

REMEMBERING

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

2020

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN NORTH PALM BEACH

Dear First Pres Families,

During Lent, we pause to remember Christ's life and His journey to the cross. To share the Gospel of Christ and carry out His work, we need to remember what He taught us. Jesus taught His disciples with stories and examples of real life as He walked with them to new places. Jesus involved the disciples in experiences that provided vivid object lessons that helped them remember. As He promised in John 14:26, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help His disciples remember.

This year, the Fellowship Committee at First Pres created a Lenten Devotional for our church family entitled, "*Remembering.*" As we pursue and share gospel driven lives as Jesus' disciples, we remember our Savior, who loved us enough to die on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead to give us new life, conquered our enemies and made a place for us in heaven. This Lenten season, as we prepare for Easter, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us remember what Christ has done for us. As we read how God has spoken into the lives of fellow members of the congregation and mission partners and hear voices from the past, open our hearts and minds to see God's hand in their stories.

The Fellowship Committee has been creating a First Pres Lenten devotional since 1997 and the stories from the past 23 years still have the power to touch our lives today. Remembering the history of our church and the Lenten devotional, we have selected just a few submissions from those years to help us remember God's faithfulness to First Pres. Some of those writers are still here, some have gone to serve Christ elsewhere, and one has transferred his membership to heaven. We are grateful to all the current writers who have shared their stories to strengthen our faith and inspire us. We trust that these stories, Scriptures, and prayers will encourage you and give you hope as we journey together to the Cross.

Through the years several have served as Elders of the Fellowship Committee, each serving for three years. The elders have been instrumental in gathering submissions for the devotionals and often wrote ones themselves; some we have included. The elders who have served for three year terms since 1997 are Ann Talley, Joan Renshaw, Katie (Gardner) Stalcup, Anne Romine, Hank Copeland, Shirley Alley, Grace Robertson, and Becky Isiminger, the current elder. We are grateful for their leadership.

**Thank you for being a part of our church family,
The First Pres Fellowship Committee**

— Wednesday, February 26, 2020 —

Ash Wednesday

***“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.”***

(Psalm 16:6)

I remember hearing the gospel message as it was framed in Campus Crusade’s little evangelistic tract, The Four Spiritual Laws, that Law One is, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” What an incredible thought! The God of the universe knows me, all about me, and not only loves me in spite of what He knows, but actually has a plan for my life! After praying a prayer asking Christ to take my life, forgive my sins and use me in whatever way He saw fit, I began to see Jesus showing up in my life and experience. It was as if my eyes were opened; the Bible became a different book and has remained a different book ever since. My life took a different turn from any I had anticipated and I felt that Christ was leading me to serve in ministry in some way.

This morning I read a chapter in a book by John Flavel, an English Presbyterian pastor of the 1800’s. He spoke of God’s providence, in calling us to meaningful work that provided for our physical needs, and employed us in pursuits that lead not only ourselves but our families and others to godly pursuits. Truly, that is what the Lord has done for me. I never dreamed I would serve in ministry as a preacher. I never dreamed when I came here that I would stay for as long as I have. Last Sunday, a couple visited church from out of town. I had officiated their wedding early in my ministry here. It was a joy to see them still together, still in church, still growing in their faith and discipleship to Jesus. I left church reminded of the words of the Psalmist, “The lines have fallen in pleasant places for me.” It is a privilege to be a Christian, and to be a minister of the Gospel, and to get to see the fruit of one’s labor. It was no lie that God has loved me and unfolded His plan for me faithfully. . . a day at a time.

***Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for life. Thank You for Your love.
Thank You for Your faithfulness to unfold Your plan for me.
Teach me to trust You more. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Lucky Arnold (submitted in 2007)

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods, and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

(Acts 2:44-47)

Large oak trees were at one time tiny acorns. Just think, the mighty oak started as a very small acorn that you could hold in the palm of your hand. In 1961, a small acorn of dedicated Christians met to form a new Presbyterian church, and it became known as First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach. In March 1963 that same group purchased 7 acres on Prosperity Farms Road. Within 4 months, on July 25, 1963, that small group expanded to 77 and became an official church. The tiny acorn was beginning to grow. An addition was quickly added to the existing small building, which became known as Hawkins Hall. In 1968 construction started on a sanctuary (now the chapel) and a Sunday School/Administration Building. The membership was now approximately 145. A need for additional Sunday school space led to the building of the two-story Education Building in 1979.

The church continued to grow, and by 1985 a new sanctuary was under construction and dedicated in 1986. The membership was now 650. With the faithful preaching of God's Word, the church continued to grow, and it was time to expand again. In 1995, the Preschool/Administration Building was added, followed by Fellowship Hall. In 2003 construction began on the new Youth Building, which will be dedicated in 2004. So here we have it—from a tiny acorn has grown a mighty oak with its limbs reaching to a school in Central America, support of foreign and local missionaries, and a new Presbyterian church in Port St. Lucie. Just think, it was from a tiny acorn.

*Thank You, Father, for using people with limited ability
to help spread Your gospel around the world. Amen.*

Ed Elliot III (submitted in 2004)

Charter Member of First Pres

Friday, February 28, 2020

“For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

(Luke 19:10)

I started my first year at Florida Atlantic University’s Honors College this past fall, and to say it’s been a difficult transition would be an understatement. Even in the midst of a rigorous academic schedule, I must confess that the social scene has been even harder. It has been a challenge to find my place being a “middle-of-the-road” Christian girl in a setting with a less traditional/conservative student body. Add a speech problem that makes talking feel like running a marathon to the mix, and you’ve got a recipe for a life where many days are spent feeling a bit alone, lost, and sometimes hopeless.

But whenever I have an extra hour or two to relax and think of all that God has done for me, suddenly I feel a little less alone! I remember that Jesus set aside His place in Heaven so He could come set the human race free from sin. I remember that God loved me enough to die a criminal’s death to get to me. And I remember that the Lord of all Creation, my Father and my Friend, is so close to me that He already knows my thoughts, concerns, and fears. It is extremely reassuring that I’m never alone, no matter how isolated I may feel at college. I find it incredibly uplifting that God is my cheerleader, rooting for me nonstop!

Most of all, I remember that if God was willing to stand by me through every single day of my life thus far, He will help me to thrive in college! I feel certain that through faith, He will guide me and light my path. I know the best is yet to come!

My Lord, thank You for being patient with me and never giving up on me, no matter how lost I may seem. Help me to hold on to all that You have promised me, that I might have the faith to live joyfully, no matter what I’m facing. Amen.

Annie Hernandez

(Annie is the granddaughter of Ann Talley. In Ann’s devotional before Annie was born, she wrote a prayer that her granddaughter would follow the Lord. We rejoice with Ann that God has answered her prayer in Annie’s walk of faith.)

*“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows
and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”*
(Isaiah 53:3)

Our Savior Can Empathize and Help

A famous Bible teacher once preached a sermon titled, “The Answer to Your Problems is a Person.” This especially rings true in the midst of our own suffering. Perhaps you recently received a devastating medical diagnosis that filled you with new anxieties and questions — “What will happen to me? What about my family—who will take care of them?” Maybe you received a phone call that began with, “You better sit down” or you heard the words, “I want a divorce” from the spouse who once sincerely said, “I do.” Perhaps you have a lingering sadness or chronic pain that even sleep cannot alleviate.

At those times when we think, “No one really understands,” or “Who can really help me through this?” Our pain can point us to the Savior, Jesus, the person who understands our suffering intimately and can help us supernaturally. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Jesus’s friend, Lazarus, who had died also saw the Savior’s tender love. John, the apostle Jesus loved, tells us what happened in John 11:32-36:

“When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ He asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’”

Our Savior understands and can also help us. The author to the Hebrews states it this way (Hebrews 4:14-16):

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

As we read the Gospels and reflect on the ways in which Jesus suffered, our mind rightly goes to the Cross where He suffered in our place and completely paid for our sins so that we could enjoy the gift of eternal life by believing in Him. John’s gospel beautifully and concisely expresses it:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

From the moment we believe in the Savior, Jesus, we receive the gift of eternal life — freedom from eternal condemnation, forgiveness, and a permanent eternal relationship with God.

As you reflect on your own suffering, talk to God about your doubts, fears, and questions. Address Him with reverence, but with total transparency and complete trust. And, if you have never believed in Jesus as your Savior, believe!

Dear Jesus, I believe in You. Thank You for dying on the Cross in my place and paying for all of my sins. Thank You for giving me eternal life and forgiveness as a gift. Thank You that You will never leave and always help me. Amen.

Al Valdez
Logoi Ministry



Sunday, March 1, 2020

First Sunday of Lent

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”

(Revelation 3:20)

A few summers ago, I was anxiously awaiting news from school about student test scores that arrive in July. When I had not heard from my principal by the end of July, I was upset and called to find out why. My principal said, “I called you because I wanted you to be the first to hear the good news about the scores. I left a message on your answering machine.” I then discovered that my answering machine was not working.

So often I want to hear from God, but my ears are not working. I don't have “ears to hear.” Although I think I'm paying attention to the message of Easter and the resurrection, my ears are not ready to hear, nor is my heart open to receive. One of my favorite Scriptures is: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

As we prepare for Easter, let us hear about Christ's descent from heaven to become a man; to be a humble servant; to be obedient to God, even unto death on the cross and then to His ascent to heaven to sit in the place of honor, next to God, exalted above all others. Let us reflect on God's mercy and grace as we try to comprehend how much God cares for us and how He reached down to us through His son, Jesus Christ.

Dear Lord, I pray that this Easter season, we will open our ears to hear and our hearts to share the presence and Resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sara McDonnell (submitted in 1999)

“But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”

(Isaiah 53:5)

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

(Hebrews 12:2)

Many times at communion service, I have talked about our Savior’s suffering for us—for me! It has often made me sad to know He suffered so much for us—for me. How can we rejoice and be glad?

1st—We need to recognize that our sin has to be paid for by suffering and death—His or ours! Therefore thank Him for His suffering.

2nd—It was a once for all as to time and value. He does not suffer over and over. It is done once and for all—“. . . But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by one sacrifice of Himself. (Hebrews 9:26b)

3rd —He did it because He loves us; not because He had to or was forced to bear our sin—“For God so loved the world.” (John 3:16)

4th—My sin put Him on the cross. I am in that sense a “Christ killer.” How that wounds my spirit, but I sin and that sin has to be paid for—I put Him on the cross.

5th—It was a joy to Jesus: “for the joy that was set before Him,” “scorning the shame,” “looking toward” (providing) my salvation and yours.

Gracious Father, Thank You for suffering in my place. May I live with rejoicing that You have given Your life for mine. Amen.

Hunter Norwood (submitted in 1997)

(Hunter was a Presbyterian minister and missionary with South America mission.

He taught Agepe Sunday School Class for about fifteen years.)

