has expressed loving care for others or for yourself (perhaps during a time of illness or grief, or for a homebound member or a nursing home resident). What impact did the experience have on those who expressed care and on those who received care? What did this experience mean to you?
2. How and when can you/we connect with others by showing care?
3. Take a moment to thank God for the gift of caring.



Sunday, March 24
Loving God Through Worship
Isaiah 6:1-13 (v. 6-7)
Elaine Shryock-Allen

Assurance of Forgiveness

Much like our desert ancestors, we strive toward the goal to please God. That is, until we become bored, discouraged or frustrated by a task that sometimes seems just out of reach. The human response to this frustration or failure is to accept the lie that we are broken and will never be worthy of His promise to love us no matter what.

Have you wondered how many times God will hear your confessions and still offer His outstretched arms of mercy and forgiveness? Is it possible that He can still love us?

Unlike our desert families who were instructed to build altars to sacrifice animals for the atonement of their sins, we can rejoice in the knowledge that our creator of the universe found the solution to the problem of sinfulness once and for all....on the cross of Jesus Christ!! Amen! The thought that He, who was innocent and without guilt, stood in for us, paying the price for our sinfulness, can be overwhelming. Our worship must surely reflect this incredible exchange. Our gratitude must now be demonstrated for others that they, too, might hear His still small voice of forgiveness and mercy.

Lord, thank you for your assurance of forgiveness. Accept this worship that all we say and do is pleasing to you now and forever. Amen!



Monday, March 25
Loving Neighbors Through
Care
John 11:28-38
Anne Wesley Mayes

Caring in Times of Grief

Friends are such an important part of our lives. We spend lots of time with them talking, eating, laughing, playing games and sharing hopes and dreams. And then we lose someone or one suffers a debilitating illness that changes that person and a time of grieving comes.

Such was the case in this scripture passage from John when Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus, dies. Jesus spent much time during his ministry with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. The scripture says, "Jesus wept." As Jesus went with Mary to Lazarus' tomb, he was deeply moved in spirit. Grief comes to all of us. Everyone grieves differently. Like Jesus, when we lose a

friend, we weep and our heart aches. So how do we care for and show our love for those who are grieving?

First, we can ask God to grant them peace and comfort during their time of sadness and loss. Second, we can be available with a hug, a sympathetic word, a shoulder to lean on, a listening ear and a show of love and compassion as friends or loved ones share their feelings.

After the passing of our son, a friend gave us an Elf-Help Book entitled “Grief Therapy” by Karen Katafiasz (Abbey Press, 2004). Not only did the book help us, but we have shared it with others. The times that used to mean only joy and celebration—anniversaries, holidays, birthdays and more—can now be among the toughest of days. We can show our love and concern for those hurting during these difficult times.

There were other times when Jesus showed compassion for the hurting—for Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15); for Jarius, a synagogue ruler, whose daughter was ill (Mark 5:21-24); for blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52).

Jesus set an example for us as he showed love and compassion to those who were grieving. Can we do no less?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be aware of those who are grieving for whatever reason. May we show our love and compassion as they go through difficult times. Thank you for setting an example for us. Amen.



Tuesday, March 26
Loving God Through Prayer
Luke 18:1-8
Lara Mason

Persistence in Prayer

Persistence in prayer is illustrated for the disciples by Jesus through this parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. “God,” he says, “will bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night.” Jesus knew the sort of trials that his followers were bound to face in the days leading to and following his crucifixion. He knew that the way for them to stand up under these trials was to stay persistent in their prayers. He knew that the way for them to become examples for all of us to follow was to stay persistent in their prayers.

Persistence in prayer was interpreted by Hollywood in 1946 by the creators of, “It’s a Wonderful Life”, which has become a Christmastime movie staple for many. In the opening scene, dozens of residents of Bedford Falls are persistently praying, each in his or her own way, for George Bailey, who is having a crisis of faith. Angels discuss the situation, and one of them is soon sent to minister to Bailey, who eventually discovers that he indeed has had a wonderful life.

Persistence in prayer is something repeated throughout the New Testament by those who heard this parable, and by those who came to know the man who told it: James 5:16 tells us that “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Paul writes in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition...present your requests

to God.” Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer....” It seems that these three, along with so many others who came to know Jesus, are passing on this message to us. We need to pray, pray, and pray. We need to pray for each other and for ourselves, because when we pray, God hears us.



