



BY HIS STRIPES

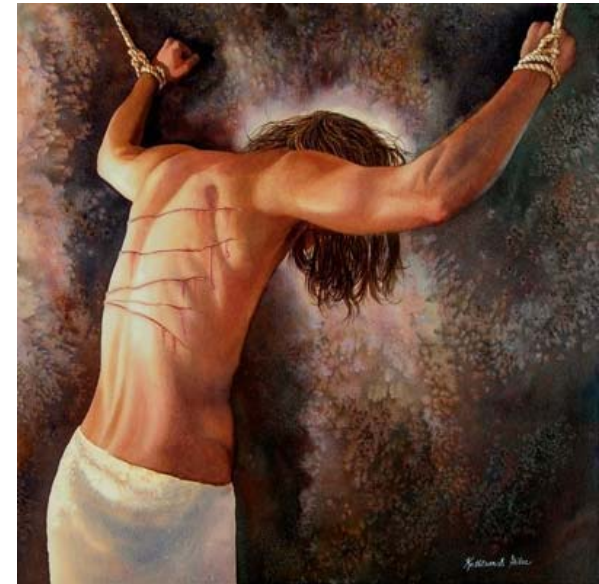
2011 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

BY HIS STRIPES—

He saw me plunged in deep distress,
He flew to my relief;
For me he bore the shameful cross,
And carried all my grief.

To him I owe my life and breath,
And all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
He saves me from the grave.

Samuel Stennett



Editor: Martha Evans Sparks

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the NIV.

WILMORE FREE METHODIST CHURCH
—CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 March 9, 2011—Ash Wednesday

LENT?

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:1-4).

HE IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

I grew up mainly in the Wesleyan Church, and Lent was always viewed as a “Catholic” thing. So, when I was asked to write a devotional thought for Lent, I first had to discover what in the world it was all about.

What I found out is that the 40 days of Lent is a time to remember the temptation of Jesus in the desert. People give something up during Lent as Jesus gave up food. We give something up that is dear to our hearts as a way to draw closer to God as we lean on Him to meet our needs. The time that would be taken up by the activity, food, or whatever that is given up is meant to be devoted to time in the Word, time in prayer, or charity work.

Previously I have never given anything up except for the two times that I participated in the 30-hour famine at our church. As I looked into the meaning of Lent, I looked into my life and choices. When one of my friends started a Facebook group for Facebook Free February, I decided to give it a try. I am hoping this 28 day period without Facebook will bring me closer to God, as well as helping me devote more time to my schoolwork and myself. As Lent begins, I ask you to look into your hearts and see if maybe God is calling you to give up something and devote some time to Him instead. For “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3).

Megan Kidwell is currently a student at Houghton College in Houghton, NY. Her family has lived in Wilmore since August 2007.

GOD'S WILL BE DONE

He said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:40b).

The power of the Christian is in prayer. Is this your daily pattern? Do you take advantage of time with the Savior before facing the trials a day may bring? That is the secret to not falling into temptation. Going further, Jesus fell on the ground and prayed, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me...." Here we witness the humanity of Jesus, dreading the cross and the pain. If there was any other way to save humanity, He wanted out! However, He prayed, "not what I will, but what you will." By submitting, all of humanity could be redeemed.

Jesus came back to the disciples and found them asleep. He asked them, "Could you not watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Jesus did this three times. Each time the disciples were sleeping. They were tired and they failed to realize the necessity to pray. As a result, they were not spiritually ready for what happened.

To be spiritually ready, we need to "watch and pray" daily. As we seek to do God's will in everything, we will reach our potential and God's plan will be accomplished through us. You and I don't often know the full consequences of saying a mighty "Yes" to God. Satan wants us to choose the easy way. Yet, by following Jesus' example, "Your will be done," we can find fulfillment, joy, peace, and eternal life with God forever.

Margaret Dargan says she accepted Christ at age five and believes that prayer is the most important thing she does each day. She adds, "I am a wife, mother, grandmother, and Team Leader of the Prayer Team of the Wilmore Free Methodist Church."

JESUS' DEATH IS FOR MISSION

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." (Matthew 28:18b-19a NASB95).

Death is not the end of us. That is what the resurrection of Jesus reveals. Human life is precious to God; we are eternal. How precious? Enough for God in Jesus to seek after and die for.

Jesus' death is completed by his resurrection and being lifted up to God's right hand (Luke 22:67-69; Hebrews 1:3; 12:2). A starting point for our mission is to understand that "all authority in heaven and on earth" is given to Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). There is great power behind our outreach. He reigns above all other rule (Ephesians 1:19-22); and from his heavenly throne, Jesus as Lord commands us to seek those who are lost, created in God's image, who are equal objects of God's compassion and forgiving love.

We talked with a woman the other day about religion. After learning that I taught New Testament, she indicated her view that all religions worship the same god and all religions make us good. Shannon and I listened. I began praying immediately. Would I risk offense by affirming Jesus? Would that end any further conversation? We kindly affirmed her desire for goodness, but questioned what that looked like; also, I mentioned that many religions promote things that are not good. Then I gently and simply affirmed Jesus to her: Jesus is Lord of all, he forgives our sins, and he defines what is good. He shows us how to love our enemies and those who hate us. At this point, the conversation noticeably changed—she inquired about our church; we have since made plans to get together again.

Fredrick Long is married to Shannon Long and they have five children: Hannah, Nathan, Gabrielle, Sam, and David. Fred is Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Scripture: John 16:13

April 23, 2011

NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13 NASB).

Although my father-in-law, Obed Koehn, had been raised in the Mennonite Church, as a young man he was alcoholic and had been responsible for the death of another human being. One day, Dad recounted to my husband the point in time when all that changed, whether a dream or a vision we don't know, but he said if he forgot everything else in his life, he would not forget what happened to him then.

The night was very dark. Dad was traveling southwest with an abominable weight strapped to his back, when he saw a light in the distance and began to move towards it. As he drew near enough to recognize what it was, he realized it was the cross and on the cross hung the Christ with blood dripping from his hands and feet. He continued on until he was standing directly in front of Christ.

He heard the unmistakable words, “Obed, kneel.” He knelt. The blood that had been dripping became a river of blood washing over him, loosening and releasing the weight on his back. It was gone. His guilt was gone. He knew himself forgiven.

The Spirit of the Living God knows the path for each of us, from death to Life. At the cross, the cost of our redemption has been fully paid. It is completed. But, we must choose to follow Him to enter the Life He brought us.

Karen Koehn, mother of three, has worked in higher education for the past 20 years. She grew up in a parsonage, and served as a pastor's wife several years. Karen's interests include spiritual formation, reading mysteries, and remodeling.

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13

March 11, 2011

A DAY OF DUST

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful..., and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster (Joel 2:12-13 ESV).

Lent is traditionally a time of mourning and grief, and I had never in my life been in a more appropriate frame of mind for the season than I was last year, 2010. My children and I were refugees, staying with my parents in Wilmore because the city where I usually live, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, was devastated by a 7.0 earthquake on Tuesday, January 12th. Although I was overwhelmed with gratitude to be alive, I was definitely mourning.

As Pastor Daryl put the ashes on my forehead at the Ash Wednesday service, he said, "Remember that you are from dust, and to dust you shall return."

Immediately I thought of that Tuesday night we spent on the soccer field at school because we were afraid to go into buildings, not knowing if they would collapse. A parent who was driving toward the school when the earthquake happened said he saw a huge cloud of dust rise from the city. It was the dust of buildings shaken and destroyed, and in that moment many human lives returned to dust as well.

Dust. It's all dust. Everything physical we value can be reduced to rubble and dust in a moment. But we who live in Haiti learned what lasts: God's grace and mercy, His steadfast love. Around the city, people gathered to praise God. In the midst of disaster, in the midst of dust, He was present.