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 1:6)

Tracing God’s Hand

All of us have memories and, like Bob Hope sang for many years, “Thanks for the memories.” And now with the sand in the hour glass mostly at the bottom, I have lots of great memories of:

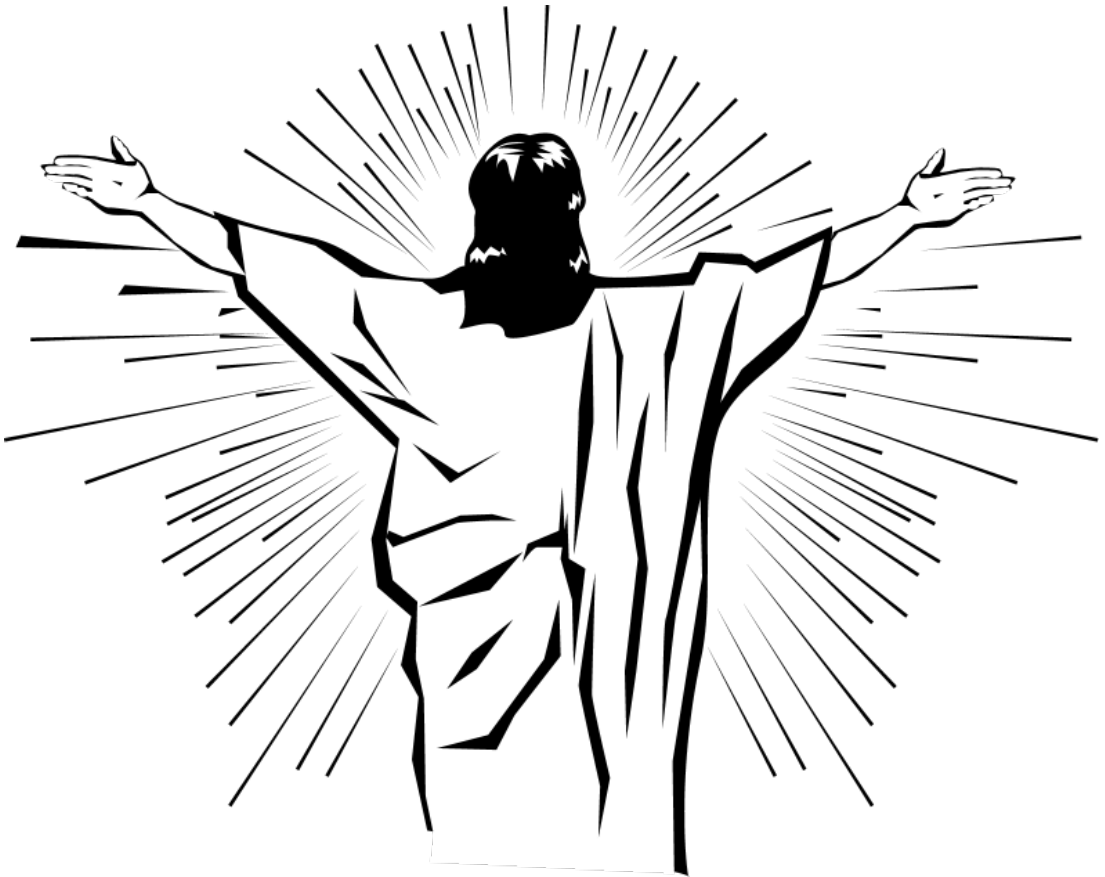
- My father who worked hard, even Sundays to support and raise 4 children
- My mother who took us to church on Sundays and was active in the PTA; even lobbying at the state capital for children’s education
- Learning how to sing hymns in the basement of a small Methodist church
- Riding atop a hay wagon headed to the barn and driving a pitch fork into my foot
- Collecting eggs for Mom to sell and the wind slamming the coop door and the large pane of glass falling, cutting my leg
- Dad taking us to Arlington National Cemetery for Easter Sunrise and now he and mother are interred there as he served in France in WWI
- Being in a 7th grade Sunday school class with a teacher, Howard Parkett, who, at 25, I thought was ‘old’
- Having scarlet fever and reading comic books that my brother couldn’t read because they had to be burned
- And, most important, attending a Youth Fellowship at the University of Maryland my senior year in high school and accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior
- And how does one forget coming home from a late-night date and waking up to find yourself driving between a telephone poll and a fence
- My mother finding me the opportunity to co-op with the government and go to the University of Tennessee
- In my junior year meeting this pretty girl in the library (1st time ever in the library), later meeting her on the street and the rest, 60 years later, is history.
- The Lord blessing us with three beautiful children and then telling us, ready or not you are having one more. Sure enough, six months later a 1 lb. 14 oz. Carey was born
- Becoming a Baptist like Winnie. Singing in a small choir led by Don Boese and later a much larger choir led by Bill Keith
- Having a Bible teacher called ‘Lucky’ and subsequently becoming, along with Winnie, a Presbyterian
- Being blessed with 8 grandchildren
- A fire and the encouragement of our church family that rallied around us and helped us to press-on

- And best of all, remembering Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for my sins and that Advent represents new life in Christ

When I was young, I didn't know God's plan, but I decided to trust His hand. Now, I can look back and trace His hand from Florida to Maryland to Tennessee and back to Florida. And like David I can say, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life" and I can look forward to Jesus' promise that where He is, there I will be also.

Father, Thank You for Your watch care over me and my family all these years and thank You for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that we remember as we journey through Lent. In His name we pray. Amen.

Barry Romoser



Wednesday, March 4, 2020

*“And He said to them, “When you pray, say:
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 lead us not into temptation.”*
(Luke 11:2-4)

Awatif came from a strict Muslim family but had made the decision to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. One of the first things she learned was to pray and talk to her heavenly Father. Over the course of the next year she would go through many trials and difficulties. The Lord would answer her prayers over and over again. She began sharing her newfound faith with friends.

Many rejected her and one guy in particular, Kamel, made life incredibly difficult for her. He was mad at Awatif and decided to get revenge by outing her to the entire community. He called her parents and told them that she had left Islam and was now a Christian and that she was getting into trouble. This set off a series of events, she was kicked out of her home, she lost her job, she struggled to find anyone who would take her in because her family had turned against her. Kamel had single handedly managed to upend her entire life.

Awatif prayed that the Lord would forgive Kamel and that he would know Christ as Lord and Savior. She forgave him as she had been forgiven and the Lord heard her prayer. Within 2 months, I got to watch the Lord work on Kamel’s heart and he surrendered his life to Christ!

Lord, may we remember to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Lord, help us to remember to return good for evil, to pray for those who persecute us, to love those who would do us harm, to trust You in every situation, no matter how bleak the circumstances. Help us to be thankful for all of Your blessings and trust You for our daily provision.

Jordan Barry, mission partner

***“These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold,
which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and
may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”
(1 Peter 1:7)***

“Calgon, take me away!” This familiar refrain from a bath product commercial expresses an undeniable wish that many of us have to escape a crisis situation.

Those of us who have loved ones with long-term health problems often deal with pressures of being the lone caretaker, the responsibility of financial and medical decisions, and the most devastating aspect—witnessing the suffering of a family member. Last, but certainly not least, we need to “be there” for the needs of our immediate family. Quite a tall order for anyone! Escape is a tempting idea, but we must stand and face the music, even if it is a very long song.

As the old saying goes, “If you can’t change the situation, change your reaction to it.” We can do that with God’s help. The apostle Peter tells us that God “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

As we approach the Lenten season, we are reminded that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is our gospel. He is our living hope for our time on this earth and for eternal life, that priceless gift, when we join Him in heaven.

Peter tells us in verse 7 that trials test and refine our faith, they teach us perseverance, tolerance and humility. Trials help us to become more like the person that God would have us be.

Through God’s power and our faithfulness in Him, we can meet each crisis and have the assurance that in our present situation, as in all others, God has a plan for our lives.

***Heavenly Father, grant us strength for the day and help us to see
Your face even in the shadows. May we exhibit Christ-like love
to each other and cherish each day of our time together. Amen.***

**Joan Renshaw (submitted in 1998)
Elder of Fellowship 2000-2002**

“Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.”

(2 Corinthians 9:13-15)

My mother was one of 14 children and I have 60 first cousins on my mom’s side. Most were raised in a Lutheran church, were baptized as an infant, and are assuming that since they believe Jesus is God’s Son, they will go to heaven. James 2:19 says that “Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” When I ask them about their personal faith journey, they say, “ I grew up in a church and have always believed.” Yet, their lives do not reflect that they are Christ followers.

I used to be like my cousins, making decisions with no thoughts of God, yet claiming to be a Christian. It wasn’t until the age of 28 that I truly surrendered my life to Christ. Before that, I had broken almost every commandment of God’s, including lying, stealing (from my grandparents for money to buy candy at the neighborhood store), being promiscuous, committing adultery and even murder. (I had an abortion; something I regret to this day.) When my second husband and I were on the brink of divorce, he asked me to attend a Baptist church with him. I was raised to believe that Baptists were weak-minded people that could not think for themselves, so they had to follow a bunch of rules. I went to that church anyways, and in a short period of time, I committed my life to Christ and was baptized by full immersion to symbolize that I was now a new creation. The old life was gone and a new life had begun. (2 Cor 5:17) Jesus forgave me of all of my sins, and my life has never been the same. Jesus is my Rock, Redeemer, Savior and friend, and the most important thing in my life – even more important than my children and grandchildren, and anyone that knows me knows how much I love them! I remember who I was before finding Christ – someone looking for love in all the wrong places – and how fulfilling and joyful my life is as a true Christ follower. I am forever grateful that He suffered a horrific death to forgive me of my sins and remember them no more (Jeremiah 31:34) so I can spend eternity with Him and, until He takes me home, to love and serve Him and His people faithfully.

I was the first of the “cousins” to be saved. I would share my faith at family reunions and weddings and other events where we all got together. One day, my cousin, Annette, came up to me all excited that she, too, became a believer. Between the two of us, we have been witnessing to the rest of our family, and one by one, our family members are committing their lives to Christ. There is no higher calling.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May each of us reading this today examine our hearts and fully commit our lives to You if we have not done so already. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

“Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years. . .”

(Deuteronomy 8:1-2)

Do Not Forget. God reminds us of God’s constant presence, but also how quickly the miracles and provisions He made got forgotten. I have been a Christian as long as I can remember, and like the Israelites, I too can forget all God has done for me. As a teenager I always wanted to have a dramatic testimony. You know, some kind of 180 degree change, but as I have grown older I have become grateful that God has spared me. I have known God’s love, peace, and forgiveness, and I would never change my testimony. I have always been close to God; I don’t always feel like I’m in the palm of His hand, but at least hanging on His pinky.

Romans 5 states: “Faith brings joy.” Christ is the joy that miraculously was born into this world, lived without sin, died on a cross, and rose to free us from sin, giving us eternal life. God’s love is that great, therefore, we can live our lives different from the world. Our challenge is to share that joy with others. Christ needs to radiate through each of us that the world might know Him.

This Lent, reflect on how God has miraculously touched your life. Spend time talking and listening to God. It’s amazing when I actually am quiet, I can hear a still small voice inside that guides me.

I pray that as you seek God, the Holy Spirit may speak to you in a new and exciting way, and prepare you to follow His instructions. Never lose sight of God’s Amazing Grace and love. Don’t allow this to be just another Easter—make it special!