Wednesday, March 27
Loving Neighbors Through
Missions
Luke 13:10-17
Dana Nickles

Mission Frankfort Clinic

In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus was teaching at a synagogue on the Sabbath when he stopped to heal a woman who had been disabled for 18 years. The ruler of the synagogue criticized Jesus for healing the woman on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by calling the ruler and his followers hypocrites because they had cared for their animals on that day, but found fault in Jesus for healing a long-suffering child of God. In this passage, Jesus tells us to follow His teachings instead of the expectations of our society.

Recently, a man who was staying at the local homeless shelter came to the Mission Frankfort Clinic and asked for help. He had been released from a psychiatric hospital, was hungry, had lost his wallet, and had four empty medicine bottles. We provided a meal to him while we waited for our medical volunteers to arrive. Then the man saw a doctor and received free medicine from our pharmacy. We referred him to a mental health provider for psychiatric care and social services, and invited him to come back to the clinic.

People who need help cross our paths every day. Society may tell us that some people do not deserve our help because they are immigrants or unemployed or have a criminal history. Jesus calls us to ignore society's rules and follow his teachings to love and care for everyone.



Thursday, March 28
Loving God Through Spiritual
Formation
Luke 8:4-15
Dwight Lovan

Parable of the Sower

The Parable of the Sower is a very familiar parable of Jesus and it is contained in all of the synoptic Gospels (see Matthew 13 and Mark 4). Some have suggested it might be better named, the Parable of the Soils. The Sower provides the same seed with a potential for growth to each of

the soils, but it is the preparation of each of the soils which determines the future of the seed. For people it is our foundation or formation which will determine if the Word will grow and spread.

When I was in high school, we moved to Houston. It was a very challenging time for me, but my dad and I got in the habit of taking walks most every day. We talked about many things, some light and some very serious. Soon I would be graduating high school and likely leaving home for good as I would head off to college, “all grown up.” He imparted so much wisdom to me on those walks and created in me a solid foundation/soil for the years ahead. He encouraged me to be strong in my faith and to be unafraid of others who might challenge my faith either personally or intellectually. I should use those experiences to learn and in learning, to further feed the soil of my soul.

On those walks, my dad was tilling and feeding the soil hoping and praying, I am sure, it would be well prepared for the growth of the seed. To this day when I read or enter a discussion about the mysteries of faith, I feel prepared because my dad took the time to prepare my soil. Can I do any less?



Friday, March 29
Loving Others by Bearing
Witness
Luke 7:18-23
Stephen Mason

Tell What You Have Seen

John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is “the one or should we expect someone else.” Jesus sent John’s messengers back and told them to report about what they had seen and heard. Jesus had been healing many people with a wide range of issues and ministering to the poor.

I’m thankful that as a church we are still carrying out the mission Jesus laid out for us throughout the New Testament. We are helping to heal the sick, breaking the cycle of poverty through our payday loan ministry, and helping with housing and other needs in Owsley County and beyond. My prayer is that we continue to live out this witness to our community and world. This mission emphasis sparked new life in our 200+ year old church. Most of the floor in our building used by the Mission Frankfort Clinic was empty and in disrepair for a period several years ago. Now almost every part of the facility is in use. God can work wonders when you follow Jesus’ example and heal the sick and help the poor.



Saturday, March 30

Prayer: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Think of an experience with prayer that has helped our community of faith connect more fully with God and helped us grow in our love for God? What made it special? What did this experience mean to you?

2. How can you/we connect with God more fully and love God more deeply through prayer?

3. Take a moment to thank God for the gift of prayer.



Sunday, March 31
Loving God Through Worship
Isaiah 6:1-13 (vs. 8-13)
Doris Wallace

God Speaks

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us.” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Isaiah saw in a vision that God is a holy, holy God, the sovereign ruler of the earth. How we, as Christians, grasp this holiness of God makes a difference in how we live and how we worship. As we worship this most holy God, whether corporately or personally, we must take time to listen to His voice. Perhaps we will hear him through the Word, a sermon, music, prayer, silence, etc. But our focus must be on Him, the holy Creator and Father of all.

One of the most powerful ways He speaks to us is through His Word, and we must feel the power of that Word and be obedient to what He is calling us to do. But, in whatever way we hear His voice, let us remember, we have been created to bring glory to Him and to make disciples of all the nations.