Ruth Hersey and her husband, Steve, and their two children live in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where Ruth teaches middle school English at Quisqueya Christian School.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:10-11

March 12, 2011

COME, YOU THIRSTY

As the rain and snow come down from heaven...making it bud and flourish, ...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty (Isaiah 55:10-11).

I love to tend to my flower gardens, and in return they bless me with serenity, beauty and pride. It's a lot of work keeping them healthy, but the end result is rewarding.

A few years ago, Kentucky broke all kind of records for heat and drought conditions; my flowers suffered also, and it broke my heart watching them wither before the beautiful blooms could mature. But I discovered a marvelous thing. If I watered my plants early in the morning, they could survive the heat of the afternoon.

The same parallel could be drawn with studying God's Word. When we are wilting from the stressful demands typical of this 21st century, we need to be rejuvenated, refreshed and renewed. If we have been diligent in our daily reading of God's Word, our roots are strong; and we will be able to weather the heat of life. If we succumb to the excuse of a too busy schedule to daily study and dwell in His Word, we, like the delicate annuals without the nourishment of water, will fail to thrive when the droughts of life chip away at us.

God invites all who are thirsty to come and He will refresh us (Isaiah 55:1). If we continue to daily study the Bible, God promises that His Word "will not return to me (God) empty..." (Isaiah 55:11).

It is our choice to find time to become strong in the Word.

Sharon Madison is a former senior English teacher. She and her husband, Keith, a former UK baseball coach, work for SCORE International, a Christian mission organization. They take teams, players and lovers of baseball to the Dominican Republic for short-term mission trips.

Scripture: Matthew 28:5-6

April 22, 2011—Good Friday

EASTER CAROLING

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb "The angel said 'He is not here; He is risen as He said. . . .'" (Matthew 28: 1, 6).

Sound wafted through our open window, rousing me from deep sleep. I realized the sound was voices singing Easter hymns in Otetela, in beautiful harmony. Easter caroling? I knew about Christmas caroling, but I had never even thought of the appropriateness of Easter caroling. The comforting, uplifting singing moved slowly down our street, stopping along the way.

That predawn morning, our family was in Kanaga, Democratic Republic of Congo, under the auspices of Mission Aviation Fellowship. I was finding life very challenging. Driving into town for supplies was a hair-raising experience. Policemen, who were underpaid or not paid at all, were everywhere. I had learned there was no correct way to drive, and no infraction that a few zaires could not fix. I did not feel bribes were honest. Wes' flying took him away most days and many nights. Our children, Lois and David, were six and eight. Fulfilling the duties of mom, along with maintaining the shortwave radio network and entertaining guests, my heart had shifted from what God had given me the privilege of doing, to, "Hey, when is furlough coming!"

Startled awake at dawn on that Easter morning to the beautiful voices of Congolese brothers and sisters in Christ, singing the glorious songs of Easter, how could I not help but feel the joy of the Marys. "He is not here; He is risen."

June Eisemann and her husband, Wes, have been members of WFMC for 3 ½ years. They served 19 years with Mission Aviation Fellowship. June was an Asbury Theological Seminary staff member for 25 years.

IS HE FOR US?

If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31b)?

Many years ago, my wife and I were called to the side of a missionary family who had been in a terrible car accident in Greece. When the husband regained consciousness and learned that his wife had died in the accident, he paused for a long moment and then softly said, “God must have some purpose in it.”

The circumstances of life sometimes tempt me to doubt if God is really for me. Like Job in his suffering, we cry out our questions to God. At times it almost seems that God is more against us than for us. But like a great shout to the sky, the apostle Paul proclaims the unchanging truth: God is for us; God loves me.

With three great acts of compassion, God proved irrefutably that He is for us. In the incarnation, God through Jesus Christ became one of us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “In the incarnation, God makes Himself known as He who wishes to exist not for Himself, but for us.”

The second great act of God that proves He is for us is the cross. The Father gave His Son to suffer and die because of His love for you and me. How can we doubt that God is for us?

Jesus’ resurrection is God’s third demonstration of His love for us. Jesus could have returned to heaven in spirit, leaving His painful episode of humanity behind Him. Instead, He chose to bodily rise from the dead and ascend to heaven as both God and man. God will always be for us.

Bob Erny served as a missionary with OMS International for over 40 years, ministering in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Indianapolis mission headquarters. He and his wife, Norma Jean, have been members of WFMC for more than six years.

Devotional thought adapted from *Learning to Trust* by Robert Erny. Used with permission by One Mission Society and Bob Erny, 2011.

GOD’S LAMB—OUR LAMB

...Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing (Revelation 5:12).

A remarkable 160-foot mural adorns the interior of the Wesley Chapel foyer at Houghton College. Painted in the 1960s by the Rev. H. Willard Ortlip assisted by his wife, Aimee Ortlip, it portrays much of the biblical record from creation to the triumphant revelation of Christ. A first-time viewer is struck by the frequency of the appearance of a lamb.

God taught the first family about redemption. How else did Abel know to sacrifice a lamb?

A Hebrew family in the wilderness was taught by Moses, speaking for God, to select a perfect lamb from the flock, setting it apart to be taken care of for four days before it was sacrificed. What affection and identification must have developed. Then the father slaughtered the now-beloved lamb at twilight. This was Passover, the lamb’s blood used to mark each household’s door (Exodus 12:3-11).

Millennia later, as Jesus walked by, “Look!” announced John the Baptist. “There is the Lamb of God” (John 1:37 NLT)! In explaining the crucifixion, Paul declared, “...Christ our Passover [Lamb] is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7 KJV).

Let us become increasingly grateful that He gave Himself, God’s Lamb, a sacrifice for our salvation and, now glorified, acts as our Intercessor till our final triumph (Romans 8:34)!

Virginia Swauger Dongell, born in Stearns, KY, has lived in PA; Houghton, NY; NJ; and SC before returning to KY in November 2008. She and her late teacher/pastor husband, Dr. Herbert H. Dongell, had four children, including Dr. Joseph Dongell, a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Scripture: Matthew 11:4-5

March 14, 2011

GRACE, MERCY AND HOSPITALITY

“...Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen...the Good News is being preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:4-5 NLT).

We waited for breakfast until Dad got home from his overnight shift at the paper mill. From our huddle around the wood stove the pickup's door slam was clearly distinct. “Daddy's home!” Soon the kitchen door swung open and Dad ushered in a guest.

My parents met Jesus as young adults when an industrial league baseball teammate invited Dad to the Wesleyan church. They were anxious to learn what it meant to follow Jesus. The hitchhiker was hungry and Dad's faith-informed response simple. Our early morning filled with stories told by a friendly man down on his luck, but more importantly, I was a child witness to my parent's gracious hospitality.

Lent offers the opportunity to focus on Jesus' teachings. The Kingdom of God makes room for the poor, marginalized, disenfranchised, and is richly populated by people down on their luck.

Given the worst economy most of us have known, Kingdom work is all around us. The unemployed are numerous. Single mothers toe an unstable economic edge. The addicted are hopelessly enslaved. Lost people have given up on finding the *real* Jesus.

Lent is our time for extravagant displays of grace, mercy and hospitality. Lent reminds us to pray for those who are so far from God they can't hear His voice. Lent is Father, eager to give the gift of repentance.

Ed Bryson is director of the WPMC Adult Bible Fellowships. He delights in his wife Sharon, daughter Anna and grandson Hayden.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

April 20, 2011

THE CROSS STRAIGHTENED ME OUT

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

A pastor friend of mine served a church just a few miles from Ocean City, N. J. The church building was a beautiful, white classic style colonial structure set square in the middle of a bustling county seat community. My wife, Anna, and I have worshiped there many times. The building and its tall, stately, steeple and cross had been ravaged by the seashore weather for many years. The cross had actually begun to lean precariously the way of the prevailing wind.