***Dear Lord, help us to remember how You have touched our lives
and help us listen and follow as You speak to us. Amen.***

Patti Conway (submitted in 1999)

(Patti and her husband, Jeff, were at First Pres from 1996-1999)

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Second Sunday of Lent

“But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

(John 14:26)

My mother loved to tell the story of when she and my father lived in Florida during their early marriage and how she got stuck in some sand in her car. She said she just rocked it like she used to do when she got stuck in snow earlier in her life. The story changed as she got older and she would say that my father was the one that told her to rock as if she were in snow. However, when she reached a point in her dementia and didn't truly know those around her, including me, her story changed for the last time. From then on it wasn't my father, but it was the Lord who told her to rock the car as if she were in snow.

I learned then that even if we eventually forget much in our life ...if we have asked the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and our heart, He will never leave us nor forsake us. My mother remained a sweet person for the rest of her life and now enjoys a wonderful life with Jesus as He promised...I know.

Lord, thank You that You have sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Help us to listen to His guidance and to share the knowledge of this gift with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Karen Petrus

“But Mary kept these things, pondering them in her heart.”

(Luke 2:19)

What memories are we likely to ponder in our mind and heart this season of Lent? Are they sweet memories of cherished times and faces, or haunting recollections of fear, self reprisal, or regret? Commonly, we have a variety of both positive and negative thoughts flooding in and out of our mind at one time or another, pouring in streams of visions and dreams. Most of us favor loving, sweet memories for good reason. Positive thoughts are comforting and satisfying. They fill us with hope and encouragement. In contrast, our negative thought patterns depress and discourage us.

The landscape of our inner thoughts and self talk ultimately influence our disposition, personal choices and behaviors. They can edify and build us up, or stop us in our tracks and corrode our mental, physical and spiritual well being. Let's choose life in Christ as Mary did and make our lives a grateful and living prayer. Our memories and thought patterns are shaped daily by what we read and study, by what we see and do, by whom we encounter and what we experience. These words of George Herbert, a Welsh-born poet, orator, and priest of the Church of England, encourage me along the way –

“Teach me, my God and King,
In all things, Thee I see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.”

In Philippians, believers are instructed by the disciple Paul to think and ponder in a grateful and graceful manner so God's peace would dwell in their hearts.

Philippians 1:3 “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...”

Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.”

Dear Jesus, As I journey through this Lenten season, my mind and heart gratefully ponder the passion of the Cross and the divinity of Your sacrifice. My heart treasures every beautiful and loving reflection of You. I pray that thoughts of You be brought to mind often as I rest in the peace of Your presence. Amen.

Annie Dougherty

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

***“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask
or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us”
(Ephesians 3:20)***

As human beings, we are limited on the things that we can control and we can only do what we can with things that are possible. We can use our abilities to push through things that are hard but possible. This Scripture is so refreshing to hear as a mere broken human being because we don't serve the God of hard but the God of the impossible. The things that I can't control He already has taken care of.

Working at a non-profit is really hard: to find money where there is no money, to follow the procedures or criteria for grant approval, and to even find staff or participants who are fully invested in the vision. But I've seen God do things that not even I can explain to this day. There were moments where we had no money at all, but somehow a random anonymous donor would give a large amount of money. There were moments where we almost got shut down due to certain things we didn't have or could not even afford, but people would just show up and offer themselves to provide for us for free. Those are things we prayed to God for and He answered. His power is still working in us and we can be sure that we are well taken care of because nothing is impossible for Him.

God, we pray that whomever is reading this, that You may open their eyes to remove the limitations from what they're facing or dealing with to know that You are the God of the impossible. There is nothing too great that You can't handle and there is nothing too impossible that isn't possible for You. Thank You that You are still working in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Kim
Urban Promise Miami**

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

***“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you;
He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”
(Deuteronomy 31:8)***

In December 1999, my husband, Gene, and I unexpectedly found ourselves in the emergency room. We were not certain what kind of a health problem he was facing. A pleasant, young technician came and ran a test. As she was leaving she said to Gene, “Have a good day.” I thought, “How does she expect him—or us—to have a good day in such circumstances?” I did reach some conclusions.

First, one must remember that Jesus, who loved us enough to endure the cross for our sins, promised to be with us always. (Matthew 28:20) His love never fails! He takes our hand and guides us through each day. Second, God works through people. There was the loving care of our family, the shepherding of our caring pastors, and the medical world. There was our church family who showed God’s love to us by prayers, cards, calls, visits, flowers and offers of help. God worked through them to bring Gene healing.

Yes, there is “good” in every day, even if it can’t be a good day. These are God’s blessings to us. Look for them! Then listen for God’s voice. He may be calling you to take His blessings to someone today. So have a good day!

***Dear Father, Help us to seek and find the blessing You send to us each day regardless of
circumstances. Help us to listen for Your voice speaking to us. Amen.***

**Betty Bennett (submitted in 2002)
Fellowship Committee member (now emeritus) since 1984**

Thursday, March 12, 2020

***“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.
He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit
in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
(2 Corinthians 1:21-22)***

Most of the time a remembrance is something from awhile back, but my remembrance that has stuck with me is from this past Christmas. During a Bible study class at Christmas, our leader showed us her Baby Jesus in the manger and she said “I am getting so forgetful that I put a note on my computer so I would not forget to take Baby Jesus with me for tonight.”

For some reason, and only He really knows why, I took a really good look at her Baby Jesus and then when I returned home, I looked at mine. For the first time I really looked and noticed His outstretched arms. I began to notice this whenever I saw a Nativity Scene and most showed those same outstretched arms. Maybe Baby Jesus is saying to us, “Lift Me up, hold Me close to your heart and take Me with you wherever you go.” How many times have we seen these same outstretched arms from our children and the wonderful feeling to pick them up, hold them close to our heart and take them with us wherever we go. And then I realized that not only as a baby did He ask us to “lift Him up,” but as a man on the cross with His outstretched arms again making the same request.

Where is your Baby Jesus? Where is your Christ on the Cross? Is He in your attic, garage or basement in a box waiting to come out next year? We should all keep Him in our heart and mind and soul wherever we go!

***Dear God, thank You for the birth of Jesus that He would lead us to salvation through
His death on the Cross. May we always remember the greatest gifts ever given, His birth,
His death and His resurrection! God bless America and may Americans be a blessing to you.
In your Son's precious name I pray. Amen.***

Gail McGhee

Friday, March 13, 2020

“Be still, and know that I am God.”
(Psalm 46:10)

I don't know why, but I've often thought of this verse from Psalm 46 and remembered it in time of need. Sometimes I think of it when I'm alone, or on a plane; I often think of this verse and listen for the voice of God in quiet times which, sadly, are not nearly often enough. And at times, if I listen closely enough, and am actually still enough, I can hear Him speaking to me in the small, quiet voice of my conscience, advising me, showing me the right thing to do, or explaining to me in the still of the night the troubles of the day.

But the true meaning of this verse is far more powerful than my usual interpretation, which, in fact, is taken out of context from its real meaning. God is here to help us, right here and right now, in our daily lives. God is our source of strength, no matter how mighty our enemies, or how perilous our troubles. God is with us, as long as we love and revere Him, and turn to Him in our need. Because of His presence, we have nothing to fear. He is our fortress and our God.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.
(Psalm 46:1-2)

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”
(Psalm 46:10-11)

Father, help me understand and feel Your presence in my everyday life and especially during this Lenten season. Help me truly understand that I am not alone, no matter where my walk in life may take me. I acknowledge that I am a poor servant who puts his own desires ahead of Yours. Forgive me my sins and help me understand that it is I who must be still, and know that only You are God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Hank Copeland (submitted in 2007)
Elder of Fellowship 2009-2011

***“While the women were perplexed about the empty tomb,
two men suddenly stood near them. . .and said ‘Why do you seek
the living ONE among the dead? He is not here, but HE has risen.
Remember when. . .’ Then they remembered. . .”***

(Luke 24:4-8)

Savoring the Saving Moment

Have you ever failed to “savor” a moment in your walk with Christ which later the Holy Spirit revealed to you as having been missed?

Hall of Fame Basketball coach, Frank Maguire of UNC Tarheel fame, had a “distasteful habit” whereby he would call a time-out in the final minute of a game in which his team was winning on an opponent’s home court—not for bench-clearing substitutions, but just to “savor” a special victory. We at Duke successfully worked hard never to provide an opportunity during my years for such savoring (10-0).

In a dimly lit gym in the hills of West Virginia, six coaches of the local 10-12 years old basketball league had gathered on folding chairs placed around the center jump circle to conduct the annual “draft” of players. . . We had come down to the last two candidates: one a tall 12 year old; the other, a very short 12 year old.

My selection had been the older “project,” leaving “Johnny” as the final pick in the draft. . . The final drafting coach, a veteran of the league, exclaimed: “But Johnny’s crippled—He can’t run or. . .” stopping short of blurting out the child’s additional defensive handicaps for guarding in basketball. Obviously, I perceived, such a coach could be very harmful to the developing psyche of the young lad. Furthermore, I found myself becoming overwhelmed with anger regarding that adult’s behavior.

“I’ll take him and you can have my twelve year old,” voiced my emphatic rejoinder to his whiny complaint. On that inauspicious note, the draft ended.

Congenitally crippled with a flexed (club) foot, Johnny was physically challenged to participate in sports, but he limped through every session, practicing his awkward, gun-slung shooting technique. Always early, he never missed a game. His mother related how important it was to her son to be a part of our team, totally accepted. In his mind, he had to be there for everything; he did not want to miss anything.

The instituted rules required that every child would play a minimum of five minutes each half. Our squad was championship quality, winning the majority of our games. However, the team, first place in the standings, was the one managed by the above mentioned coach of insensitivity. His players were the class of the league and he knew how to take advantage of the game’s unique guidelines.

The night in the tournament when our team was upsetting this number one ranked roster, according to rule, Johnny was reinserted into the lineup. Additionally, throughout the whole regular season, he had yet to score a single point. . . Suddenly out of a crowded corner, from the hip he lofted the ball, arcing high in a slow motion rotation, and drifting true through the net with a “swish.” Johnny’s shot! Johnny’s score!

The Junior High gymnasium erupted in jubilation. Immediately, I leaped to my feet and called time-out: time out so Johnny and his teammates could “savor” the moment; his moment. . .Parents were in tears; my sleeve, a bit moistened, too. No spitefulness in my heart; only celebration that a child of disability had experienced such joy. Silently, I flashed a prayer of praise to God. Years later, people would come up to me and ask, “Remember when Johnny sank that shot?”

At Easter, recall that only Mary Magdalene stayed to contemplate the puzzling situation at the tomb. The angel had spoken, “Remember when?” . . .And while Mary sorrowfully “savored” the memory, the Remembered One came!

Lord, during the Lenten Season, let me DO and REMEMBER YOU. Let me REMEMBER YOU and then DO! WWJD. WJWDIWD. Amen.

Buzz Harrison



Sonya Haffey (submitted in 2011)

Gethsemane was an industrial olive garden or orchard where they pressed the olives for oil.

The olive presses were made out of basalt and in Jesus’ time were made in Capernaum, near the Sea of Galilee, where much of Jesus’ ministry took place.

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Third Sunday of Lent

“Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.”

(Psalm 139:10)

Not long ago, I was sitting on a bench at a shopping area waiting to meet some friends. I was watching people pass by when a pretty little girl about three years old caught my attention. She came running by as fast as her little legs would go! I looked around to see if she had an adult in attendance and a way behind was who I assumed was her father. She continued on for quite a way then stopped still and looked back to connect with this young man. She then resumed her flight. This pattern continued for a distance down the shopping area.