Let us be willing to say, as did Isaiah, “Here am I. Send me”!

- To my neighbor
- To the sick
- To the needy
- To the bereaved
- To my family
- To the mission field
- To social media
- To my coworker
- To my friend
- To the lonely

Father, open my ears that I may hear. Send me.



Monday, April 1
Loving Neighbors Through
Care
John 2:1-11
Bob Browning

Wedding Compassion

Johnny Carson was the host of the Tonight Show from 1962-1992. He mastered the art of putting people at ease while casually talking to them in front of a television camera, making it possible for millions of people to listen and watch.

One of his guests was an eight-year-old boy from West Virginia who rescued two playmates from a mine shaft. When Johnny discovered his guest attended church regularly, he asked him what he was studying in Sunday school.

“Last week,” he replied, “our lesson was about Jesus going to a wedding and turning water into wine.”

“What did you learn from that story?” Carson asked.

The boy squirmed in his chair, and after a while it became apparent he had not thought about the meaning of this story. Finally, he lifted his head and looked Johnny squarely in the eye. He was now ready to answer Johnny’s question.

“Here is what I learned,” he said to Carson, “If you are going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!” Of course, the crowd roared with laughter.

Jesus’ appearance at the wedding in Cana tells me much about him. Turning water into wine tells me even more.

On the third day of Jesus’ public ministry, he and the disciples attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee. In all likelihood, the bride or groom was one of Jesus’ relatives based upon the leadership role his mother played in the story. Family members were expected to help fund the wedding or bring food and drink to the reception. Mary’s part in this drama indicates this was the wedding of a family member.

Sometime after Jesus arrived, a serious problem arose. Wine for the wedding guests ran out, which was inhospitable and humiliating.

No wonder Jesus’ mother, Mary, informed him of this crisis as soon as he and the disciples arrived. It was the highest priority on her ‘do something about this’ list.

After a brief but terse exchange between Jesus and his mother, Jesus agreed to resolve the problem. He instructed nearby servants to fill six nearby ceremonial water jars to the brim. After doing this, Jesus told the servants to begin taking the water to the master of the banquet.

Those of you familiar with this story know what the headmaster’s reaction was—shock and awe. Somewhere in this process this water changed to wine, and it was not only the best wine the chief steward had been given to serve at this wedding, but probably better than any wine he had served anywhere.

Since the master of the banquet did not know where this wine came from, he assumed the groom had provided it. This was why he said to him, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now” (John 2:10).

You know what intrigues me about this story in light of our Lenten theme this year? It is the way Jesus used his divine power to keep a young couple’s celebration from turning into a disaster.

Often, we associate compassion with people who are struggling to survive. We know how important it is to reach out to those who are battered and bruised by the harshness of life.

This story, however, reminds us it is also important to do our part to make special occasions special. Special events like weddings, birthdays, graduations, baptisms, anniversaries and retirements need to be acknowledged and shared with family members and dear friends.

Working behind the scene and going out of our way to make special occasions special is as much an act of love as feeding the hungry. Healthy relationships are forged and strong communities are built in good times as well as bad.

Never minimize your appearance at or contributions to a special event in someone’s life. The pleasant memories you help make honor God and connect people.

Just take a walk down memory lane and think of those who made your special occasions special. Don’t you wish they were around so you could thank them and let them know what a difference they made?

“If you are going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!” Carson’s young guest said when asked what he learned from this biblical story. Would anyone say the same thing about you?

Prayer: *“Dear God, help us to do what we can to make special occasions special for family members and friends. Give us the same spirit of compassion, humility and generosity Jesus modeled at this wedding in Cana.”*



Tuesday, April 2
Loving God Through Prayer
Luke 22:39-45
Parks Mason

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

In his book *Life of Christ*, Archbishop Fulton Sheen reflected on Christ’s agony in the garden, writing: “Eden and Gethsemane were the two gardens around which revolved the fate of humanity. In Eden, Adam sinned; in Gethsemane, Christ took humanity’s sin upon Himself. In Eden, Adam hid himself from God; in Gethsemane, Christ interceded with His Father; in Eden, God sought out Adam in his sin of rebellion; in Gethsemane, the New Adam sought out the Father and His submission and resignation.”

