

**Sunday, March 27, 2016**  
**Easter Sunday**

Christ Lutheran Church  
Long Beach, CA

Read Mark 16:1-8

But then, on Sunday morning, I was wakened by a violence. Light - pure, hard, demanding light - slammed against my sour face, and I blinked, and I looked, and I saw the last and the first wonder of all.

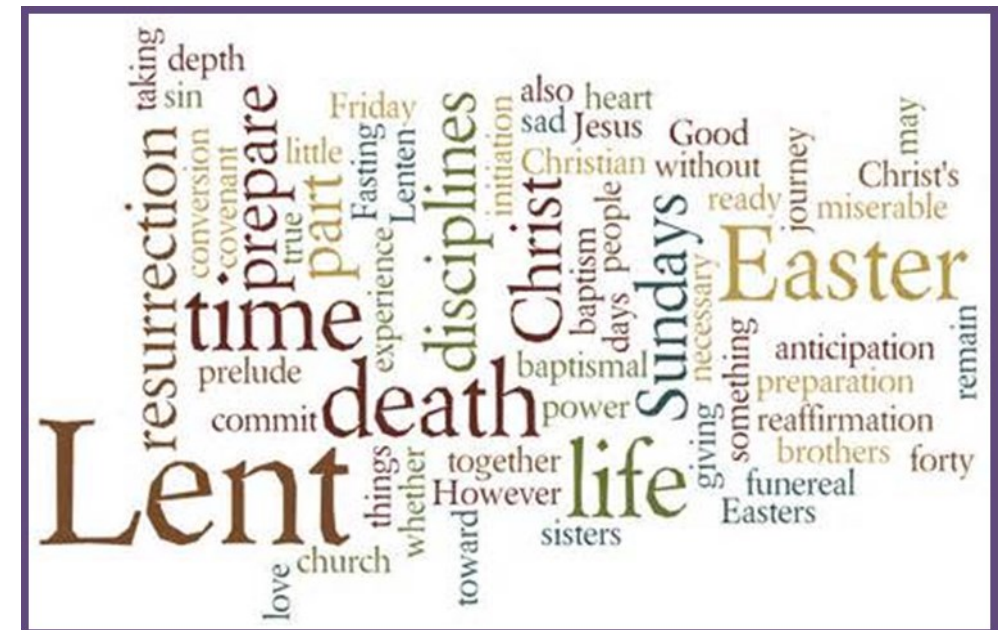
There was the Ragman, folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead, but alive! And, besides that, healthy! There was no sign of sorrow nor of age, and all the rags that he had gathered shined for cleanliness.

Well, then I lowered my head and trembling for all that I had seen, I myself walked up to the Ragman. I told him my name with shame, for I was a sorry figure next to him. Then I took off all my clothes in that place, and I said to him with dear yearning in my voice: "Dress me."

He dressed me. My Lord, he put new rags on me, and I am a wonder beside him. The Ragman, the Ragman, the Christ!

*Together,*

*We Journey to the Living Christ*



*Lenten Devotional*

**2016**

**Ash Wednesday**  
**February 10, 2016**

*Abraham answered, 'Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Genesis 18:27*

***Lent***

Lent is the time to take the time  
to let the power of our faith story take hold of us,  
a time to let events  
get up and walk around us,  
a time to intensify  
our living into Christ,  
a time to hover over  
the thoughts of our hearts,  
a time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem  
or to walk along the sea and listen to his word,  
a time to touch his robe  
and feel the healing surge through us,  
a time to ponder and a time to wonder...

Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!

by Ann Weems

-Pastor Pam Challis

**Holy Saturday**  
**March 26, 2016**

Read Mark 15:33-47

The little old Ragman - he came to a landfill. He came to the garbage pits. And then I wanted to help him in what he did, but I hung back, hiding. He climbed a hill. With tormented labor he cleared a little space on that hill. Then he sighed. He lay down. He pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket. He covered his bones with an army blanket. And he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death! I slumped in a junked car and wailed and mourned as one who has no hope - because I had come to love the Ragman. Every other face had faded in the wonder of this man, and I cherished him; but he died. I sobbed myself to sleep.

I did not know - how could I know? - that I slept through Friday night and Saturday and its night, too.

**Good Friday**  
**March 25, 2016**

Read Mark 15:21-32

And now I had to run to keep up with the Ragman. Though he was weeping uncontrollably, and bleeding freely at the forehead, pulling his cart with one arm, stumbling for drunkenness, falling again and again, exhausted, old, old, and sick, yet he went with terrible speed. On spider's legs he skittered through the alleys of the City, this mile and the next, until he came to its limits, and then he rushed beyond.