As I sat there, the thought came to me that this is the very picture of my relationship with my Heavenly Father. I run ahead and plan, try to solve, and yes, even worry over my daily challenges in life. Why don't I take my Lord's hand and let Him guide, counsel, and comfort me in all things? He knows all, He wants what is best for me, and He desires, above all, my complete trust. He is ever-waiting to grant me joy on the journey and show me the abundance of His love. Why do I run ahead of this gracious gift?

Dear Lord, I pray that I will take more time to see You and to be aware of the abiding, bountiful, and eternal love You shower on Your children. Amen.

Kathryn Thomas

*“I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—He who watches over you will not slumber;
Indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—He will watch over your life;
The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”*
(Psalm 121)

I believe that we as a church have received the Lord’s help and guidance through the years as Psalm 121 tells us. I rejoined the Session this year (2008) and as I was preparing for my re-examination, I reflected on the history of our church from the early days until now and I believe that God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, has always been there leading us forward. In the 1960’s, we were a small young congregation, inexperienced in church matters and I believe that God used Memorial Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery to send us outstanding pastors and leaders to educate and train us.

Through the years, God has continued to be with us and we have had great pastors and lay persons to lead us, our children and grandchildren as we all grow in our faith. Our church has reached Memorial’s maturity and God has continued to bless us with outstanding pastors and qualified lay leaders that lead us in a Bible-based Christian life.

My prayer is that we will always look to the Lord for His help and guidance while teaching and preaching God’s Word. Mary and I are very thankful for the Christian beliefs and life that our family, including our children and grandchildren, has experienced at First Pres. I pray that this church will always be a place where families can worship God and discover His grace and peace in their lives. Amen.

**Pete Mitchell (submitted in 2008)
Charter Member**

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.”

(James 5:15a)

The home where I grew up in Elm City, North Carolina, was located across the street from the Baptist church. One Wednesday morning, as my mother was sweeping off the front porch, she noticed several ladies trying to get in the locked door across the street. A light rain began to fall and my mother called to them to come into her home. They conducted their meeting, and my mother invited them to return the next month. Although we were Methodists, this group continued to meet at our home regularly for several years.

Several years later, my husband and I, with our three children, were living in Hinsdale, Illinois, many miles away. My daughter, Diane, a senior in high school, was driving to a Friday night sports event when she was hit by a drunken driver. She sustained a serious concussion and she was taken to the local hospital. A few days passed, and she did not regain consciousness. My mother called frequently, while I sat by Diane's bedside hoping for her to recover.

Late on Wednesday morning, Diane opened her eyes and looked at me and asked, “What happened?” Thank God she had returned to normal! I drove home to have some lunch and the phone was ringing when I arrived. My mother called to inquire and was delighted at the good news. She told me that she had asked the ladies meeting at her home to stand in a circle and pray for Diane's healing. It was at the exact time that Diane had awakened!

Heavenly Father, we thank You for always protecting us, watching over us, and healing us. You never forsake us, and for this we are truly grateful. Help us to continue to live as You would have us live. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Juanita Demrick

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

(Romans 8:28)

Most of us do not like to be uncomfortable. We don't like to wait or be told no or not be able to get what we want. I know someone who decided to get a dog. She desired a specific breed and had a plan to use the dog for therapy. She found what she believed to be the ideal dog and anxiously waited for the puppy to be ready to come live with her. But, it turned out the dog had a health issue and was not expected to live. My friend was devastated. She could not understand why everything had gone so wrong when it had felt so perfect to her.

One week later, she found another dog; and in two more days, she brought this puppy home with her. She was immediately head over heels in love and was consumed with joy over this dog.

I think about how long that one week was and now that everything has worked out so well, it seems like so little to bear in light of the joyful outcome. I imagine that the days following Jesus' death must have been the longest, darkest days His followers had ever known. All their hope and expectations must have turned to utter despair. It wasn't until Jesus had returned and reminded them of everything He had promised, that they were able to see that all was according to His plan. So often, it is only after God brings us through a trial, or gives us the gift He had planned, that we are able to remember His promise. In all things God works for good.

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of Your Son. Teach us to be patient. As the disciples had to wait three days, remind us that Your plan is always good. Amen.

Anne Romine (submitted in 2009)

Fellowship Elder 2006-2008

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love.”

(John 15:5,10)

Throughout my life I often fall into the trap of believing the lie that my value comes from how much I accomplish and how well I accomplish it. This was especially true during my first years of campus ministry. I hit the ground running, filling every hour with meetings with students, working hard to see their lives transformed by Jesus. It did not take long before I was exhausted and frustrated with a seeming lack of fruit. I started believing more lies: that I was not a good fit for this role and that I had done everything wrong.

Graciously, Jesus intervened with a new perspective on His words, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” Jesus showed me that remaining in Him means walking in simple obedience, listening to His voice through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. I repented of the lies I had believed and began afresh to ask Jesus for His instructions. Some days I felt like I had less to show for my efforts, but as I learned to walk in simple obedience, I experienced more of the love of Jesus (just like He promised), and I was able to share the depth of that love with others.

As disciples, we are successful when we are learning to take simple steps of obedience with Jesus. We remain in His love and can trust Him with any fruit that comes as a result.

Jesus, You are the vine and in You alone we bear fruit. What do You want me to prioritize this week? What steps of simple obedience would You like me to take today? I trust You with the fruit. Amen.

**Kristin Weinzapfel
Campus Ministry**

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

In the midst of Lent, you may be wondering, why does the passage about love come to mind? Love comes to mind because it has everything to do with Lent! The love in this passage tells us about divine love, and shows us how our lives should be lived because of the love God has exhibited to His people. During the last few weeks of Pastor Elton’s life, I began to reflect on his life in our community, and how he lived that life. This passage kept coming back to me over and over again. Elton Piersma loved us the way that God loves us.

1 Corinthians 13:1 tell us if we “do not have love” we are nothing. Having love and loving are two very different things. Having love comes from God, and knowing, as Leon Morris says, God’s love “is a love lavished on others without thought whether they are worthy or not” frees us to love others in that same way. Elton knew that he was loved by God in this unworthy and undeserving manner. That love by God was exhibited ultimately by Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross for our personal sins. Being loved while we are still in sin is a big deal! Being loved while still in sin sets me free to love because I have been given divine love, and I am loved at my worst, not my best.

Defining love in today’s world is quite difficult. We say we love many things and many people, but our lives don’t always exhibit that love. The verses in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 are the tangible manifestation of God’s love. Elton lived his life in the knowledge and wonder of God’s love for him and because of God’s love for him, Elton was able to walk in this kind of love. As you read verses 4-8, I would like you to ponder your life in light of the adjectives regarding love that are there for you. When you have done that, I would like you to replace the word love in verses 4-8 with Jesus. As you do that you will find how Jesus treats you, a sinner saved by His grace. I would leave you with some questions to ponder today. How is this love exhibited by my life? Do I “have love” in my life that I am able to love my neighbor as Jesus loves me? What are the ways you would like Christ to be more evident in the way that you love others?

***Lord Jesus, thank You for the love You have poured out for me on the Cross.
Thank You that You have loved me, and continue to love me. Transform
my life into one that shows forth Your love that others might experience
You and be freed to love the way that You love them. Amen.***

Lynn Grandsire (submitted in 2011)

**(Lynn helped coordinate the Lenten devotional when she was on staff at First Pres from 1999-2006.
She is now serving as Associate Pastor at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Columbia, S.C.)**

***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see Your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
(Matthew 5:16)***

Immediately upon reading the blurb about the Lenten Devotional, I remembered the first time I had to memorize a Bible verse. I was 6 years old, had just finished first grade, and was attending my first daily Vacation Bible School in our “new” church. Each child was given a different Bible verse to memorize for recital at the closing exercises at the end of the second week. I was given Matthew 5:16, King James Version, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see Your good works, and glorify Your Father which is in heaven.” I found the verse a bit difficult to comprehend, and, because of that, was nervous about standing in front of everyone to recite the verse. I managed to do it successfully, but I have never forgotten the experience or the verse. It (the verse) has become my guiding “light” as I have tried to live by its admonition.

I remember exactly when I truly understood how one could live by the verse’s tenet: I was a young teenager going to my first summer church camp. After “check-in” I was taken to the cabin in which I would be spending the week. Sweeping the porch of the cabin and singing a cheerful hymn was an older teenager. Her hair was long, blonde, and curly; she was in jeans and a plaid shirt. She looked like an angel to me. She was always cheerful during what turned out to be a rather dreary, rainy week. As a result, she enhanced my first experience at a church camp because she was always positive, cheerful, and encouraging. I wanted to be like her as I grew up! I have no recollection of her name, and I never saw her again. However, I believe I learned from her what was meant by “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.”

Once I really understood Jesus’ words, I tried harder to let my “light shine” with a positive attitude and a caring demeanor for others. How successful I’ve been, I do not know, but I will continue trying to live up to what has been not only the first Bible verse I ever learned, but also the one that has been most meaningful to me.

***Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your continuing blessings on my life;
and please, Lord, continue to help me live up to Jesus’ instruction about letting
our “light shine before men.” In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.***

Ellen Reed

Sunday, March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Lent

***“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity;
but of power, love and self-discipline.”***

(2 Timothy 1:7)

Each of us has been there. Facing a difficult time, feeling dark, alone, and lost. “Work is not fun.” “School is too hard.” “Our expenses are growing but our income is not...how long can we live like this?” “The kids don’t seem happy.” “No one likes me.” This is when fear would often try and have its way with me; poking me, laughing at me, whispering to me, “You’re not good enough.” “You’re not worthy enough.” “You are not smart enough.” “You can’t...” “You are not enough!” It gets to be too much to bear sometimes. The doubt, the worry, the fear...it is almost paralyzing. Fortunately, this is not how our Father would have us live.

God, our Father, loves us so much; so much so that He sent His only begotten Son to earth to die for our sins so that we may experience everlasting life with Him in heaven. Our loving, faithful Father would have us be bold in the work we do, even in the midst of troubling times. Working in ministry, I have a unique position to see God’s hand at work every single day. I also see the worst of humankind and the depravity of human flesh and blood. It is in those moments, in particular, that it is very easy to slip and allow fear and timidity to control one’s mind. Ask the Lord to help you see that person through the eyes of Christ. Ask the Father to reveal this person’s backstory to you so that you may better understand him/her. Endurance in the midst of difficulties is a beautiful characteristic that rises up when we accept the fact that our Father does not want us to be afraid, and timid nor weak, but rather filled with power, love and self-control.

Heavenly Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ and I ask that you would help me to love others as You would love them. Help me to see them as Your child, as my sibling, and grow my heart, Lord! Help me to push through the tough times and to know that You are God. Help me, Lord, to lean on and into You more during tough times. Thank You for giving me power, love, and self-discipline so that I may see the best in others; that I may love others even when it is too hard for them to love themselves. Lord, I love You and I need You. Forgive my sins, open my heart, and bless me with supernatural endurance and self-discipline. In Jesus Christ’s sweet & precious name I pray, Amen.