In his agony in the garden and in his subsequent passion, Jesus succeeded where Adam, and by extension, we, failed, reversing our fall. By offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, Christ commended himself fully into the hands of Father. Although seeking, from his humanity, to avoid his fate, he ultimately accepted it knowing its necessity from his divine nature. How often do we pray this prayer, asking that God's will and not ours be done? How often are we like the apostles, failing to hear our Lord and obey him, failing to understand?

The Good news for us is that each day given us, we have the chance anew to seek the will of God. During the remainder of this season in which we seek to repent and better ourselves through reflection, prayer, and sacrifice, think of the words from James Montgomery, "Turn not from His griefs away, learn of Jesus Christ to pray."



Wednesday, April 3
Loving Neighbors Through
Missions
Matthew 25:31-40
Vanessa Garland (Director, Emma Quire
Mission Center)

Emma Quire Mission Center

A couple of years ago, I was contacted by a local councilman about a family in need. The mom had died tragically on Christmas Eve leaving behind a dad and three boys. Dad and the boys were sleeping on a mattress in the living room because the boys were afraid to sleep alone since Mom died. In the middle of the living room floor was huge hole they had stuffed with old clothes to keep the cold and snakes out. I contacted First Baptist Frankfort about the need and a group of men came down to replace the floor and the front door. Repairs were also done to the front porch and steps were replaced on the front and back of the home. Another church team came later and built a new bathroom in the home.

We have been able to help the youngest boy to get enrolled in Head Start and working with a speech therapist. The middle boy is attending after school programs which has increased his reading level. The oldest boy was assigned a mentor through the high school and is doing better in school. Dad was not employed but could do small engine repairs. We helped him advertise and now he has a steady income. We helped them find a church where Dad and two oldest boys have accepted Christ.

This story is so important to the Emma Quire Mission Center and FBC Frankfort. So many needs were met and continue to be met in that family because of the first outreach of a repaired floor.



Thursday, April 4
Loving God Through Spiritual Formation
Colossians 1:9-12a
Mona Carpenter

Colossians 1:9-12a is a powerful prayer from Paul to the church at Colossae. He had heard a good report about them. He saw evidence of continued growth and maturity in their faith. To encourage them and help them to go further, Paul offered this prayer for a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him. Paul laid out what was needed to continue to mature in the faith: Knowledge of God's will, and spiritual wisdom and understanding of this knowledge.

We can use this passage as a guide to help us continue to learn and mature in our faith. We never outgrow the need for the knowledge of God that comes through study and communion with Him in prayer. A lifetime is not long enough. If I may, I'd like to change today's scripture passage to read as a personal devotion, a prayer of petition for wisdom and strength and a life pleasing to Him. Insert personal pronouns (or your name) where it says, "we" or "you". This is our prayer:

Dear Father,

Since the day I heard the gospel, I have not ceased praying and asking that I may be filled with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that I may lead a life worthy of you, fully pleasing to you, as I bear fruit in every good work and as I grow in the knowledge of you. May I be made strong with all the strength that comes from your glorious power, and may I be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to you, Father... Amen.



Friday, April 5
Loving Others by Bearing Witness
Luke 10:1-12
Julia Rhorer

Mission of the Seventy

The Lord sent out seventy-two disciples to prepare surrounding towns for Jesus' coming. The people chosen to be part of the seventy-two were not chosen based on their status or wealth; they were chosen because they loved and proclaimed the gospel. Today, we can classify ourselves as part of the seventy-two. There aren't specific qualifications needed to serve God. Everything God creates is beautiful. As Christians, we love and proclaim the gospel every day. The Mission of the Seventy is now our mission, but we should never take on the mission alone. The seventy-two disciples were sent out in pairs of two. It is better to take something head on with assistance and guidance than alone. We need to listen to God through every step of the way and not feel as though we carry the weight of the world on our own shoulders. Yes, there are times when you are physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted from the weight of life, but God is always there to provide relief and comfort. Serving the Lord as individual Christians is one thing, but serving the Lord as a community—that's a whole new story. Not only are we growing our knowledge of God's word as a community, we are growing our understanding of how the Lord wants us to live our daily lives.



Saturday, April 6

Missions: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Think of a special time when our community of faith has loved our neighbors through acts of service in a way that made you think, “This is how God has called us to love others.” What made the act of service meaningful? What did this experience mean to you?
2. How can you/we connect with others through service and missions?
3. Take a moment to thank God for the gift of serving others.