I wept to see the change in this man. I hurt to see his sorrow. And yet I needed to see where he was going in such haste, perhaps to know what drove him so.

**Thursday, February 11, 2016**

Searching for God

“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.”  
Psalm 25:4

Being the Beloved is the origin and fulfillment of the life of the Spirit. I say this because, as soon as we catch a glimpse of this truth, we are put on a journey in search of the fullness of that truth ... I know that the fact I am always searching for God, always struggling to discover the fullness of Love, always yearning for the complete truth tells me that I have already been given a taste of God, of Love and of Truth. I can only look for something that I have, to some degree, already found. How can I search for beauty and truth unless that beauty and truth are already known to me in the depth of my heart? ... We were innocent before we started feeling guilty; we were in the light before we entered into the darkness; we were at home before we started to dear for a home.

*Dear God, be with us on that journey as we search for your truth, for your love.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
Christ Our Hope  
Daily Lenten Devotions  
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**Friday, February 12, 2016**

### The Paradox of Hospitality

“If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.” Isaiah 58:10

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

*Dear Lord, give me the understanding to offer true hospitality to stranger and friend alike.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
Christ Our Hope  
Daily Lenten Devotions  
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**Maundy Thursday**

**March 24, 2016**

Read Mark 15:1-20

After that he found a drunk, lying unconscious beneath an army blanket, and old man, hunched, wizened, and sick. He took that blanket and wrapped it round himself, but for the drunk he left new clothes.

**Holy Wednesday**

**March 23, 2016**

Read Mark 14:66-72

The sun hurt both the sky, now, and my eyes; the Ragman seemed more and more to hurry.

"Are you going to work?" he asked a man who leaned against a telephone pole. The man shook his head.

The Ragman pressed him: "Do you have a job?"

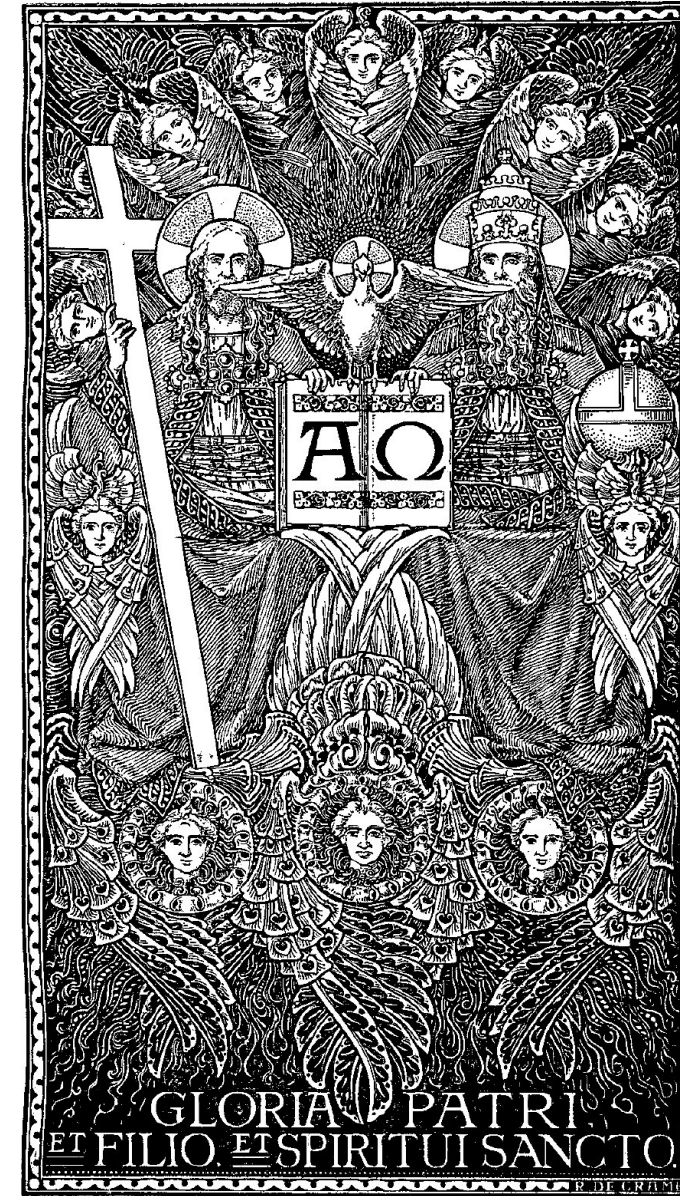
"Are you crazy?" sneered the other. He pulled away from the pole, revealing the right sleeve of his jacket - flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm.