**Joanne Dively
Hannah’s Home of S. Florida**

“And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

(Philippians 4:19-20)

Through the years of my life I see God’s constancy and love as He meets my needs and directs my path as I trust and obey. Over thirty years ago He brought me to my knees in prayer as He showed me how little I knew Him and His Word, even though I called myself a Christian. A lifetime of earnest Bible study began: Moody extension classes, Bethel Bible Study and teaching, studies at First Pres., and contextual studies with Dr. James Martin in the lands of the Bible. I could never have suspected the doors the Lord would open, nor the opportunities He would give as I walked this path.

In 1999, God suddenly called my husband, John, home to be with Him. I was on a path I did not choose. I could only trust and obey. In these difficult days in the midst of grief and the blur of my short-term memory loss, God daily gave me light for the path I was walking and met all my needs. He provided a faithful Stephen Minister weekly to minister to me and listen to my struggles, to pray for me and with me, and help me to trust God through these days. This time deepened my faith and trust. Healing from grief and loss takes time. Nearly three years later, I awoke one morning knowing that God was not finished with me. He had healed my mind, deepened my faith, and given me a certainty that I could trust Him in all things.

I continued to enjoy my familiar life teaching math until 2006 when God called me to study in Israel. Three days into the study trip I knew I wanted more of this kind of study. The Bible was alive, the people were real. My understanding deepened. I would never read the Bible the same way. How could I do this and teach math?

On the long flight home from Israel, I prayed for God to guide and direct my path. I knew He was calling me to trust Him and for me to retire from teaching math. My greatest concern was not having enough to keep me busy physically and mentally. I should have known better. He has given me the opportunity to help organize the trips First Pres. has taken to Israel, Greece and Turkey, Egypt and Jordan, and the Passion Play at Oberammergau. God has allowed me to see the wonder, joy and increased understanding of God’s Word on the faces of the travelers. I could have missed it if I had not trusted. Where is God calling you to trust Him? Trust Him with all your heart for you will never know the plans He has for you unless you do.

Heavenly Father, how thankful we are that You love us, know us intimately and provide for all our needs. You are the vine and we are the branches. We are nothing without You. Give us courage to put our hand in Yours, trusting and obeying as You guide and direct us, meeting all our needs. Even on a path we would not choose, Your light shines through us as a witness to those around us, that in our obedience we glorify You. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Shirley Alley (submitted in 2012)

Elder of Fellowship 2012-2014

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

(Matthew 5:16)

Memories, remembering! All of us have memories: some strange, some scary, some life-changing, and some sweet. The memories I want to share are sweet memories of the men of God, the pastors of First Pres. In the years I have been here, it has been a gift to have shared worship and God’s Word with our pastoral staff.

I remember when the Children’s choir from Rwanda was singing at our church. The children were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up. One girl said she would like to be a pastor. When Lucky got ready to give the prayer for the offering, he asked the girl to come beside him and asked her if she would like to give the prayer. She shyly shook her head no. Lucky gently put his arm around her shoulder and held her near while he said the prayer. It was such a sweet moment of love for God’s children.

Having the privilege to travel with Ron to Haiti and Cuba, it was always sweet to see him interact with the children. Ron’s love of photography and children drew all children to him. Modern technology in digital cameras was thrilling to the children. Ron would take their picture and then show it to them. Those children, for the most part, had never seen a picture of themselves. Watching Ron with the children was always a thrill for me.

I am always moved when I see Tim and see the way he lives his life to the glory of God. Tim, in his illness and pain, is a living example of honoring God and being obedient to following Him. I remember Tim leading the children and all of us, doing the Hokey Pokey with the children in Guatemala when we dedicated the school in Chichicastenago.

I think my sweetest memory was an interaction between Lucky and Dr. Duke. Dr. Duke was in the later stages of dementia. He came to church with his caregiver. Lucky was standing at the altar and Dr. Duke, as he entered his pew, stopped, turned to face Lucky and gave his friend a salute. I will always remember that sweet moment between brothers in Christ. I’m sure you too, have precious, sweet memories of things you have seen and experienced here at First Pres.

Most gracious Heavenly Father, I thank You for the men of God, Your servants, that You have placed at First Pres. I thank You for their message, their love for all of us and for their love for You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Betty Percy

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

For the past several years I have frequently traveled by train to Orlando on Amtrak. Needless to say, I have met many interesting people.

Recently, I had a brief conversation with a lady from Ohio while we were waiting for the train to arrive. I asked her the usual questions such as, “Do you live in West Palm?” “Whom did you visit?” etc. She explained that she had visited her daughter and was traveling to visit relatives in Orlando. She obviously had some medical problems as she commented that she really didn’t know why she was still alive. I said, “You have a purpose for living.” She immediately responded, “Yes, my purpose is to glorify God and to live with Him forever.”

Now, where have I heard that before? It was in the Shorter Catechism that we studied for “examination” for deacon or elder. Actually, it read: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

This was the first question. It had a short answer and was easy to remember. Yet, this is the part that had stayed on my mind the most since I met with Ron and the Session. What do I do to glorify God? After much soul searching, I have come up with some ways I could bring more glory to God by:

- Having a daily quiet time with the Lord in Bible study and prayer
- Confessing my sins and asking for forgiveness
- Striving to be more like Christ in thoughts and actions
- Listening, helping, encouraging and giving
- Speaking up about my faith when it is easier to be quiet

***Dear God, like the lady at the train station, I have a purpose
and a plan. Give me strength and boldness each day
to glorify You and enjoy You more. Amen.***

Grace Robertson (submitted in 2012)
Fellowship Elder 2014-2106

***“This I recall to my mind. Therefore, I have hope. The LORD’S
loving kindness indeed never cease. For His compassions
never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness
‘The LORD is my portion’ says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’”
(Lamentations 3:21-24)***

When our Church body celebrates the Remembrance of the Sacrament, I always pause during this moment to recall my walk of faith and how ***God knows the details of my life.***

I grew up in a faith-based home that goes back several generations of Christians. Never were we to interrupt my mother’s morning Scripture study as she was “armoring up for the day.” She was a professional singer and teacher that truly had the gift to sing the language of God with such beauty. I was always stunned in awe to hear her sing.

My father, who survived a tragic childhood without parents, chose likability and a wicked sense of humor to endear him to strangers. He was a natural athlete in any sport and nearly fulfilled his dream of playing professional football with the Pittsburgh Steelers, but instead was drafted by the US Army to serve 5 years in the South Pacific. In combat, he lost his hearing (and it’s another story how he ended up marrying a professional singer) and fortified his faith that NOTHING was out of the Hand of God. His favorite saying to me, in my tough moments, “Please Trust God and KEEP THE FAITH.”

As a 4 year old, our family moved to Charlotte. I had two older sisters that didn’t want to fool with a kid sister. My childish nightly prayers asking for a playmate was answered in the form of a female collie, which just randomly showed up. The owner’s father would come every evening to collect the dog. We were inseparable. “Lassie” would growl and bark to protect me and I would be in full temper tantrum not to be parted from her. It turned out to be Billy Graham’s dog and Dr. Graham showed a lonely little girl her first act of kindness. He gave me his dog, Lassie; an act I have never forgotten and still cherish.

Fast forward 25 years later in Dallas, I had just moved and joined a church. I was talking with the Senior Pastor, Clayton Bell, in his office. Somehow the “Lassie” story came up and next thing Dr. Bell is on the phone with his brother-in-law asking about the collie. God is in the details. And on the phone, Billy Graham asked me about my mother’s singing and my father’s sense of humor. He was delighted I was singing in both the Church’s Chamber and Sanctuary Choir and “walking in the faith,” as my parents raised me.

My dog, Lassie, my parents, Dr. Bell and Dr. Graham are all with the Lord now. At Easter, I have enormous joy remembering those I loved and those that loved me.

Lord, thank You for Your promise that You are the Alpha and Omega. Bless us that we may continue to trust You in the details of our lives and to be living examples of Your fragrance that others may see You. In our Lord, the risen Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friday, March 27, 2020

“We live by faith, not by sight.”
(2 Corinthians 5:7)

Who would have thought that after joining this church as newlyweds with a congregation of less than 100, we would be blessed beyond measure to live here all these years and be a part of its growth! We were young and shortsighted, but God had a plan and a vision for us and this small group!

In the '60s, North Palm Beach was sparsely populated; the nearest restaurant was Frederic's Steak House in WPB and there was a movie theater in Riviera Beach. Our new church friends soon became the center of both our spiritual and our social lives. We met in each other's homes for potluck dinners, prayer and circle meetings, and Bible studies. We cared for each other in sickness and became family. I remember being one of three adults (along with Joanna Robinson Hogan) teaching VBS to 25 children one summer in Hawkins Hall. Now that will test and strengthen your faith!

Because we started as such a small congregation, we were asked to take turns doing various jobs in leadership. Many of us served on church committees for several years. In those days before computers, Dave became the volunteer church treasurer and personally kept the books. As he reviewed the bills weekly, he would say, "We need to pray that we receive \$XX in order to cover these expenses." It certainly strengthened our faith when every single Sunday the offering was always enough. Even though we now have paid staff to administer the budget, and he is one of several who review and sign the checks, we keep praying for income to meet our obligations.

Looking back over these years, Dave and I are both thankful for the many opportunities to love and serve the Lord. Because we are still actively involved, we know that God is not finished with us yet. We still have much to learn about God's plan for us and His church as He continues to build on the foundation He has laid before us.

Dear Father in Heaven, thank You for growing our faith as we live to see more and more of the vision You have in store for us. Thank You for Your Son Jesus, through whom our mistakes and sins are forgiven as we humbly try to please You. Amen.

Ann Talley (submitted in 2017)
Fellowship Elder 1997-1999

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

Whoever came up with the name, the “Windy City” for Chicago has obviously never lived on the high plains of the Texas panhandle. There are days here when I have to fight to keep my little car on the road! At least no one here can tell if the wind has messed up my hair since it always has that look!

This week, I was in Chicago. . .not windy at all. . .for one of my classes on worship and I took a drive into the city to stop by where I had lived after college. In the twenty degree weather, I parked the car and went for a walk along the lake. It was beautiful. Looking out across the gentle waves under the starlit sky, I smiled and remembered how much I enjoyed my regular walks along the sea at Juno Beach. And smiled again as I thought about the difference in temperature.

As I continued to stroll along the walkway, I began singing, “I see the Lord, seated on His throne, with glory. . .” and remembered it was near this place along the shore of Lake Michigan, that I received the confirmation of my call to ministry. God spoke clearly and told me not to move forward with Proctor & Gamble, but to go to seminary. That was the biggest smile of the evening because it was truly the smile of my heart.

God has a calling for each one of our lives. We just need to walk more slowly and listen more intently so that we may hear the call. Sometimes it comes in a whisper, sometimes it rolls over us like a huge wave, and we need to be aware of things further away than the reach of our own hands, and sometimes we must walk a long distance before the calling appears before us with great clarity.

God is calling you and me. From the righteousness of His throne, God has given us a purpose. Let us with joyful hearts, extend our hands and say, “Here I am; send me.”

***Holy God, lead us this day that we might desire
Your will and Your truth this day. Amen.***

Jeff Conway (submitted in 2000)

(Jeff Conway served as an Associate Pastor at First Pres for a few years, and was instrumental in starting the Advent and Lenten devotionals. Jeff and his wife, Patti, went on to serve at churches in Texas and Pennsylvania and Jeff has recently retired.)