Sunday, April 7
Loving God Through Worship
Isaiah 6:1-13 (v. 8)
Rick White

Our Response to God

I remember preaching a sermon titled: “Ten Ways to Know Right from Wrong.”

After the service a fellow church member came up and remarked, “Yeah, like we are going to go right out and follow that!” I thought to myself, “Yes! I do want you to go out and follow that!” Kelly Sparks remarked: *God is not moved or impressed with our worship until our hearts are moved and impressed by Him.* To be moved by God in worship is to respond to God in love and reverence, to change direction and behavior, to praise and adore!

Our response to God in worship can take many forms: commitment to ministry, confession and repentance, presenting our offering, praise and more. The one response that is clearly unacceptable is ignoring God or rejecting Him.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44), wrote: “*Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose – and all of this gathered up in adoration.*”

When Isaiah saw a Holy God in His Holy Temple he declared: ‘*Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*’ He responded! He worshipped!

One wonders if my friend truly worshipped that day?



Monday, April 8
Loving Neighbors Through
Care
Philippians 2:1-11
Kara Johnson

Caring Through the Day

When I felt God call me to come work at First Baptist Church, I was excited to answer His call. When I felt God call me to come work at First Baptist Church *in the office*, I was NOT excited...AT ALL! I used to be a governmental auditor, sitting at a desk all day, every day. I hated it. Now God was asking me to go back to sitting at a desk all day? But after a short moment of hesitation, I knew I needed to do what God had asked of me.

Before I ever sat down at the FBC desk for the first time, I decided the top priority of my job was really about caring for our ministers in their everyday work. I felt God wanted me to support them and try to make their days a little easier. My responsibility would be to “love them through care” as I assisted them.

During my employment at FBC, I have learned an immense amount about caring for others. It’s so important, as mentioned throughout these devotionals, to care for those who are sick, homebound, grieving, or celebrating wonderful moments in their lives. I think, though, it is just as important to show care for those simply going through their day.

How can you CONNECT with a loved one, a neighbor, a coworker, or a stranger on the sidewalk this week? CONNECT with them by showing you CARE about their day, their life, their being.



Tuesday, April 9
Loving God Through Prayer
Luke 6:12
Gene Rose

Jesus Prays All Night on the Mountain

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God".

In chapters four and five of Luke, Jesus was extremely busy. He spent 40 days in the desert being tempted by the devil. He taught in the synagogue in Nazareth, taught in the synagogue at Capernaum and drives out an evil spirit from a man while He was there. He healed many people with various kinds of sickness. He taught large crowds of people from a boat, healed a man with leprosy and healed a paralytic. The next day He would be choosing the twelve apostles. However, **before** he chose the apostles, He spent the night praying to God. He "spent the night" praying to God. **He needed to connect to God!** So do we!

We are busy with work, family and daily responsibilities. Sometimes we get all wrapped up in our agenda and we neglect our relationship with God. When we connect with God first thing in the morning, we can tell Him how much we love Him and that we need a fresh supply of energy and strength and we can feel His comforting arms letting us know that His presence is with us. When we connect with Him in the morning, we are reminded throughout the day that He is guiding our paths and that He is giving us discernment and direction.

Jesus said in John 14:5 "...apart from me, you can do nothing."

In the Psalms we read where David connected with God in all circumstances: when he worshipped, when he sang praises, when he was all alone, when he felt distant from God, when he was afraid of his enemies, and when he needed mercy and forgiveness.

David prayed in Psalm 5:3, "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait with expectation!"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we want to treasure You above all things. Place in our hearts the desire to please You and let our relationship with You grow stronger and deeper. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.



Wednesday, April 10
Loving Neighbors Through
Missions
Leviticus 19:33-34
Greg Gaby

Morocco Partnership

I don't believe anyone could have prepared me for our 2016 trip to Morocco as CBF Kentucky marked their 10-year anniversary partnership with the Protestant church there. African students have been invited by the Moroccan royalty to study and earn degrees to take home to their countries. These students make up the Protestant churches that we visited and they minister to refugees.

Refugees come to Morocco fleeing their homeland's violence, famine, disease and poverty in attempt to make a better life for themselves. Once they get into Morocco there are no monies for food, clothing, shelter or medical attention. They are often abused and find themselves facing obstacles that are inconceivable. Many of the young girls and women are forced in human trafficking. The living conditions, pain and suffering and abuse are almost unimaginable. These "aliens" of Morocco are treated like a pestilence and dealt with in extreme measures.