A member of the church, whom the pastor had counseled many times about his dissolute life, agreed to straighten the cross. It was a long climb and it was not to the man's liking. Some townspeople, including the pastor, watched as the man reached the cross. He set to work and it was not long before this experienced builder set the cross straight and secured it. Then something mysterious happened. With his tools now in his belt, he stood there completely still for what seemed an eternity. Then he began the descent.

When he reached the ground he walked straight to the pastor and with tears in his eyes he said, "Something happened to me up there. I began to think of the mess I've made out of my life. I remembered what you've shared with me and I gave my life to Christ. I went up there to straighten out the cross and the cross straightened me out!"

During this Lenten period let the cross do a work in you.

Harry Stevenson is a retired United Methodist Pastor. He and his wife of 56 years live in Wilmore.

YOUR WORD, MY LIGHT

I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have renewed my life (Psalm 119:93).

In this country, we have the freedom to study our Bibles even in a public coffee house, and it's not uncommon to witness small Bible study groups sequestered in the corner of a restaurant. Studying the Bible is an eye-opening experience; and each time I read my Bible, I'm amazed how much more there is to learn. It's a Book that never stops teaching.

I have discovered that God is always with me (Hebrews 13:5). When I have gone through trying times, I knew God was with me, but I wished for some type of visual proof. And I found it in my Bible. Jesus told the disciples "Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing" (John 20:29).

I have developed a close relationship to our Lord through my daily devotionals. Even though I cannot physically see Him, I have learned more about our God through the promises that I find in His Word. Reading and studying is important, but we need to learn to emulate Jesus in our daily life. Do I act like a Christian in everyday 21st century situations? How can I let people see me as a child of God? Do I exude the love of Christ to those who know and don't know me?

God promises us success; and we need to learn, listen and respond as He teaches. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Sharon Madison is a former senior English teacher. She and her husband, Keith, a former UK baseball coach, work for SCORE International, a Christian mission organization. They take teams, players and lovers of baseball to the Dominican Republic for short-term mission trips.

UNDIVIDED DEVOTION

I am saying this for our own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:35).

In the Christian church calendar, Lent is my favorite season. It can seem depressing to some. For me, it is a very peaceful time. It begins in the cold, dark winter and ends in the warm, bright spring.

As I ponder this time of "Lenten devotion," many thoughts come to mind. Lent, a time of reflection, possibly self-denial in hopes of embracing Christ and His desires even more. Forty days in our own personal wilderness. Introspective. Stark. Lonely. Restrictive. Maybe even painful. Devotion. Dedicated. Adoring. In love. Whole-hearted. Committed. Wanting-to-spend-every-moment-with.

That phrase, Lenten devotion, seems to be an oxymoron. Yet the gospel, the good news, is itself the ultimate oxymoron. Die to live. Perfect for imperfect. Pure for impure. Beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:3).

While denial, fasting, almsgiving, etc. may be somewhat painful for our flesh, the trade off is clarity of mind, simplicity, and an unhindered ear for our Lord to speak into. It is our spiritual spring cleaning. When we clean out the accumulated junk, we may find some items that we didn't even know were lurking in the corners of our spirit. And when we throw those things out, we have more room, more time, more resources for our Lord. More for Jesus. More Jesus. I want that.

Amy Cooper and family feel blessed to be a part of such a loving church. She teaches the kindergarten CLC class, is on a committee or two, and makes time for the Youth. She has been married to Peter for over 25 years, has three sons and a daughter-in-law!

Scripture: Isaiah 53:7

March 16, 2011

SILENT NIGHT

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

Silent Night brings to mind the seasonal melody associated with Christmas. Although the song, now running through your head, is not sung during Lent or Eastertide, yet it has something to say to us in its “not-saying.”

Silence speaks in many ways. Think of the expressions that use silence. We assert, “Silence is golden,” or “You have the right to remain silent,” or “Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent” (Proverbs 17:28).

Christian silence is fasting that creates space to hear God's still small voice (Job 33:33). Silence detoxifies dependence on the “noise” all around us. Silence is a throat lozenge to the coughing clamoring of CDs, TV, radio, or “I-machines” clinging to us! Like Jesus kept silence, use silence to pursue God through reading, writing, praying, thinking, and meditating.

Steal away into the silent night with God. In the stillness, God's calm, warming presence will restore the explorer to life.

Emerge from the silence with a resurrection voice. There is “a time to be silent and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:7b). Thus, the silent night revolves into Easter Day. He has triumphed gloriously eliciting “**He is risen**” from our lips. Listen for the sweet strains of God's voice in the silent night. Discover “**He is risen indeed**” and speak his joys abroad!

Jeff Hiatt is a husband, father of four, author, and ordained elder with specialties in Wesley's theology, spiritual formation, missiology, and communicating the Gospel. He teaches at Asbury Theological Seminary, Asbury University, and Lindsey Wilson College.

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-3

April 18, 2011

PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF MUD

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

I had been praying all the way as we traveled down a scary mountain road in North Burma. My husband, Bill, and I had come on a ministry trip with our skillful driver (Burmese preacher friend, Thun Jan) and others. Thun had gotten us safely around all those curves with sheer drops on each side. I drew a sigh of relief as we were on level ground now.

Then we came upon an eerie sight, trucks lined up on the highway, standing still! A bystander yelled there was a mud slide from the mountain ahead. But now Thun was inching ahead. To my horror I realized he was going to try to make it through the mud to the other side. I gasped, as I was praying, “Lord you promised to be our PRESENT help in time of trouble! *We need You NOW!!*” I realized we could be buried at any moment in mud. For moments that seemed like hours we swung from side to side in the squishy mud. Then the van hit something solid. The danger was past! The Lord had brought us through safely! All of us erupted in praise to HIM!

As I remembered that night I realized my whole life has been desperate need, and glorious answers from the “present” Jesus in times of trouble. How I praise HIM!!

Beth Ury and her husband, Bill, were privileged to be in ministry in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia for 28 years and in U.S. ministry 28 years.

Scripture: John 1:4, 5

April 17, 2011—Palm Sunday

HOLY FIRE

Everything that was created received its life from him, and his life gave light to everyone. The light keeps shining in the dark, and the darkness has never put it out (John 1:4, 5 CEV).

Every year since 1106, Christians have gathered at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem for the Easter Holy Fire Ritual. Believers sing hymns around the church and reflect on Jesus' victorious emergence from the tomb. The pilgrims anticipate that God will bring special, holy fire, the same fire seen at the burning bush and on Mount Sinai, fire that illuminates but that does not destroy. It is fire typifying the energy, transformation, and light present at the resurrection of Jesus, Light of the World.

There is a careful inspection to make sure the tomb area is empty. The door is sealed with wax. Orthodox Church leaders gather around, and the patriarch is stripped down to a simple robe. He enters the tomb alone and then emerges with a lit torch, presumably lit by God. Church bells ring. Tens of thousands of pilgrims pass the flame with candles. Shouts of joy fill the streets. Special flights rush priests with lit torches to Greece, Russia, Moldova, and Bulgaria. You can watch this celebration on YouTube, The Miraculous Appearance of the Holy Fire.

It would not shake my faith to hear that there is some trickery involved in lighting the torch. And it wouldn't surprise me if Jesus, ever the life of the party, likes to light up the tomb each year on His special day. This Easter season, let's remember this: the light of the world has come! Celebrate! If you have a candle, light it. If you have a song, sing it. If you have a smile, wear it. Let's flood the streets with joy. He is risen indeed!

Kathy Davila lives with her husband and twin daughters in Wilmore. She teaches English as a Second Language to students of many faiths, including several Orthodox Russians.

Scripture: Matthew 26:57-58

March 17, 2011

NIGHT IN A CISTERN

...[T]hose who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter also was following... (Matthew 26:57-58 NAS).