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Fifth Sunday of Lent

“I remember your sincere and unqualified faith [the surrendering of your entire self to God in Christ with confident trust in His power, wisdom and goodness, a faith] which first lived in [the heart of] your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am confident that it is in you as well.”
(2 Timothy 1:5)

I will remember my first trip to India in the year 2000 and how the sincere faith of the people I met there changed me. For good. Forever.

I really didn't want to go to India! In fact, I was downright SCARED of the whole idea of India! My missions pastor persistently encouraged me. I attended the informational meeting, prayed about it, and somehow felt very drawn to this specific trip—all the while I was still SCARED. But the most remarkable transformation took place as soon as my feet touched the ground in India! Something inside of me came to life in a way that I never experienced before. It was as if my entire life was preparation for this moment, and this place, and these people.

I spent the next ten days on the streets of Delhi, the capital of India, and then in the villages of Punjab, near Pakistan. This experience rocked my world as I heard firsthand stories of how little girls were sold for a pittance, or had their lives snuffed out simply because they are girls. I saw the resilience of the people, especially some very hard-working women. They received the Good News of Christ's love with great joy. Then they worked tirelessly to share His love with others.

Yes, I remember their sincere faith—the surrendering of their entire selves to God in Christ with confident trust in His power, wisdom and goodness. And their beautiful faith changed me. And my earnest desire is that I will continue to pass along this faith to my family, my friends (including dear friends at First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach), and the women we serve together in the 10/40 window and beyond. For good. Forever!

Oh Lord, when I remember ALL that You did for me, for each and every one of us, how can I withhold anything of value from You? Thank You for the gift of Your life, and our life in You secured by Your death, burial and resurrection! With Your help, I will remember and rejoice through each day of Lent—with confident trust in Your power, wisdom and goodness. Amen.

Kim Kerr
Women in the Window

Monday, March 30, 2020

***"Thus far the Lord has helped us."
(1 Samuel 7:12)***

A couple years ago I read the following end of year post on social media from one of my favorite Bible study leaders, Beth Moore. "To all of you living the long haul of something really hard, you made it another year. Raise that Ebenezer stone as Samuel did and declare this year's end: 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.' Even if all you've got left is a whisper. He whose grace is sufficient will help us still." I texted it to a few friends that I had been praying for and thought could use the encouragement. Little did I know how much those words would mean to me upon entering 2020.

Some years are just tough! 2019 was definitely one of them. For me personally, it was a year of loss. My family lost our twenty-three-year-old cousin to a car crash and 8 months later his mother (my aunt and godmother) lost her battle with colon cancer. I also had to say goodbye to our sweet fifteen-year-old dog. (All you animal lovers know that is more difficult than most expect.) In addition, I walked alongside many dear friends who have also journeyed through deep loss and really hard life circumstances. As I reflect on the difficulty of the past year, I also remember so many ways that God has been faithful in providing what I needed to get through each trial. He answers prayers and provides blessings in ways we can't even begin to expect or imagine. Even in grieving, we can be recipients of comfort, encouragement, joy in sad times and peace that passes all understanding. As we spend time with family and friends, we can share memories, hugs, laughter and tears together.

In my car console I have a small stone with the verse reference 1 Samuel 7:12 written on it. It is a reminder to me that in difficult times my God has cared for me, given me much to be thankful for and is the hope for what lies ahead. In the seventh chapter of 1 Samuel, Samuel set up a memorial stone and named it "Ebenezer" which means "stone of help." Had I known a year ago the circumstances that I would have to endure, I am sure fear, panic and a few other emotions would have consumed me. Instead, I can look back as Samuel did in the midst of challenges and know for sure that "thus far the Lord has helped me."

Through whatever changes and challenges lie ahead, we can choose to remember and share the ways God has been faithful. God's Word provides endless amounts of encouragement and hope. His faithfulness gives us reason to give thanks and find joy in the journey, no matter the circumstances. Here are a few additional verses I wanted to share with you that have brought me hope in trials: John 14, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, James 5:10-11, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Joshua 4.

Lord Jesus, You are faithful in Your love for us. You give us all we need for our journey. May we remember Your goodness and rely on Your provisions all our days, giving praise to You alone. Amen.

Kimberly Sanders

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

***“Remember His marvelous works that He hath done,
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.”
(1 Chronicles 16:12)***

The hardest part of getting older has been that I'm not as smart as I thought I would be now, especially when a family crisis occurs. Spending time in an ICU with an ailing parent reminds me of my tendency to worry as a child. My dad was a police officer then, and his safety was a constant concern of mine. My parents begged our minister, Pastor Lindemann, to talk with me. These conversations changed my life. I learned I have a Heavenly Father who cared about not only me, but my earthly father as well, and had already made important plans for both of us. He even sent the Son He loved so much to die for our sins. I also learned that trusting God was an important part of faith. While God has been a constant presence in my life, I must confess that I have to work very hard on trust.

Watching my father confront yet another health crisis reminds me of various surgeries, injuries, and other challenges he encountered with his health. One time he was hospitalized so long that he ran out of sick leave, and other police officers took turns working his shifts so that our family would still be taken care of financially. I remember that God provided not only help for his recovery, but had a plan to provide resources for our family as well. I praise God as I shake my head in amazement, that I have the luxury of worrying about him as an almost eighty year old.

***Dear God: Thank You so much for Your constant presence in our lives.
Please help us to remember those times You provide for our needs
and to trust You in times of trouble. Amen.***

Cora Barnhart

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

***“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns,
is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life
and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”
(Matthew 13:22)***

When I was 15, I attended a church camp. One evening I found an alcove and knelt to pray. As I was praying, I felt as if a vacuum bell fell around me. I could no longer hear the night sounds and I was enveloped by such Love. . . You would think I would never forget that experience, yet I did. My family moved, I went to college, married, had children. The busyness of life choked out that memory.

Then my father died. Two months later Ernie’s mother died. Our lives were shaken. Both of us started seeking for meaning in our lives. Separately, we turned to God. Both of us had good foundations from our childhoods, yet the busyness of life had allowed us to ignore God.

One night, I was praying in our bedroom and I asked God if I had ever accepted His Son as Lord and Savior. That memory came flooding back into my mind and heart. How could I have forgotten? I don’t remember my youthful prayer, but God assured me that I was His child and He had been beside me all along.

Like the seed that fell among the thorns, the busyness and worries of this life choked out a vibrant relationship with God, but unlike the seed, we can choose to move and grow in our faith in Jesus.

There is a line from Psalm 42:4, “These things I remember as I pour out my soul...”

I have never again forgotten my experiences in the alcove and my bedroom. I remember. . .

***Dear Father, during this journey through Lent and always,
help us to remember Your lovingkindness to us and give
us wisdom to keep the busyness of life at bay. Amen.***

Bonnie Wilcox

Thursday, April 2, 2020

“He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” Then they remembered His words.”

(Luke 24:6-8)

My oldest daughter has gone to Belgium to study abroad, and I am preparing to move my mother into an independent living facility. Both of these events are fraught with grief, fear of the unknown, and countless never before faced obstacles. Putting Claire on a plane was very hard; we are nervous to send her into the unknown. And she is So. Far. Away. Likewise, my mom will be leaving the house she and my dad built, in a town she loves, to come here to join a completely new community. Along with my heartache though, is the anticipation of new opportunities and discoveries.

What I always hold on to is this: it is because we love Claire so much that it hurts so much to be apart. And it is because we have loved my mom's home so much that it is sad to leave. If we did not have the love, the great memories, the beautiful shared experiences, we would be indifferent to the changes and loss. The hurt is big because the love is even bigger. And each step forward, no matter how hard, is as it should be. It is right for Claire (and eventually Tess) to leave us. My mother is aging, and I am grateful that she will be near me.

So it is with Easter. We approach Lent as a time of sacrifice and reflection. There is sadness as we ponder Jesus's death for our salvation. But without it, we could not have the joy of the resurrection! Every step of Jesus's ministry was leading to His crucifixion. And His crucifixion leads to our eternity with Jesus. What a blessing to experience life so deeply! Even in times of grief, we can rejoice in our loss, knowing that God is leading us towards a beautiful future.

Dear God, thank You for every moment in our lives. Remind us to see Your hand in even the hardest of circumstances. We know that in all things You work for our good. Help us to glorify You in all we do. Amen.

**Anne Romine
Fellowship Elder 2006-2008**

“This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.”

(Lamentations 3:21)

*“Yet with You I shall always be; You have hold of my right hand; with Your council
You guide me, and in the end You will receive me in glory.”*

(Psalm 73: 23-24)

I never thought of myself as a storyteller. Co-workers, however, have told me that they loved the stories I would share. Often when faced with a challenge, I would address it with a memory of a similar situation. That remembrance would explain how the problem had been handled in the past. While telling my story, tempers and attitudes settled down. A discussion would ensue often leading to a positive outcome as we worked together. Being an elder on a team, and having the advantage of experience, easily put me in the perfect position of influence.

Thinking about the power of remembrance, I realized that a memory often instructs and directs in a beneficial way. For me, a single memory can be a still life image that creates a soothing calm and settles my soul. A cheerful memory can promote a smile, even a giggle. My grandsons have added to that stockpile! Yet, I have other memories that can promote deep sadness leading to a heavy heart and flowing tears. For example, loving words not shared. I can recall poor decisions that heavily impacted others emotionally causing much regret. I can now see deeply rooted in those memories was a single action that fed into the chaos. My memories now instruct, counsel, and guide me. These recollections come from my deep sub-conscience, working in tandem with my heart. Maturity has played an important role, having grown to know my heart is the home of much hope and godly spirit. These permanent memories etched in my brain contain the lessons that inspire growth and change. They continually challenge my character. They fill me with love, hope, and compassion. They help me choose to live a joyful, honest, and righteous life.

Memories continue to refine me. Seventy-three years have stored up plenty! Needing to sort through and choose one to share is an impossible task. I do know each and every memory is a part of who and what I am. My memories are saved by the will of my Heavenly Father. They are securely held to be revealed by divine inspiration at just the right moment to advise, restore, and redeem.

Dear Father God, Your Son, Jesus, led a life advising, reforming, and redeeming those He met. His life exemplified perfect and pure love. We are reminded of this each Lent as we follow Christ to the cross. We thank You for the ultimate sacrifice of great love leading to our redemption and salvation. Let us never forget. May today's memories be deeply rooted in our hearts, leading to fruitful lives lived out for Your glory. Amen.

Saturday, April 4, 2020

“Remember Me...”

(Luke 22:19)

“I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more.”

(Hebrews 8:12)

REMEMBERING ...

As I age, I spend a great deal of time remembering.... That’s one of the blessings of retirement. You have time to reflect on your life and how you arrived where you are. I spend time remembering teachers who influenced me, especially my first and second grade teacher, Dorothy Borst, at Ascension Lutheran School in Charlotte, North Carolina. All she wanted was excellence from her students. I remember Katherine Lindsay, who sent homemade fudge through the mail when I lived out what she taught. I remember my seventh grade math teacher who had a quiz for the class: “How much dirt is in a hole 10’x3’x8?” She gave me an “F” because I should have known that there is NO DIRT in a hole! She said, “Think, Johnny, think, or you aren’t going to make it in life!” I’ve never forgotten! Of course, my parents were the greatest blessing...who didn’t just confess the faith, but LIVED it...everyday...and had daily devotions after supper every day.