I talked with a refugee and I asked why it wouldn't it be better to stay home and with his family? His reply was very simple and to the point. "We all have many reasons to leave our countries, while you in the United States have so many to stay!"

In the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verses 33-34, the Hebrew nation was told to treat aliens as citizens and not to oppress them. They were reminded that they too were once aliens in another land (Egypt). In one sense or another, we are all aliens and yet all are children of God. If only we would adhere to these words today, what differences in the lives of our fellow men we could make.



Thursday, April 11
Loving God Through Spiritual
Formation
Jeremiah 18:1-6
Erica Galyon

Shape Me

Arise and go down to the potters house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words

Lord, I find it interesting that it is in the simple moments of life, the routine chores or daily tasks, that you use for me to hear your words.

Then I went down to the Potter's house and, behold, he was making a work on the wheels. And when the vessel he made was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Lord your message often comes from the ordinary. It was heard in the handiwork of the diligent potter in the case of Jeremiah. I notice it in the actions of the people I run into going one place to the next, or in the funny or sweet things I hear from my children.

Then the word of Jehovah came to me saying, "Oh Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?"

Lord help me remember that you continue to shape me. I can be remade. Remake me in your image.

Behold, as the clay in the potters hand, so are ye in my hand O House of Israel.

Lord help me remember that you continue to shape the people around me. You have shown grace to me. May I show grace to others.



fbconnect
Loving Others through...



Friday, April 12
Loving Others by Bearing Witness
Acts 2:43-47
Jaime McKown

There is something about being invited into another's home that makes me feel welcomed. It says to me, you're a part of us, of this—the life we're living. Linda and Ralph have a way of doing that for the new faces in our fellowship.

On a lovely fall day, this delightful couple encouraged my family. They opened their special family event to new people and treated us like we had always been there. It's a gift to be part of a community that embraces people with glad and sincere hearts. I praise God for them! Their generosity reminds me that God's love is abounding in us. With great and small gestures, we may bear a witness to that love. It's not always easy for me to welcome the new or to open my table to the unknown, but I am convinced that God's presence is near when I take this risk.

I wonder if there is a way that God has been calling to you to share your table or to notice a need in our faith community. Maybe someone has welcomed and loved you in this way in the past. Consider sharing with them how their hospitality has impacted your life. Let us continue to learn how to love each other as Christ loved us!



Saturday, April 13

Spiritual Formation: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Think of a spiritual formation experience that has helped our church learn and grow as disciples. In what ways did the experience shape us as a community of faith and deepen our relationship with God? What did this experience mean to you?

2. How can you deepen your relationship with God through spiritual formation?

3. Take a moment to thank God helping you grow in your faith.



Sunday, April 14

Palm Sunday

Luke 19:29-38

Children of FBC

On Palm Sunday we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and how the crowds welcomed and honored him by laying their cloaks and palm branches before him. The palm branch was a sign of honor.

The cloak was an important and valuable piece of clothing, also used as a blanket. The people honored Jesus by laying before him something of great value to them.

We asked our children, "What thing of value would you lay before Jesus to honor him?"

"Holy Bread and fuzzy blankets" – Conner

"Blankets" – Maya

"Palm leaves; Old shirts" – Gracie

"Pretty sheets" – Peggy

"An orange" – Braydon

"Blanket" – Ben

"Soft bread; Nintendo Switch; a baby; your brother" – Ben

"Pants and shirts" – Michaela

"Mango the cat" – Sophie

"Paper" – Marissa

"Cloth" – Noah

What thing of value would you lay before Jesus to honor him?



Monday, April 15

Luke 19:45-47

Clay Mason

"When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling." Luke 19:45 reveals to us Jesus's humanity in full range.

It's like the old Popeye cartoons where after Bluto creates enough havoc, finally Popeye says "that's all I can stand, I can't stand no more." Just preceding Jesus entering the temple he and the disciples had made their way from Jericho toward Jerusalem and the weight of what was going to happen to Jesus was evident. There were confrontations with Pharisees, pointed parables and Jesus weeping over the city that did not know what lay in store.