"So," said the Ragman. "Give me your jacket, and I'll give you mine." Such quiet authority in his voice!

The one-armed man took off his jacket. So did the Ragman - and I trembled at what I saw: for the Ragman's arm stayed in its sleeve, and when the other put it on he had two good arms, thick as tree limbs; but the Ragman had only one.

"Go to work," he said.

**Saturday, February 13, 2016**



"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Revelation 22:13

**Sunday, February 14, 2016**

Read Philippians 2:1-11 and John 16:16-33

**Beneath the Cross of Jesus**

Beneath the cross of Jesus I long to take my stand;  
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land,  
A home within a wilderness, a rest upon the way,  
From the burning of the noontide heat and burdens of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus, my eye at times can see  
The very dying form of one who suffered there for me.  
And from my contrite heart, with tears, two wonders I confess:  
The wonder of his glorious love and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, your shadow for my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face;  
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,  
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all, the cross.

Text: Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1830-1869

*God of our hope, we journey with you to the foot of the cross. Stay with us when difficulty comes. Give us courage and peace to face hardship. Turn our pain into joy, our mourning into dancing. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

**Holy Tuesday**

**March 22, 2016**

Read Mark 14:43-65

In a little while, when the sky showed grey behind the rooftops and I could see the shredded curtains hanging out black windows, the Ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage, whose eyes were empty. Blood soaked her bandage. A single line of blood ran down her cheek. Now the tall Ragman looked upon this child with pity, and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart.

"Give me your rag," he said, tracing his own line on her cheek, "and I'll give you mine."

The child could only gaze at him while he loosened the bandage, removed it, and tied it to his own head. The bonnet he set on hers. And I gasped at what I saw: for with the bandage went the wound! Against his brow it ran a darker, more substantial blood - his own!

"Rags! Rags! I take old rags!" cried the sobbing, bleeding, strong, intelligent Ragman.

**Holy Monday**  
**March 21, 2016**

Read Mark 14:22-42

Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into a handkerchief, sighing, and shedding a thousand tears. Her knees and elbows made a sad X. Her shoulders shook. Her heart was breaking. The Ragman stopped his cart. Quietly, he walked to the woman, stepping round tin cans, dead toys, and Pampers.

"Give me your rag," he said so gently, "and I'll give you another."

He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes. She looked up, and he laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shined. She blinked from the gift to the giver.

Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing: he put her stained handkerchief to his own face; and then HE began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done, his shoulders shaking. Yet she was left without a tear.

"This IS a wonder," I breathed to myself, and I followed the sobbing Ragman like a child who cannot turn away from mystery.

"Rags! Rags! New rags for old!"

**Monday, February 15, 2016**

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted in me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."  
Psalm 42:11

I call this my "confirmation" verse. Confirmation that prayers are heard...and answered.

Soon after my youngest child was born, I experienced Post-partum depression. My depression manifested itself by extreme anxiety, making it especially hard to sleep. One night, I lay awake in bed, exhausted---praying that at God would take away this debilitating anxiety. I prayed over and over, until there were no more words to say. After awhile, in the silence, numbers started coming to mind: 42:11 --42:11--42:11 over and over until, I finally got out of bed and wrote the numbers on a note paper. And just as quickly as the numbers had come to mind, my anxiety subsided and I was able to sleep. The next morning, I called my Pastor who helped me locate verse 42:11 in the book of Psalms. I cried with relief and a sense of hope came over me as I read the last sentence over and over: "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God". I knew then, that my anxiety would not go away--- right away, but I did have assurance that one day--- not too far away, I would be healed and once again praise God!

I still have that piece of note paper with 42:11 written on it, tucked into my bible. It reminds me that when praying, sometimes we have to **silence our thoughts**---in order to hear the answer to our prayers.

*Dear Lord, Thank you for hearing my prayers. Help me to **be still and listen** for your answer.*

-Shannon Howard

**Tuesday, February 16, 2016**

Re-creation's purpose  
is not to kill time,  
but to make life:  
not to keep a person occupied,  
but to keep them refreshed;  
not to offer an escape from life,  
but to provide a discovery of life.