Two years ago, my mom and I travelled to Israel. With Mark Twain in my head and a journal in my hand, I hunted for the living Jesus beyond the tourist trinkets.

While retracing Jesus' steps, we came to the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu. The church is built on the site of Caiaphas's house, the place where Jesus was questioned and mocked by the priests after he was arrested and where Peter denied Christ three times. There is a deep, earthen cistern underneath this church where some believe Christ spent the night.

While our group stood in the cistern, duskily lit with candles, the deep, bass voice of one of our traveling companions read Psalm 88 aloud: "Thou hast put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths....Thou hast removed my acquaintances far from me" (vv. 6, 8 NAS).

I imagine Jesus in that cistern, in complete darkness, alone and confused as to how this fits into the master plan. Certainly Jesus knew that He would suffer and die and be raised back to life, but did He expect to spend the night in a cistern? Perhaps at some point, He recalls Psalm 88. He breathes the first words to Himself and, identifying with the psalmist's predicament, is comforted.

Imagining this brings me comfort as well. When the walls of my cistern look tall and the master plan is hard to see, I, too, can find comfort in Scripture. Jesus knows our sorrows, just as He knows that soon dawn will come and His victory will be ours.

Katie Warnock Diddle has attended WFMC since 2000 when she came to Wilmore to attend Asbury University. In May 2010 she married Jerry Diddle and reports loving married life.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:16

March 18, 2011

MY GOD HAS A LONG ARM

...[S]o his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him (Isaiah 59:16b).

The heart of man is full of sin. Do you believe that? I used to not. Naive, I know. It's easy to find excuses for ill behavior if you're looking, and conversely, it's way too easy to believe yourself somehow the exception, to be better than the other guy.

Age, experience, and the Holy Spirit have opened my eyes not just to the sin of my fellow man, but to the sin of my own heart, and I see how totally powerless I am to remove the stain. All of my righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)! I can follow the rules and play the part, but I am completely without the ability to save my own soul. Where can I go for help?

I love the picture God creates in his question to Israel (Isaiah 50:2b), "Was my arm too short to ransom you?" I can just see him looking down and watching me run around here and there in my vain attempt to repair my damaged heart. I try first one formula then another. What a waste of time and so unnecessary. God has already done the work! His own arm has worked the salvation I need!

I'm still learning what it means to be ransomed, still grasping the reality that the work of the cross is complete, still discovering the power I have through the Holy Spirit to live a holy life. But what a comfort to know that the God who created me and knows my secret thoughts has taken care of all of the details—and his arm is not too short!

Carol Blankenship has been married to Bryan for 22 years and is mother to three. She says her family is her biggest training ground for Christ.

Scripture: Revelation 3:19-20

April 16, 2011

INTIMATE DINNER

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20 RSV).

The Jesus who entered Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, Who took a basin and a towel, and washed His disciples' feet, is the One who longs for us to open the door of our hearts and to invite Him in.

God respects the free will He has given us. He respects our personhood. He does not bang on the door of our hearts nor force entrance. Instead He says, "I stand at the door and knock."

The promise continues, "[I]f any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus not only wants to come into our hearts, He wants to have fellowship with us. He wants to sit down and dine with us, one-on-one, and share heart-to-heart. In many cultures eating with another is a special time to get to know someone. Jesus wants to spend time with us. That's how we grow in our relationship with Him!

Dr. Hugh Anderson said, "God visits us very often, but for the most part we are not at home."

Have you opened the door of your heart and received Him as Savior? Do you fellowship with Him as a trusted Friend?

Fran Ditto, and her husband, Tom, a retired United Methodist minister, have enjoyed living at Wesley Village for four years.

PREPARE

“The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial” (Matthew 26:11-12).

This story is repeated in all four Gospels, appearing at different points in the narrative, and with differing emphases. Matthew’s account is similar to Mark’s, but with a fuller explanation of the events transpiring. In Matthew’s account, the woman is unnamed.

The woman joins a list of New Testament figures who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to understand the nature of the Suffering Servant. Simeon prophesied Mary’s pain at Jesus’ circumcision while the Wise Men brought the infant King myrrh, a spice commonly used for burial. This woman makes no great confession as to Jesus’ nature as Peter did, yet she understands that Jesus must go to Jerusalem and suffer, something Peter could not comprehend beforehand.

While reflecting on her act of anointing Jesus, we come to the realization that we cannot do the same. We cannot prepare His body for the pain and death He would go through to save us. However, we can prepare for something the woman could not. We can prepare for the glorious return of Christ! Are we, as the body of Christ, preparing not only ourselves, but the world for His return? Are we reaching out to the poor who are with us? The sick? The oppressed? As we reflect on Lent and Holy Week, let us not forget that preparation comes in many different forms.

Steven Lane is an MA student in Theological Studies and Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and is a 2007 graduate of Asbury University. He and his wife, Mandi, have two boys, Isaac and Aiden.

SELFLESS IN AGONY

“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them.... I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:8-9a, 15, 20-21ESV).

The night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed for all who believed and all would believe in Him. Though His soul was “sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:34), He chose to beseech His Father to protect us, and to use us to reveal Himself to the world. What a beautiful example of selflessness! Amidst His agony, Jesus had two great concerns: His believers, and His Father’s glory. What is paramount in our minds in times of trouble? Do we focus solely on our needs, or do we take time to care for others? Do we pity ourselves, or do we ask God to accomplish His will through us? Though Jesus also prayed that night “remove this cup from me,” He added, “not my will, but your will be done.” (Luke 22:42) Let us follow his example, supplicating for others as well as for ourselves, and, ultimately, desiring God’s will for our lives.

Toni Louise Toadvine is a senior music education major at Asbury University. She hopes to share both God’s love and her love of music with her future students.

VICTORIOUS LIVING

For this is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3 NKJV).

Have you ever had this conversation with yourself? “There are times when I experience a carnal streak in my heart which troubles me! I know I am a Christian. I found the joy of forgiveness in Christ. However, gradually, I have begun to note a resistance, a struggle in being obedient to God. I am dissatisfied with this kind of Christian life! Is there not something better?”

There IS something better. Be encouraged. Every Christian faces this question and you can find help from the Lord. The Bible uses a heavy word, sanctification, to name the help God has for you. You see, there is a *double* problem in the human heart because of our sinful nature.

Problem one is the sinful acts we commit—lying, stealing, and other sins. When we become a Christian we repent of these acts of sin and God forgives us through Jesus’ blood.

Problem two goes deeper because it is something with which we were born. The Bible talks about a nature or a tendency to sin. It comes with the human package, so to speak. The Bible calls it “old sinful selves” (Romans 6:6 NLT). Our sinful acts come from this old sinful self. God wants to cleanse this sinful nature.

Sanctification is the answer to both problems. Consequently, we don’t have to be “slaves of sin” (Romans 6). It is called a “second work of grace” because it is something that God will do for the Christian after conversion. Celebrate this victory in your life this Easter.

Richard Barker was born in Detroit, Michigan, and became a Christian at sixteen. He says he came to an understanding of sanctification through a missionary who visited his high school youth group during World War II.

THE PROMISE AND THE POWER OF FAITH

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day (2 Timothy 1:12 NKJV).

As I thought about my own walk of faith, I remembered the first step of faith I took. It was many years ago and it was the first step of many. Every believer is given a measure of faith (Romans 12:3), and although this is the start of our faith, it is far from being the last step. We should never stop allowing the Lord to help us build on our faith. The focus of faith is knowing in Whom we believe, not only in what we believe. Faith is far more than just understanding the promise. Faith is knowing Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Let us learn to focus on the Person Who has made us the promise, rather than the promise itself.

True faith rests in Him (2 Tim. 1:9-10), abides in Him (John 15: 4-7) and no power or authority can separate us from His love (Rom.8: 38-39). Now let us walk with Him Whom we know and in Whom we believe.