We can relate. At the end of major work projects or significant personal events, we often wear down under the pressure and snap at things we have walked by without noticing in the past. [Think wedding eve and finding out the florist ordered the wrong colored flowers.] But this was different, to see Jesus in full rage physically clearing the corruption from the temple was uncharacteristically vivid. We envision Jesus as an arm open wide comforter, a soft touch healer, and a spoken word instructor. We don't picture him throwing a fit in public, chasing

unscrupulous money changers away from the Jewish center of power. Like so many of the character studies of Old Testament figures, this episode really puts Jesus in full human form in my mind. The stress and pressure of leading a revolutionary movement along with his foreknowledge of the task at hand surely played a part in his reaction. Yet, he remained focused on the mission – to offer the world salvation.



Tuesday, April 16

Luke 21:1-4

Dianne Stillwell

I normally sat in a similar location Sunday after Sunday at Lexington Avenue Baptist, down front on the right. This particular Sunday, last fall, I changed things up, sitting on the second to last row in the back. As the service began, a familiar mentally challenged young adult male sat down next to me. I reached out my hand and introduced myself. He, in turn, did the same. “Hi, I am Marty. Nice to meet you!” “Nice to meet you, too, Marty,” I replied.

As the service continued, Marty leaned over and whispered loudly, “Will you watch my stuff?” “Sure.” He quickly got up and exited toward the rear of the sanctuary leaving his phone and jacket in the pew. Marty was gone for several minutes. As he returned, the offering plate was being passed down our pew. Marty sat down rather out of breath and began desperately searching his pockets. He dug into all of his pants pockets and into his jacket pockets. Finally, he pulled out a coin and whispered loudly, “Ah ha! A penny! A Canadian penny! Do you think they will take a Canadian penny?”

“Oh, I’m sure they will!”

He quickly jumped up and trotted to where the ushers were just about to walk back to the front. He stopped the woman with the plate and asked, “Will you take my Canadian penny?”

“Of course!”

He proudly dropped his Canadian penny into the plate.

“Thank you!”

Upon returning to his seat, he leaned over and loudly whispered, “Phew! So glad I caught them in time!”

My heart smiled.

Jesus said, “I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than them all. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had to live on.” (Luke 21:1-4)



Wednesday, April 17

Luke 20:45-47

Keith Felton

There were certain groups that really got under the skin of Jesus. The Scribes were among the groups that Jesus would denounce in a very public way. Verse 45, “While all the people were listening...” Jesus then proceeded to rebuke the Scribes. This was a group mostly associated with the Pharisees and they were the main interpreters of the law. They taught the people mostly according to tradition and not the law. They were brought into judicial proceedings for renderings of the law. They were well known to accept bribes for convenient interpretations of the law. They flaunted their self-proclaimed righteousness and misused their position of leadership. They were an all-around shady group.

The admonishment Jesus distributed was warranted as the Scribes used their position of authority to prey upon those who were vulnerable. In this time and space, no one was more vulnerable than widows. No particular means of defraud are mentioned, but the point Jesus made is clear: Misusing a position of authority or prestige to deceive and take away from the powerless is reprehensible.

Be like Jesus. Raise your voice against those who oppress and take advantage of the weak. Advocate for those who are abused in any way by those in positions of power. Lift up the broken and exploited. Make others aware of injustices happening in your community. Never use your position of influence to take advantage of anyone. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”



Thursday, April 18

Maundy Thursday

Luke 22:14-23

Dan Hughes

The Thursday of Holy Week has always been understood to be when Jesus shared the Passover feast with the apostles and revealed that this was his last meal with them while on Earth. This day is also known as “Maundy Thursday”. Maundy typically means “a ceremony of washing the feet” (Merriam-Webster), which Jesus did to the disciples before the meal. Merriam-Webster also shows that Maundy has an obsolete definition of “feast”, which also occurred that night. Thus, “Maundy Thursday” gives us a full picture of the *happenings* of the evening, though the *meaning* was much more profound.

Jesus had already taught us how to be humble in washing the feet of others. But at the feast, he explained to the apostles how to proceed going forward. Passover had been a meal of remembrance for many centuries. But the “Last Supper” was a demonstration of how to remember Jesus’ broken body and blood of the new covenant, thus changing the meal from a

Jewish remembrance to a Christian one. Remember that Jesus was inclusive of ALL followers, not just those of the Jewish faith.

Luke wrote, “And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’” The events of that Maundy Thursday were a final opportunity for Jesus to share directly with the ones he loved before the events of the following day—to share in the foot washing, to share in the meal, and to share his desire for his remembrance.