Not all memories are good. I remember not visiting someone before they died. I remember saying things I would love to take back. I remember stealing a Snickers bar when I was about 7, putting it in my pants pocket and then throwing my pants over a hot radiator in my bedroom. My mother sniffed that one out and I made my first confession, not to a priest, but to the owner of Reid’s Grocery Store. I remember lecturing Eileen about getting a dent in our new car by parking too close to someone at Publix...and later that day backing that new car into an ornate brick wall at an apartment complex in Lake Park!

But the best memory I will always have is that invitation of Jesus who said, “Remember Me.” All these good things in my life came through Him and all of the bad things have been forgiven by Him. “Remember ME,” Jesus said. “Remember why I came, what I did, and how I have forgiven you so much –and that **I don’t remember your sins!**”

***Lord help me to never forget that You forgive me so much and that
You forget my sins. Help me to forgive like You do. Amen.***

Rev. John Frerking

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday

“Be still, and know that I am God”.

(Psalm 46:10a)

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

(Jeremiah 29:13)

In the Bible, the people of God are reminded many times to remember who God is and what He has done. We are also reminded that He will always remember us, love us and care for us. I have found that journaling has been an important part of remembering Him and His work in my own life. When I was young, I occasionally found it helpful to write out my feelings—both happy ones and disturbing ones. I found it was a good way to clarify what was going on in my head and my heart. As I grew in my walk with the Lord, I have learned how meaningful a spiritual journal can be.

The most basic reason to journal is to keep track of prayers and how God has answered them. It helps me stay focused during a quiet time, but it can be far more than a prayer list. We can keep a record of insights we discover in Scripture, meaningful quotations, questions we ask of God and the answers we receive, amazing “coincidences,” acts of kindness or a person coming alongside at just the right time. Journaling is a way to slow down, examine our priorities and motives, and listen. There is no right or wrong way to journal. It can be whenever and whatever we please. The purpose is always to grow in our love for God and love for others.

I have found it to be very encouraging to look back and be reminded of how God was faithful in providing just what was needed at the right time. Often, we do not realize how significant something is until some time has passed. If it isn't written down, it is likely to be lost. Journaling can be richly rewarding as it becomes our own personal record or testimony of God's work in our lives.

***Lord, slow me down in order to hear Your voice and receive
the love You pour out on us so abundantly. Amen.***

Carolyn Weda

*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.”
(1 Corinthians 13:4)*

*“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.”
(1 Corinthians 13:13)*

We have all been the recipient of many gifts that we accept and use to our enjoyment or advantage, but often take for granted. Yet they require no exchange of money, endless shopping or gift wrapping. The GIFT OF LOVE, for example, is no doubt the greatest gift we can ever receive or give, but even a gift of love can cause pain as well as joy. The Bible speaks of Faith, Hope and Charity “but the greatest of these is love.” Let’s consider more of the often under-appreciated or unacknowledged gifts:

GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP — cherished probably more than any other, and so necessary. GIFT OF THE SENSES: SIGHT, HEARING, TOUCH, SMELL AND TASTE—all priceless. What if we couldn’t see the beauty of nature, read books, view television or movies, or look into the eyes of a loved one? What if we couldn’t see a look of unbridled joy on the face of children on seeing their first puppy, or touch and feel the softness of a baby’s skin, or taste bread pudding with whiskey sauce, or an ice cream bar on a hot day? What if we couldn’t hear the beautiful music of Brahms, Chopin or Mozart, or an evening of Dixieland Jazz? Without the GIFT OF LANGUAGE, we would have no connection to the great writers of history—poets, authors, great speakers like Churchill—no Thoreau, Kahlil Gibran, or Mark Twain etc.—the list is endless. The broad scope of CREATIVITY in all its forms is a gift to the world, as well as to all of us individually.

Less recognized are the GIFTS OF IMAGINATION, SELECTIVITY and THOUGHT, or the GIFTS OF DISCERNMENT and REASONING. Would that we could give such gifts to those in high offices in business and government —gifts that are equally important in our private lives.

What would we do without the GIFT OF LAUGHTER? It would be a sad, sorrowful world for sure. Laughter is supposed to be good for the soul as well as the liver, and science has suggested we seek out more laughter to extend our lifespan. Never have we needed laughter more to rise above the nonsense and triviality we are exposed to almost daily, as well as the natural disasters, tragedies and loss of loved ones that leave us with broken hearts.

The GIFT OF MEMORY perhaps should be at the top of this list. Losing one’s memory is probably mankind’s greatest fear due to the terrible disease of Alzheimer’s. A lady recently asked, “What if I forget who God is? Would I still go to heaven?” As we age, we often need our memories to keep us sane, to look back on past accomplishments and remember loved ones who helped make our life complete.

Particularly when we are the recipient, we must not forget the GIFT OF FORGIVENESS and the GIFT OF ACCEPTANCE. The GIFT OF COMPASSION opens our heart and makes us kinder human beings and the results expand to embrace and, hopefully, bring joy to others.

The GIFT OF LIFE ITSELF is not just about the beginning and the end but all the moments in between that make us who we are, that make us stronger and more accomplished, and able to give back even in some small way that most precious of gifts. Even illness can be a gift when it enables us to learn the real meaning of life and to appreciate the health we have been given— and once recovered, reach out to be of help to others.

Dear Lord, During Lent, as we think about and meditate upon Your Word and Your gifts, help us believe the Good News and remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross that gives us the gift of eternal life. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Marie Pinschmidt



“Lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth.”
(Matthew 28:20b)

Last Sunday when Ron reflected on the fact that he had been involved in ministry here at First Pres since 1978, I thought how many stories he must have and I was inspired to reflect on my life since I joined First Pres in 1984 and the stories I have defining my Christian walk.

Time to go home, so we began our voyage home from the Bahamas in our 42 ft. sailboat across the “stream,” as everyone calls the ocean. We had checked the weather reports and it was the usual “seas a moderate chop and winds variable.” Leaving the inlet and crossing through the channel was pretty choppy, but it was customary for that channel, so we motored on and raised the main sail for stability. Now “back in the day,” which only those of us who traveled before GPS and when sketchy weather reports were the norm, will understand.

The wind began to dramatically increase whipping the sail erratically, so we knew it had to come down! As my husband yanked on the lines time and time again to bring it down, it did not budge, jammed in the track! No one said a word; no screaming, no apparent fear, we all knew. . . somebody had to go forward! Boat tossing, waves much too big, wind, and the sound! We were all alone, it seemed. As far as the eye could see, the ocean seemed to meet the dark sky. We waited for the captain’s instruction. My husband pushed me to take the wheel, and tied me to the steering station, grabbed more line and explained to our daughter that she must lie on her stomach in front of him while he did the same and as he pushed her, they crawled to the mast, no life jackets, (they would have been in the way). Strong instructions to me were “keep the boat into the wind and don’t watch us!” I tried not to think what could happen, and prayed only for God to give them strength and for me to keep us into the wind; any deviation of the wheel could not be reversed! Close to the mast, he got on his knees and she climbed on his shoulders as he tied only himself to the mast. She stood. Now rising almost 11 ft, but with a 65 ft. mast, I prayed that it was enough, and as the boat pitched back and forth, she began to yank and yank and yank. At what seemed like forever, it was finally free and noisily slid down onto the deck!

We arrived safely to the Palm Beach inlet, on the edge of a tropical storm! I could only think that God’s words are true and dependable, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth.” Through many years and many adventures later, I was always asked, “How could you keep going back?” My answer, “It is not fate that preserves us, it is our God, the Captain of our ship!”

***Lord, help us to remember that You are the Captain of our ship
and we must follow You; however blindly because You are
with us always, even to the ends of the earth. Amen.***

Patricia Rentz

This isn't your typical story in my life kind of devotional, but Kenzie and I hope some of these practical steps will help you in your daily walk.

Recall God's faithfulness to you in the past. It is good to look back and count all the times that you can see God coming through for you, even in the smallest of things or events. Journal so you don't forget all the answered prayers. (Deuteronomy 7:9)

Embrace how much He loves you, just alone in the knowing of the sacrifice He made in having His only Son die on the cross to take our sins away so that we may have a relationship with Him. (John 3:16)

Meditate on Scripture. Read slowly, more than once and pull out some parts to really study with a concordance. The more we know His Word, the more we know Him and how He desires us to live. (Psalm 119:97)

Elevate your soul with worship. I have found laying everything down at His feet and exalting Him in all His majesty puts you in a place of gratitude and that is when the simple miracles happen. (1 Chronicles 16:29)

Memorize specific verses in the Bible, perhaps some key verses that you are currently reading in your quiet time. Stay on those verses for a couple of weeks to really let them sink in. (Psalm 119:11)

Bless others with stories of God's faithfulness in your life to encourage them and give thanks to God together. Believe in a God that is with you no matter what may come your way. His Holy Spirit within you is your helper. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Examine your heart to see what you may need to confess and change. Make sure you are not harboring anything against someone else. (Psalm 118:24)

Rejoice again, I say rejoice in the Lord, that your joy may be made full, for His loving-kindness endures forever and ever. Amen. (Psalm 118:24)

One of my favorite verses for a long time now is: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Notice the 'as' you trust? So, whether it be through a code word that Kenzie and I often come up with, or building up rocks in your garden; however you choose to help you remember God's faithfulness in your life, remember. Then you can walk with a deeper trust than before so that JOY, PEACE and HOPE can overflow to be a blessing to all those around you and glorify our God on high!

This is our prayer for you.

Thursday, April 9, 2020

Maundy Thursday

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11:28)

For thirty years, I have read the writings of Max Lucado. I began with *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*.

Christmas 1991, my daughter Kristin, gave me a copy of *Six Hours One Friday*. I have reflected on Max's thoughts for many Easters, beginning in 1992. I have shared these Three Anchor Points in many devotions, such as this one.

This book was birthed from Max's experience when he lived in Miami during Hurricane David.

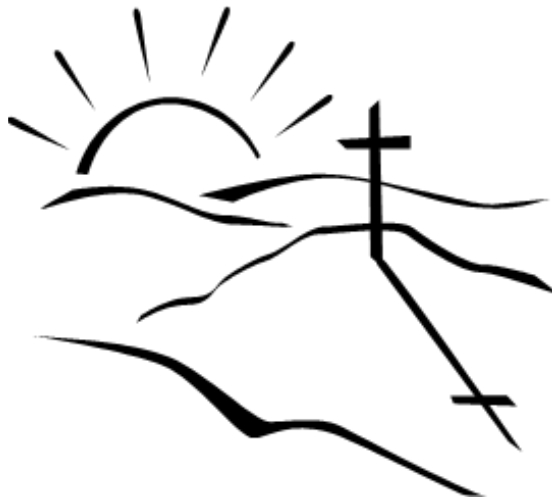
Because of the cross you and I can know that:

Our lives are not futile
Our failures are not fatal
Our deaths are not final

At the foot of the cross we find hope for life's tough issues. In the cross we find purpose, forgiveness and rest. If the claims of the cross are true, then there is an anchor point for our futility, amnesty for the guilty and life for the dying. And there is rest. Rest for the weary.