In this time of Lent and Easter we should remember that Christ abolished death upon the cross (2 Tim. 1:10).

Lord, forgive us when we have little faith. Forgive us when we fail to apply the power of the cross and the power of Your blood to our lives. Help us, Lord, to push away the things of this world. Help us to make room for your Spirit, the Spirit of the Holy God. Bring forth healing in our lives, according to our faith as we trust in Your wisdom. Increase our faith, Lord. Bring our will into perfect alignment with Your will. We want You to bless us. Amen.

Tim McMillen was born and raised in the Wilmore area. He and his family have called WFMC their home since 2004.

RAISED TO LIVE FOREVER

Raised to live forever...raised in glory...raised in strength... raised as spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44 NLT).

Redeemed. We have been redeemed! Christ knocked. We cried, “Enter!” Our lives became new. Our focus? On Him! No longer bound by that heavy weight. We can fly! Our debt to Him? Fully paid! Our lives? Purchased! By Him! How we love to proclaim it! Indeed!

Invited. We had been invited. To enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ! One without which we would not see God! The Lord inquired, “Where are you?” And, hearing our deep cry, invited us to “Come unto” Him! We came to Him. He ran to us! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! Indeed!

Saved. We have been saved! Sin? Guilt? Isolation? Death? No more! We have experienced a holy-rescue! Set free—Eden-free! We no longer live in the utter futility of doing it our way! We live in the wide-open ranges of His grace. We are safe! Living His way! Redeemed through His infinite mercy! Indeed!

Eternal. We have already begun to live the eternal life He promised! Life—no longer needing to be offered—given to us by God, the Father. Forever with Him! Assured by His promises! Children of eternity...here and now! No more waiting. All joy! Running the race, His child forever I am! Indeed!

Named. We have been given a new name! Indeed! Our names are recorded in God’s book of life! Redeemed! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! Raised? Indeed!

Ron and Nancy Johns are graduates of Houghton College. Married in 1963, they have been New Yorkers much of their lives. They are both school teachers. Ron has pastored both Free Methodist and Baptist churches. They moved to Wilmore in 2008.

JOIN THE CROWD

Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him” (Mark 15:12-13 NRSV)!

It’s always easier to point fingers at someone else. As the oldest sibling I quickly became an expert at this. It was easier to blame my brother or sister, than accept responsibility and punishment for myself. We’re also prone to look on the decisions of those in the past and think that if we were in their position we would have acted differently. For a long time I read this passage with that mentality. After all, what were they thinking? The crowds that had long supported and praised Jesus had turned against him in an instant. How dare they yell out, “Crucify him!” They were rejecting their own Messiah and sentencing him to death!

So who was responsible for the death of Jesus? Again, it’s easy to point fingers. We could say the crowd was responsible, or Pilot, or the Jewish religious leaders. But what about the disciples? Where were they? Everyone had abandoned Jesus. It’s easy to think that if you or I were in the position of the crowds or the disciples, we would not have turned our backs on Jesus. But the truth is, we have all shouted, “Crucify him!” many times in our lives. Any time we sin and willfully go against God’s will, we are turning our backs and adding our cries of betrayal and rejection to the crowd. But praise Jesus that despite our rejection, he suffered and died, and was raised to life for us! He calls each of us to abandon our cries of rejection, and instead turn to Him in acceptance of His way day after day, in every thought, word, and deed.

Andrew Bentz is a first year student at Asbury Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Ashley, moved to Kentucky from Spring Arbor, MI in July 2010. They have attended WFMC since.

UNLIKELY BLESSING

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matthew 5:4).

This is a statement that on the surface of it seems almost absurd. How could you call someone who is mourning “blessed”? What could Jesus mean by this? How does this fit with Paul’s command in Philippians 4:4? He says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” How can we rejoice and be mournful at the same time? However, this was apparently not a problem for Paul because he says in 2 Corinthians 6:10 that he is “...sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...” Jesus is saying here that we are blessed if we mourn over two things, mourning over our own sin, and mourning over sin in the world (Psalm 51:17). Christians are those who see how much sin has been a part of their lives and they grieve. They also look at the world, which is under the power of sin, greed and corruption, and they grieve.

Do we mourn over sin? Perhaps we would feel ashamed if we got caught in sin, but do we mourn over it? Do we see it affecting our relationship with God? Jesus here says a person is blessed if he/she has that sense of mourning over sin. But there is a promise here as well. God’s presence is with us as we mourn over sin. He comforts us in our need. Our greatest comfort is the fact that Jesus died so that our sins can be forgiven. So, even as we mourn our sin, we can rejoice over forgiveness! Not only do we experience a measure of comfort and joy in this life, but we know that when Christ returns we will be ultimately comforted.

Ryan Cook is a student at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is married to his lovely bride, Ashley, and they have two children.

NOT WILLING

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Luke 13:34).

Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem. He knows He will suffer and die at their hands. He realistically faces the suffering of God’s messengers in the past and what Jerusalem will do in the future to Him and His disciples. Fresh on His mind must have been the beheading of John the Baptist. Jesus has just responded to those trying to convince him to leave the area because “Herod wants to kill you” (v. 31). Yet Jesus resolutely continues on longing to rescue, protect, and care for His chosen people while they choose to be His enemies. What undeserved compassion!

“...[B]ut you were not willing (v. 34)” Even while purportedly loving God and watching for the Messiah, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were “not willing” to follow God’s plan. The Messiah didn’t come as they expected, so they missed Him. Could we be in the same danger? Is there anything for which I am “not willing?” Am I missing out because God’s plan comes differently than I expect?

Father, please help me willingly cooperate in any way You want to spend my life. Do whatever it takes to dissolve my resistance that I may eagerly obey Your will and abide under Your wings. Would You help my unwilling heart match Yours in being “not willing” that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9)?

Nancy Ellwood says her highest delight is being God’s child. She is also a mother to Rebecca, Jason, and Lindsay; a mother-in-law to Sarah; and a grandma to Silas.

BRIDGING THE GAP

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ...yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—(Colossians 1:19, 22 NAS).

As Lent approaches, our hearts are filled with sweet sorrow. The weight of reality reminds us of our desperate need for a Savior. God in His unsurpassed love and wisdom sent the One who could mediate for us with the Father.

Jesus is God's only begotten son. As C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, "What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man." So man is only a creature – a creation of God. Yet God loves us so much that He limited Himself by sending Jesus in the flesh. This kenosis or self-emptying of God allows us a glimpse into the nature of God. God—who is omnipotent and self-sufficient—desires a personal relationship with us so much that He humbled Himself, taking on flesh in order to invite us into relationship with Him.

Christ lived as we are intended to live, a life of love, discipline, prayer, and perfection. Jesus' example allows us to be made new as we imitate and walk with Him. The innocent blood He shed washes away our sin. "By His wounds we are healed" Isaiah 53:5. Jesus bridges the gap between heaven and earth so that we may become like Him. May we give thanks today to Christ—the One who made possible our adoption as children of God.

Audra Goodnight is a Philosophy Major at Asbury University with an Equine and Latin double Minor. She says it has been her joy and privilege to serve the Lord and support the FM Church in Burundi, Africa and India. She enjoys playing violin and working with horses at the Equine Center.

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

And he said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den" (Matthew 21:13).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He first focused on restoring the Temple's spiritual function—to be a house of prayer. However, at that time, the activities of selling, buying, and exchanging goods for the purpose of offering worship to God became transactions promoting a business for profit. Therefore Jesus indignantly expelled all the merchants from the temple that was intended to be place of prayer for all. Unfortunately, even though the Temple was a place filled with many people (crowded traffic), it was lacking genuine worship and sincere prayers. There were no true heartfelt praises to God. Thus Jesus' affront highlighted what the people were oblivious to regarding the Temple's function.