*-author unknown*

-Sheryl Hunter

**Palm Passion Sunday**

**March 20, 2016**

For our devotions during Holy week, we have incorporated the **The Rag Man's Story** by Walter Wangerin, Jr. with the Passion Story from Mark's Gospel. We trust this will both enhance and bring meaning to the events that are so central to our Christian story.

Read Mark 14:1-21

I saw a strange sight. I stumbled upon a story most strange, like nothing my life, my street sense, my sly tongue had ever prepared me for. Hush, child. Hush, now, and I will tell it to you.

Even before the dawn one Friday morning I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking the alleys of our City. He was pulling an old cart filled with clothes both bright and new, and he was calling in a clear, tenor voice: "Rags!" Ah, the air was foul and the first light filthy to be crossed by such sweet music.

"Rags! New rags for old! I take your tired rags! Rags!"

"Now, this is a wonder," I thought to myself, for the man stood six-feet-four, and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes flashed intelligence.

Could he find no better job than this, to be a ragman in the inner city? I followed him. My curiosity drove me. And I wasn't disappointed.



Saturday, March 19, 2016

Wednesday, February 17, 2016



“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
1 Corinthians 15:55-57

### The Gift of Compassion

“Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed ...” Isaiah 1:17

We sometimes find it easier to show pity than compassion. The suffering person calls us to become aware of our own suffering. How can I respond to someone’s loneliness unless I am in touch with my own experience of loneliness? How can I be close to handicapped people when I refuse to acknowledge my own handicaps? How can I be with the poor when I am unwilling to confess my own poverty?

When I reflect on my own life, I realize that the moments of greatest comfort and consolation were moments when someone said: “I cannot take your pain away, I cannot offer you a solution for your problem, but I can promise you that I won’t leave you alone and will hold on to you as long and as well as I can.” There is much grief and pain in our lives, but what a blessing it is when we do not have to live our grief and pain alone. That is the gift of compassion.

*Compassionate Jesus, let me willingly take up the burdens of others’ grief and pain.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
Christ Our Hope  
Daily Lenten Devotions  
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**Thursday, February 18, 2016**

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:10-17

These verses provide a powerful visual picture! This is my ‘super hero’ suit of armor complete with God’s strength. God’s gifts are all here – truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word – and they have been freely given to me so I will have the necessary tools to stand firm and withstand evil. Sometimes I become overwhelmed with all the evil in the world. But as a Christian I have been given a job to do. I must work to overcome evil with good. And I have the armor I need to protect me.

-Melissa Biel

**Friday, March 18, 2016**

“**Faith** is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

- Martin Luther King Jr. (paraphrased)

I kept seeing this quote over the MLK weekend. When I did a little research I discovered that Dr. King had combined two elements of faith from the New Testament.

“Now **faith** is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

“... **faith** without works is dead.” James 2:20

Faith seems so natural for some and so difficult for others. I do know that my faith is most fluid and alive when I look and find evidence of God’s work in my life. I should say that faith is most alive when I take the time to look and see the evidence. It’s always there. I just have to take the time to look.

Most recently, we as a congregation took the first step on a new staircase when we joined into a partnership with Habitat for Humanity. I see God’s hand in the joyful tears of a family receiving the keys to their new home. I see God’s work in the painters, the framers, the sandwich makers from our church who helped make this possible. Faith is the first step but it’s strengthened by the actions that follow.

*Dear Heavenly Father, strengthen our faith. You know our hearts. Help us to take the first step or help us to continue on our faith journey. Keep our eyes open to see your hand in our daily lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen*

-Ruth Benner

Thursday, March 17, 2016

## Joy of the Soul

Heaven has given us hearts too great and warm to love only a few people. We pursue the love of the soul, which transcends our little selves, for we have hearts more than able to embrace all humanity and the world.

Unconditional peace, spontaneous joy and satisfaction, and *a little smile coming from my heart* are my only rewards, but the joy of the soul is a joy all my own, whether or not someone recognizes it. That joy is absolute and long-lasting.

The joy of the soul never runs out, no matter how much you may share it.

From: *Calligraphic Meditation for Everyday Happiness* by Ilchi Lee

I love the visual of "a little smile coming from my heart are(is) my only reward(s)." What a lovely thought---to see and feel my heart ---smiling at me! God has given us hearts full of love---to share.