Dear Lord, I pray that others will be encouraged to join me in spending some time at the foot of the cross this Lenten season so we can glorify You as You so deserve. Amen.

Bob Schuemann



Friday, April 10, 2020

Good Friday

***“For He said, ‘Surely they are My people, children who will not deal falsely;’
and He became their Savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but
His presence that saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them;
He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.”
(Isaiah 63:8-9)***

You know what I just can't get over about God? That He came to get me. I can understand "that God so loved the world," and I can even understand Him coming to save you, well. . .most of you. But I just can't get over the fact that He came down here, to get me.

Think for a minute about what it must be like to be God. Really, try to imagine with me being the undisputed ruler of heaven. Having legions of angels at your disposal. Sitting on a huge throne with seraphs and angels and those cute little chubby cherubs all calling out your name in love and adoration. Masses of saints who worship and praise you all day, every day. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but it sounds pretty good if you ask me. Why would He leave that to come get me?

Well, one day in the midst of all this glory and honor, God looked down and He saw me. . .or maybe it was you. . .no, no I'm sure of it; it was me. What He saw hurt Him. Sin and disobedience were pulling me off the course He had designed for me. As He watched, I wandered further from His way and ever deeper into a world of danger, pain and despair. Finally, He could endure my suffering no longer, so He came to redeem me from the clutches of sin.

He left all that glory and splendor in heaven and became a poor Jewish carpenter so that He could reach down into the pit that I had made of my life and lift me up. I can't understand why He did that, but I sure am glad He did.

Father, we ask that out of Your glorious riches You might strengthen us with power through Your Spirit in our inner being, so that this Easter day and forever more Christ may dwell in our hearts. Amen.

Mark Miller (submitted in 1998)

(Mark Miller was a member who led a Sunday school class, called Home Builders, for the young couples of the church. He later became a pastor and recently retired from Church in the Gardens.)

“So gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, nights or days. I and my attendants will fast as you do. . .”
(Esther 4:16)

“When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:17-18)

I was born in a small town comprised of many Christian people. It had lots of churches, a Christian school, which I attended, and lots of extended family. Everyone knew each other and about each other. It was a wonderful place to grow up with many good memories, but also many terrible ones. My immediate family had many problems including alcohol, women, bankruptcy, part-time abandonment and my dad being excommunicated from church. Divorce was unheard of in that area in those days, so we moved out of town to a city around 200 miles away with only a few boxes in my uncle's trunk. I was 14 years old and my brother was 10.

It was to be a new start, but it only lasted only a few months. There were lots more problems, but something good happened. We found a Baptist Church with a very good youth group and I became active in that. Around 1 ½ years later, I accepted the Lord at that church and was baptized. A short time later, my parents' divorce became final and my mother remarried. There were problems to the extent that I decided I should leave.

A young man from church, whom I had dated off and on, was moving from his parents' home and looking for an apartment. He and I decided to get married because we felt we were in love and we could get an apartment together. We were 16 and 19. We had 4 children in 5 years and we struggled somewhat, but worked hard, attended church regularly, were raising our children the best we could. I felt the Lord was blessing us in many ways. In fact, when we were married 15 years, we both had fairly good jobs. He had just received a promotion that would really help us to have more family time and he had just become an elder in the church.

Then, under horrible circumstances, I found out he had someone else in his life and he told me he hadn't loved me for a year and wanted to leave. As you can imagine, because of my past, divorce to me was the worst thing in the world. It was worse than death because of rejection and everything else that goes with it. However, the no fault divorce law had just come into effect, so there was nothing I could do if he wanted out. So, of course, I was devastated and broken. I didn't want my children to go through what I had as a child. But circumstances were not good and I watched them go through so much heartache. They were treated very poorly by their father. I had to get another job because I ended up being the sole support for them, besides caring for them. Usually, 2 or 3 nights a week, I would only get 2 hours of sleep.

I prayed, but I wondered why God was allowing this to happen, but I also realized the Lord was giving me an unusual amount of strength and courage to keep going. A few years later, I married a fine Christian man. He had 3 children, so now we had 7 from 12-17 years old. A couple of years into the marriage our family attended a Christian Seminar (Basic Youth Conflicts). It was a great study on principles of the Bible.

Shortly after this I had some time off one summer and decided I should get into a deeper study of this material. I can't explain why I felt such a need to do this but I felt that the Lord wanted me to fast while doing it. I knew Esther fasted 3 days, so decided that was how long I would study for several hours each day. I also decided not to tell anyone what I was doing. I had never fasted before and must confess, I have never fasted since except maybe skipping something, etc. But at that time, I knew it was what God wanted me to do.

The last day of the study was on forgiveness. The study explained how it is important to forgive others and also to ask for forgiveness, even if you think you didn't have any fault in a situation. I fixed dinner for the family, as usual, and spent time with them. It was the third day, so this was the last meal I was to skip. After dinner, the whole family went outside, which was very unusual. I was finishing cleaning the kitchen when the phone rang. He, my former husband, never called except maybe once a year or so. That is a time God spoke to me. I had all that forgiveness stuff in my head. I knew why the phone rang and it was him. I had to do it. I knew that was because God was in control and even if I wasn't concerned or didn't think about this anymore, the Lord knew it was important.

So, I asked if I could talk to him a minute before I called the child he was calling for. He complied, so I asked for his forgiveness. His answer was something like, "I'll think about it." He never asked me to forgive him, but I wasn't surprised because I never remember him saying he was sorry for anything. But do you know what? I forgave him—I know the Lord made me do it and I felt like a ton of bricks was lifted from my shoulders. I felt so relieved and so wonderful. I know now that I needed to fast and the Lord had to get me in the right state of mind and get me ready for that step and relieve me from any bitterness and hurt I might have still had. He also showed me He is in charge and we can depend on Him. I feel so thankful to the Lord for ridding me of so much anger and resentment.

Another thing this experience did was it has helped me to forgive others. If I can forgive my former husband for all the horrible situations he put the children and me through, I can forgive anybody. That has helped me so much through life. I see more and more that God is in each situation, He never leaves us, and He is always with us.

Dear Lord, During Lent, help us think about fasting and forgiveness. We thank You for always being with us, even in our doubts. Help us to trust You always and continue to grow in You. Thank You for sending Jesus to sacrifice Himself for us so that we need only to believe and have eternal life with You. Help us to forgive others as You forgive us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Arlene Brown

Sunday, April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday



Sonya Haffey (submitted in 2010)

(This drawing was used for the cover of the devotional in 2010 and 2011.)

Easter Schedule

Ash Wednesday Service

Wednesday, February 26

7:30 pm | Sanctuary

Maundy Thursday Service

Thursday, April 9

7:00 pm | Sanctuary

Good Friday Service

Friday, April 10

7:30 am | Sanctuary

Free breakfast following the service

Children's Easter Carnival

Saturday, April 11

10:00 am | Courtyard

Infants through 4th grade

Easter Sunday Services

Sunday, April 12

Traditional:

8:00, 9:30, 11:00 am | Sanctuary

Contemporary:

9:30 & 11:00 am | Fellowship Hall

Other Church Events

Camp Registration – opens April 5 for:

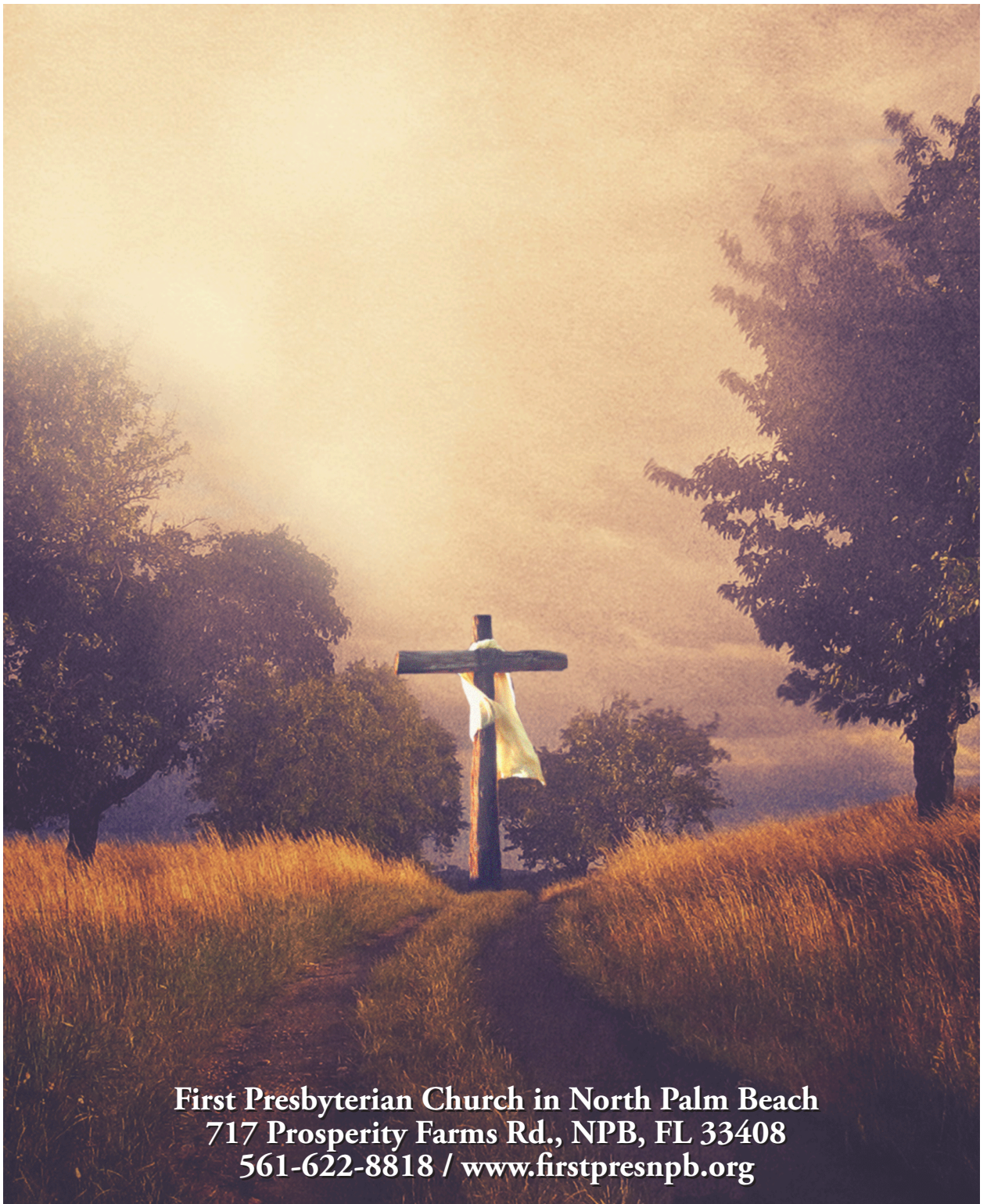
Vacation Bible School - June 8 -12

Music Camp & Conservatory – July 13-17

Fun Arts Skills and Entertainment Camp – July 20 – 24

Fired Up! – Children's Musical

Sunday, April 26 / 9:30 & 11 am / Sanctuary



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