Today churches can easily become busy with numerous activities and events, drawing many people in and out of their buildings, but we should remember that the essential function of the church is prayer and worship. Christians need to learn to be still before the Lord, to hear His words through the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in our prayers because throughout our day we are surrounded by the distractions and opinions of the world. Our busyness or crowdedness at church can overlook the key aspect of enjoying true fellowship with our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. But through the believers' unceasing prayers and wholehearted praises to God, we can uphold a "cleansed" church to become that House of Prayer!

So-Young Chen is the wife of Tony and mother of Joshua Chen.

Scripture: Mark 14:3-9

March 24, 2011

SENSORY STORYTELLING

While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head (Mark 14:3b NLT).

The anointing of Jesus was an extraordinary event. In the Old Testament anointing was understood to be God's mark on a person and was done by God through a servant of God, a king or priest, or prophet. Here is an unnamed woman in a leper's home doing something that is normally reserved for a king or priest. She dared to break the norms of her society when she lavishly used up what cost her a year's worth of income. By doing so she declared Jesus the Messiah, the anointed one, something that only a handful of other people had done before. She acknowledged that Jesus must suffer, something that not even the disciples had accepted. Some were indignant that she had wasted this much precious perfume, a substance imported from Tibet or China in an alabaster jar that was made from calcite or onyx that would have been mined from a cave.

An exquisite gift indeed. The woman did three things in this simple yet extravagant act: she declared Jesus Messiah; she acknowledged Jesus' impending suffering; and she prepared Jesus to endure suffering with this reminder of her honoring Him and prepare His body for burial. This woman told the story of Jesus in the days leading up to the crucifixion. How can I extravagantly tell the story of Jesus in my day?

Dave Grant is in his final semester of the M.Div. program at Asbury Theological Seminary and is seeking commissioning in the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Scripture: Philippians 3:10, 11

April 10, 2011

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10,11 NKJ).

Lent is the time that Christians acknowledge the need of penitence for the sins they have committed. Augustine, in one of his prayers reveals the need of penitence, "...[W]e who carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud." (*Prayers From the Confessions*, edited by John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.)

The New Testament gives four definitions or four ways we commit sin: all lawlessness is sin (I John 3:4); all unrighteousness is sin (I John 5:17); everything that is not done in faith is sin (Romans 14:23); knowing to do good and not doing it is sin (James 4:17).

Paul realized the suffering that sin caused his Lord. It was his desire to be part of that fellowship – acknowledging his sin that helped to cause the suffering and death that Christ experienced for the forgiveness and salvation of mankind.

In Philippians 3:10, 11 Paul reveals that Christ's death was only the first phase of God's plan to provide for our salvation. Paul also believed and possessed the hope to attain the resurrection from the dead. Christ alive—the resurrection—is God's final provision for our salvation.

As we worship and experience God's blessings during Lent, may we like Paul, desire to know Him and the power of His resurrection.

Charlie Denger and his wife Jeneane, have been attending WFMC for approximately ten years and are members of the Layman's Adult Bible Fellowship.

STOP THE MADNESS

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place....After he had dismissed them, he went up into the hills by himself to pray (Matthew 14:13, 23a).

I have always understood Lent to be a time of prayer, fasting, and quiet reflection. It is a time to reexamine one’s calling in life—yes, every child of God has a calling in life—a chance to focus on God’s presence in one’s life. In some ways, the Lenten season is a time to “be,” not “do.” We live in a world that is full of activity—where the doing is all important. We can easily get too busy and feel overwhelmed from being over committed, even in our endeavor to serve others for the sake of Jesus.

Lent gives us the opportunity to stop the madness, to take a deep breath, to pull away and just be, to kneel before our Lord and Savior and truly take in the depth of His love for us. Quite often the best service in ministry that we can do for others is to recognize the need for taking care of ourselves and our families in the midst of the busyness.

Jesus gives us the example many times. In the passage above, He has just learned of John the Baptist’s death so He drew away to a solitary place. Yet the crowds found Him and He had compassion on them and fed them spiritually and physically. Even then, He took the time to draw away by Himself to pray. He understood His need for spiritual and physical renewal. Do we understand that need? I challenge each of us to examine our own lives with prayer and fasting this season and allow God to renew and strengthen us for His honor and glory.

Patricia McPeake (Patti) is an Asbury Theological Seminary student on the 7-10 year plan. She serves as the auditor for WFMC. She works primarily with BEJA Environmental and the Rose Garden as their accountant.

OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6 ESV).

Perhaps this is the first year you are observing Lent. For my wife, Valerie, and me, it is! Growing up in a tradition where Lent was not observed, we did not realize what a spiritually beneficial discipline we were missing. I want to share why we are excited to be observing this season with you.

I would sum up my understanding of Lent with the word *preparation*. To benefit from the Lenten season, we need to ask ourselves what this preparation will mean for us. It meant a great deal for Jesus as He fasted in the wilderness. For someone to be effective in finishing any goal or task, his/her mind has to be focused in preparation. As we read in Romans 8:5-6, our spiritual lives depend on a right mindset. If we focus only on carnal concerns, spiritual death is our sure end. However, focusing our mind on the Spirit brings life and peace. Lent affords you the opportunity to focus your mind in preparation for forty days—not just a solitary moment in prayer. When we choose to go without something we desire during this time, our mind should immediately be reminded of the Spirit when we sense an urge for that particular want. Thinking this way brings life and peace where there would otherwise be none. So what will this Lenten season be like for you—a customary preparation for Easter, or a life-changing preparation for holiness and spiritual vitality?

Joshua Ratliff has been married to Valerie for just over a year now. They moved to Wilmore in fall, 2010, for Josh to pursue an M.A. in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

INNOCENT BLOOD

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said. "for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27: 3-4).

Remember the old sayings, "You reap what you sow?" "Wrongdoers receive their just deserts?"

Jesus' crucifixion and death were a remarkable injustice. In fact, we observe injustices throughout. He never, ever deserved it.

His was an obscure birth in a stinking manger unfit for the Son of God and King of Kings. The religious leaders succeeded at sabotaging His miraculous ministry. All of His followers forsook Him after He poured His life into them for up to three years. He was rejected by God's chosen, the Jews. He was betrayed by Judas. Barabbas was released, not Jesus. He was spit upon, stripped, beaten, and died like a criminal on the cross. His own eternal Father turned His back when Jesus hung on the cross.

Unbelievers today reject His loving care and saving grace. Some of us who name His name live each day like practical atheists, as if He doesn't exist or make any difference in our lives. We forsake His ways and cheapen His grace yet expect or even demand our rightful place in His eternal home.

Jesus never deserved death on the cross. But He willingly suffered, shed His blood, and died so that all the world's sins might be removed. We certainly do not deserve the love of God manifested on the cross, but He gives and gives. During this season of Lent, consider how you might defend the innocent.

Duane E. Brown lives in Wilmore. He is married to Patty. They are blessed with three wonderful children: Eric, Kathryn, and Elizabeth.

GOD IS FOR US

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:31-32 NKJ).

The phrase *Deus Pro Nobis*, *God is for us*, came from Paul's beautiful passage in Romans 8:31 which expresses his confidence in God's good intentions for His creation. The early Christians used the phrase *Pro Nobis* as a greeting, reminding each other in days of difficulty and persecution that God was for them indeed. Many times our fear of God and what He may ask of us prevents us from realizing this truth, but the cross is the greatest proof of Romans 8:31. He has not only dealt with our sins, but He opened the way for His presence to live in us. In Him our lives become complete, and our future is secure. He did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up to make this possible. I love Paul's confidence as he affirms that the Father who gave His Son will also give us all things that we need.

Psalm 56:9 reveals that the Psalmist had this same confidence in God. Tradition states that David wrote this Psalm when he was captured by the Philistines in Gath. In the middle of surrendering his fears to God and prior to his glorious conclusion, he makes this simple assertion that reveals the bedrock of his faith in God. "This I know, because God is for me" (Psalm 56:9).