Let us not only remember his body and blood, but also his humble love. Use his example to enjoy his spiritual food for ourselves and his lesson of love for one another.



Friday, April 19
Good Friday
Luke 23:26-49
Rick White

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon... Luke 23:44

One encounters “darkness” other places in scripture. One encounters “darkness in life.” In the creation story of Genesis 1 we meet these frightening words, *the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, ...* Once again, the darkness covers the land as Jesus hangs on the Cross. Is this Creation’s participation in the events of the day? Is Creation giving witness to the activity of God? As Fred Craddock noted: *If stones cry out when disciples are silent (19:40), why would not the sky darken when the Son of God hangs dying?*

The question we all ask in our “darkest” and most vulnerable moments is, “Where is God when the ‘darkness’ seems to reign and hold sway over life?” There is a “strange” verse in Exodus 20:21: *Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick **darkness where God was.***

God is even in our darkness! It is a good time to remind ourselves that out of the chaos and abyss God brings order to the cosmos and proclaims, “Let there be Light!” We already know how the story of Jesus turns out. Those followers of his scattered to the four winds, or witnessing the Crucifixion, did not! We would be amiss to speak of Resurrection on “Black Friday.” This day, with the 12 and Mary and others, we need to feel the heavy darkness of Jesus’ death. On this day we need to *live by faith* and know, that even in the darkness we can find God.



Saturday, April 20

Holy Saturday

Luke 23:50-56

Laura Columbia

Who was Joseph of Arimathea? Luke says he was a good and upright man as well as a member of the Council (the Sanhedrin)—the same Council who wanted to condemn Jesus to die. However, Luke affirms Joseph did not consent to their (the Council's) decision and action, and goes on to say he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Matthew states Joseph was a rich man and a disciple of Jesus, but John says he was a secret disciple because he was afraid of the Jewish Sanhedrin Council. It's also interesting to note that only John mentions Nicodemus coming to help Joseph remove Jesus' body from the cross, prepare it and place it in a tomb. Matthew says the tomb was actually Joseph's own tomb; Luke and John emphasize the fact that the tomb was new and had never been used. It was also the day of Preparation, the day prior to the Sabbath. No work was allowed to be performed on the Sabbath day; therefore, it was imperative Joseph have Jesus' body prepared and in the tomb that day.

Personally, I find it very bold of Joseph of Arimathea to have had the courage to approach Pilate, and ask to take, prepare and bury Jesus' body. It makes me contemplate the risk he took, and what Pilate must have thought when Joseph made his request. I think we as Christians today must have this same temerity; to be daring and courageous when faced with difficult or challenging situations. If Jesus was brave enough to face the cross and die for our sins, how could we offer any less?



Sunday, April 21
Easter Sunday
Luke 24:1-12
Sophie and Amy Smith

“I always liked Peter the best because he was the bravest disciple.”
Sophie and I were discussing Easter.

“Tell me why you think Peter was brave.” I had thought of Peter as bold, brash, not always thinking before acting, denying Jesus when push came to shove. Never brave.

Sophie tapped her finger on her cheek. “Jesus’ followers had to be disappointed and scared. They thought Jesus was going to be their savior and king. Instead, he got arrested and killed. They had to worry about what could happen to them just because they loved Jesus. It’s why Peter acted like he didn’t know Jesus three times.”

“So, how was Peter brave?” I asked.

“Peter loved Jesus so much that he was always defending him. I mean, he cut off the guard’s ear to keep him from arresting Jesus. He had a sword. That’s pretty brave.” Sophie continued. “He believed the women when they said that Jesus was alive. Peter had to be scared that he would be caught and killed, but he still ran to see.”

What does the bravery of Easter look like?

I wonder if you see it in the faces of determined women who prepared sweet spices and oils to anoint the body of their Lord mere days after his arrest and crucifixion.

I wonder if it’s in shaking female bodies bowed prostrate in front of heavenly hosts who gleam like lightning.

I wonder if it resembles the fast-footed race to an empty tomb of a man, humanly frail in his ability to follow his Lord to the grave.

Lord, help us to bravely share the good news of our resurrected Lord.



Monday, April 22

Witness: Questions for Reflection and Prayer

1. Yesterday we celebrated Easter Sunday. What are some ways our church bears witness to the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection? In what ways do we as a community exemplify life as God intends?

2. How can you/we show love to others by being a witness of the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection?

3. Take a moment to thank God for good news to share.