Courage and peace may be needed today. Wisdom and direction may be required. God is enough for every new twist and turn in the road, and He is waiting for us to come with confidence expecting His presence and direction in every situation. *He is for us!*

Cricket and Matt Albertson are long-time Wilmore residents. They have attended the Free Methodist Church for 3 years. They have three children, Michael, Mattie and Isaiah.

I MAKE A WAY

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland (Isaiah 43:18-19).

I cannot imagine the depth of the disciples’ fear and grief when Jesus was laid in the tomb. All their hopes and dreams had lain on this man’s shoulders for so long, despite the mockery they received from the Pharisees and skeptics, only to come to this? They had left careers, families, and plans when they followed Him, as so often we do, and now where were they to turn?

So often I find myself in their place. I have chosen to follow my Lord, have abandoned my way, my choices, my will, to make it His. Everything seems to be leading to something beautiful, glorious, and breathtaking, when all of a sudden; I am left, standing seemingly alone, without my Jesus, without my friend.

But, oh my soul awakes with joy when I see Him rise up and stand before me! When He looks at me and says, “Do not be afraid” (Matthew 28:10b). All that I have struggled with, those dark nights when I felt alone, He bids me forget. And I realize, once more, that He is doing a far greater thing than I could have perceived.

In these moments leading up to Easter, forget the former things in your life. Put behind you your pain, your difficulties, even your triumphs, and allow Him to do a new thing in your life. “Do you not perceive it? I am making a way in *your* desert and a stream in *your* wasteland” (emphasis/change mine).

Katie Liversedge is a junior at Asbury University where she is studying Elementary Education with an emphasis in French.

BLASPHEMY OF DESPAIR

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16: 22-23 NKJV).

J.R.R. Tolkien conceived of what he called ‘the blasphemy of despair.’ According to Tolkien, to despair is blasphemous not only because it entails a rejection of the future hope inherent in the person of Christ Jesus, but it also involves having a divine foreknowledge, which only God possesses.

In Matthew 16, I believe we find Peter laboring under such despair. Jesus has just informed His disciples that He will be traveling to Jerusalem there to suffer and be put to death and then be raised on the third day. In verse 22, we are given Peter’s response and his concern seems warranted. After all, who would not wish to deter a friend from walking into harm’s way? Yet in the following verse we find Jesus replying harshly to his disciple. Why? I believe it is because of the despairing tone Peter has taken. His despair is wrapped up in his inability to perceive as God perceives. He is mindful only of “the things of men.”

Like Peter, I think we often find ourselves falling into despair due to a false sense of certainty concerning future events. The fact of the matter is we can never be so certain of our future that despair is warranted. Meanwhile, our uncertainty over the future as well as the truth of the resurrected Savior affords us ample opportunity to hope without ceasing.

Major Upton studied Philosophy and English at the University of Kentucky and is currently employed at Asbury University. He is married to Melissa Upton and they are expecting their first child in July.

Scripture: Matthew 7:18-20

March 28, 2011

GOD AS GARDENER

“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7: 18-20).

As Christians, we know that we are called to bear good fruit. We admire those whose lives are a blessing to those around them. Frankly, we wonder how they do it! We forget that fruit cannot grow without nourishment. That nourishment comes from our faith in Christ through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works to transform us from a seed into a beautiful creation, a bountiful crop for God. One of the Church fathers reminds us, “Christ is the gardener who tends the soul so that it may produce the good fruits of the Spirit. His gardening tool is the cross and He uses it to break up the hard soil of the arid soul to prepare it and plant in it the Holy Spirit’s garden of delights ... fruits sweet and pleasing to God.”

Where are you receiving nourishment? Maybe you feel like you are on your own, so you follow the ways of the world around you, yet find that you are bearing no fruit. Embrace the nourishing wellspring that comes in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you through Scripture and prayer. Allow Christ to “break up the hard soil” in your soul. Allow Him to lead you through the life you live – from the small frustrations to the huge hurts. Then good fruits will become evident in your life, fruits sweet and pleasing to God: actions and words that build up the church and provide hope to a dying world.

Scott Grow is a student in his final semester at Asbury Theological Seminary. His wife, Camille, has worked for Starbucks Coffee Company for four years. They hope to return to Texas this May to serve in youth ministry.

Scripture: March 14:32-36

April 6, 2011

EXACT OPPOSITE

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

“Yet not what I will, but what you will.” This part of Jesus’ prayer, uttered to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion, brings to my mind the Garden of Eden. It was in the Garden of Eden where Adam, a perfect human being, did the exact opposite of Jesus. After being tempted by the serpent, Adam did what he willed, not what his Father willed. His disobedience brought upon the whole world a curse of sin and death. Now, in the Garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus determined to do what Adam chose not to do. In the face of the most unimaginable horrific circumstances, Jesus resolves to do what His Father wants, not what He wants. No fear or temptation nor anything tugging at His heart will stand in His way from obeying His Father. Philippians 2:6-8 says, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

As we prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus’ triumph over sin and death, let us pause to be thankful for His obedience to His Father’s will. May we put our faith and find our strength in the one who perfectly obeyed God.

Megan Snapp currently stays home with her 18-month-old son, Nathan. She, her husband, and son have been attending Wilmore Free Methodist for seven months.

CLEAN UNDER YOUR BED

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24, NRSV).

Cleaning my room was one of my first chores. When my mom sent me in to clean my room, she would always add, “Don’t forget to clean out from under your bed.” Getting the broom from the kitchen, I would slide it around under the bed, scattering papers, toys, odd socks, and other hidden treasures. Once the items were out, I sorted the treasures from the trash. It wasn’t enough for my mom for me to shove everything out from under the bed and leave it lying on the floor to be tripped over. I had to do something with the stuff. And putting it back under the bed was not an option.

Lent and spring cleaning seem to go together. The days before Easter provide time for reflection, for cleaning out from under the bed. But what do we do with the stuff that God reveals to us—the trash **and** the treasures we find when we allow Him to clean out from under the bed? It can take a while to sort it out. (I rarely got my room cleaned up in an afternoon.) So leave the stuff on the floor if you have to. Step over it, around it, or even on it. But do not put it back under the bed. Keep sorting it with His help. And trust that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

Andrea Tinsley says she LOVES the privilege of being the minister of youth at WPMC. A Tennessee farm girl, she loves riding horses, wearing mud boots, exploring the woods, and camping.

IF JESUS IS SAVIOR AND LORD, THEN WHO AM I?

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said unto Him, “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29 NKJ).

If Jesus is Savior and Lord, then who am I? While we must reflect upon the journey of our Lord from the manger to the cross, we must remember there would be no birth in Bethlehem if we had no need of redemption. It was for our iniquities, our infirmities, and our utter depravity that He came.

Now we turn our eyes from the glory of heaven to the shame of the cross, from Bethlehem’s manger to Golgotha’s hill. From the precious babe wrapped in swaddling cloths to the stripped man, bloodied, and hanging unrecognizable upon the tree. The reality of our sin is reflected in the violence of the cross.

Who am I? I am the reason He came. I am both the cause of His suffering and the object of His love and grace. I am the nails that pierced His hands, the spear that thrust His side, and the crown of thorns that stung His brow. I am the one who needs the cleansing power of Christ’s blood. The one who can only be redeemed by the very Son of God whose suffering I caused.

Praise God our identity does not consummate in our depravity. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Because He became the Resurrection and the Life, we can have “life in our mortal bodies through His Spirit” (Rom 8:11 NKJ)! Not only can our lives on earth be transformed, but Christ’s victory over death also gives us everlasting life.

Johnson and Amy Cannon live in Lexington, Kentucky and have four sons.

I NEVER SAW HIM BEFORE

Then he [Peter] began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74 ESV).

I cannot help but see a portion of truth in these words of Peter, "I do not know the man." Consider the events of this night. Peter had told Jesus that no matter what, even if it meant death, he would not deny Jesus. Then at the betrayal of Jesus he seems to keep his words as he risks death, cutting off Malchus' ear (John 18:10) in an attempt to free Jesus by force. But Jesus stopped him.

Peter viewed Jesus as the hoped-for Jewish Messiah who would build a great empire here on earth and overthrow the Romans, and so he was ready to fight and die for this. This vision of the Messiah was the Jesus he had convinced himself he knew. Though he knew Jesus, having lived with him for three years, he never understood Jesus. He would not accept that Jesus as the Messiah must suffer (Matthew 16:21-23). Therefore, when these events began to unfold and the picture of the Messiah that Peter desired failed, there was no way Peter could stand with Jesus; he really did not know the man, the true Messiah.

If we want to be able to stand with Jesus, we each must ask ourselves if we know Jesus or are holding on to our own ideas of who we want Him to be. He wants nothing more than for us to truly know Him and be in relationship with Him.

Mark Landerholm is a 2007 graduate of Asbury University and a recent graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary. He has a deep love for missions and discipleship. He currently works at Kroger's and Asbury University.

A GIFT LIKE NO OTHER

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28).

God created man holy and blessed him with the power of choice. However, through Satan's wily temptation, he succumbed and sinned. What did God do? As justice demanded, He could have irrevocably sentenced mankind to eternity in hell. Or, He could have destroyed mankind, tweaked His creation model, and started over. But, no! Instead, God crafted a plan to accost, change, rehabilitate, and redeem man.

To accomplish this plan, God's holy Son, Jesus, allowed the hate and rage of Satan to murder Him. Though in excruciating pain, He died voicing an amazing attitude: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus' mission was to absorb with lamb-like meekness man's extreme hostility and murderous intent. The God Who could not die, must die. Jesus' death created the foundation for forgiveness. Every repentant, sin-confessing person could receive God's freely-offered forgiveness by humbly requesting it.

To our knowledge, forgiveness was not offered to any other creature until mankind. Satan sinned, but was not offered forgiveness. The Bible indicates that even the angels, who are very knowledgeable concerning the activities of God, find the life and sacrificial death of the forgiving Savior marvelous. Without a doubt, we are one of a kind in the annals of eternal history. God's great forgiveness comes from His amazing love, giving us the privilege of becoming part of His family. Thank God for this amazing gift!

Dennis Probst is happily married to Priscilla and is the father of four children. He and Priscilla have served for more than 35 years as missionaries in Japan with World Gospel Mission.

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN LORD

“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Jesus appeared to several of His followers after His resurrection with words that may have shaped their—and even Paul’s—understanding of the resurrection. John 20:10-31 records three of the encounters of Jesus with His followers after He was raised. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene who was grieving the death of her Teacher. Her grief was so deep that she did not immediately recognize Jesus but was willing to pour out her heart to this “stranger” who asked her, “Why are you weeping?” Her grief was turned to comfort upon realizing that Jesus was raised.

Hours later, Jesus appeared to His disciples who, perhaps for fear and uncertainty of what might befall them after Jesus’ death, are not able to meet together openly. The Lord appeared to them during this meeting with a message of peace and a fulfillment of His earlier promise of the Holy Spirit. We know from Acts that their fear was replaced with courage because of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

Finally, Jesus appeared to Thomas who initially doubted the reports of the other disciples. His doubts were replaced with faith when he encountered the Risen Lord who said, “Blessed are they who did not see, yet believed.”

Each of Jesus’ disciples may have had his own story to tell about the resurrection—grief replaced with comfort, fear replaced with courage, and doubts replaced with faith. But they all have one thing in common—an encounter with the Risen Lord that made all these possible!

Samson Uytanlet is a faculty-in-training of Biblical Seminary of the Philippines. He is presently pursuing his Ph.D. in New Testament with London School of Theology. His wife is Juliet.

HUMILITY

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8 RSV).

Eugene Peterson puts the Philippians truth like this: “Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.”

Jesus, in His humility and crucifixion, identifies with us. Who hasn’t suffered humiliation? What school child hasn’t felt embarrassment at not knowing an answer? What seasoned Christian hasn’t sensed deep spiritual inadequacy? Our incarnate Lord identifies with us. What comfort!

But there’s more. St. Augustine, remembering his wretchedly sinful past, says, “The way to Christ is first through humility, second through humility, third through humility.”

Mother Teresa confesses, “I am still learning.”

Therese of Lisieux, pin-pointing the pride that so easily comes with experience and learning, declares, “The closer one approaches God, the simpler one becomes.”

No wonder the Scriptures declare that the poor in spirit inherit the Kingdom (Matthew 5:3), and that the wise, given instruction, become wiser still (Proverbs 9:9).

The moments of mortification that come to us all yield rich fruit, provided we interpret them as stepping-stones to genuine modesty. Those who do, laugh at themselves and learn patience. Charles Wesley’s prayer sums it all up, “Fix in us Thy humble dwelling....”

Donald E. Demaray has taught at Asbury Theological Seminary since 1966, the same year he and Kathleen, his wife of 62 years, joined WFMC.

WHAT WONDROUS LOVE

...Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Matthew 16: 21).

I never knew much about Lent growing up. I don't recall observances by that name being a part of the tradition in which I was raised, or if they were, they made no lasting impression on me.

For years, I tended to think of Lent, if I thought of it at all, as an obscure, optional, and slightly mysterious observance associated primarily with practicing Catholics, and I didn't really know any. I had a vague notion that it involved giving up something for a time—that was about it.

Then on a Wednesday in 1988, one of my colleagues took a long lunch and returned with a black smudge between his eyes. I asked him about it—and it was then that I connected the dots. I knew about Lent after all. I just didn't know it was called Lent.

In many respects, Lent is to the Christian celebration of Easter what Advent is to the Christian celebration of Christmas—a time of preparation, reflection, and anticipation. While both celebrations conclude with joy, the tone of the Lenten observance seems more somber, perhaps more deliberate than Advent.

The empty tomb awaits. How easy it is to rush to Easter while forgetting what it took to get there. We cheapen the celebration of Christ's resurrection by glossing over the reality of our sin, the absolute need for, yet the horror of, the cross and the selfless love which kept Jesus on task. What wondrous love is this, O my soul!

John R. Swaim teaches the Layman's Sunday School class, has been happily married to Marilyn for over 30 years, and loves being "Papa" to Brady, Cooper, Walker, and Summer.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN PETER?

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." He began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about!" Immediately the rooster crowed (Mark 14:70-72).

Have you ever had a friend deny you? Has someone whom you've confided in not merely broken trust with you, but even gone so far as to deny they know you? How painful that is, and what insecurity it causes. A bond has been broken. Many years of trust are now questioned. Your mind races, and you begin to wonder, "Why? How? What happened here that would cause such a rupture? Was it my fault? Something I did?" Much time and energy can be wasted in dealing with such a happening and everyone winds up hurt.

The breaking of a friendship is certainly tragic, yet the real tragedy of Peter's denial of Jesus is the picture we get of Peter's heart. He responds like a caged animal, full of self-protective fear. He curses himself—all in the interest of self-preservation.

We quickly see that even though Peter has confessed Jesus as the Son of God, still God is less important to Peter than Peter.

Contrast this picture with the image of Peter we get in the book of Acts. Here, Peter speaks so boldly for Jesus that he is imprisoned and eventually killed. The Peter of Acts is fearless, brave, and full of courage. He would rather die than deny Jesus.

How did "Peter the Fearful" become "Peter the Brave?" What happened to Peter's self-absorbed, self-preserving fear? Pentecost. The presence and filling of the Spirit makes all the difference in the life of a believer.

Daryl Diddle is senior pastor of WFMC. He and his wife, Annette, have three sons, Benjamin, Paul, and David.