*Thank you Lord for my loving heart and for the joy in my soul.*

-Shannon Howard



Friday, February 19, 2016

"Today in the town of David, a child has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

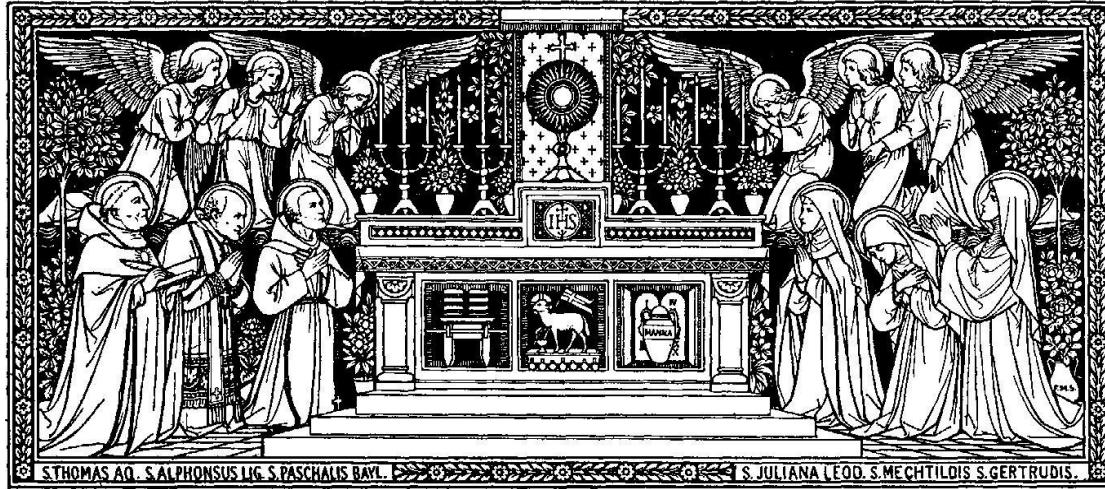
A Christmas verse for Lent? I will explain. I have spent the last 38 years working with children, and preparing a yearly Christmas program has been part of my job every year. With all the energy spent getting these ready, it often takes some time afterward for me to reflect on what has happened. This year everything went well, until the night of the program, it was unbelievable. Eight large families arrived an hour earlier than the doors were opening to get great seats complained bitterly that it was cold and insisted on being let in, two Grandmothers crawled on their knees up the middle aisle during the program to get a closer look, one of them upsetting my guitar in the process, children not enrolled in our program went up on the stage, a mother insisted her child must wear her coat, hat and mittens for the one minute trip from classroom to church, then was upset when these items were hard to locate afterwards, promised cookies were not brought for after the program, parents filled the sides to get the perfect picture after we explained we need to keep the sides free of parents, there were missed cues of little angels coming forward to see Baby Jesus, and 6 out of 5 dancers who did so beautifully in practice, froze with fright. But then there was Lily. In the midst of all of this, Lily felt the true spirit of Christmas. She danced that night as though no one was there. Twirls and spins and kisses to the audience was her response to a night that had me so frustrated. She got it. Despite all that went wrong, she got it right, and caught me up in her absolute joy. For as much as we must frustrate God, He sent his child for us. I was reminded that night of what a gift both Lily and that tiny baby born in a manger are to me. She, to remind me of what is really important in the night of a preschool program, and He, because He knew she would dance for him and touch everyone in the room with the truth of the season. Frustrations are always going to be there, but so is the One that promises to stand beside us always. He even died on the cross for me, for Lily, and for you. I believe I will look back fondly on this year's program. I will see Lily in my mind, loving life and praising God as only a three year old can do. And I will quietly smile this Lenten season as I remember the gift that night was to me.

Peace my family.

-Lisa Cottrell

Saturday, February 20, 2016

Wednesday, March 16, 2016



For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Campus shootings, ISIS, Syria, Boko Harum, Paris, Taliban, San Bernardino. So much darkness in the world. So much evil. It does seem that our night is desperately devoid of stars, as Dr. King mentions so eloquently in the above quote. As Christians, we are called to shine God's healing, restorative, brilliant light into this world of violence, evil and darkness. In fact, it is God's light alone that can drive out the darkness.

So I ask myself... "What can I do"? Sure, I work at a college campus, so I participate in the "active shooter" drills, I scan the waiting areas at the airport to look for any abandoned suitcases, and I say a silent prayer in my heart when my homepage alerts me to another terrorist attack but... is that it? I don't think so. I am called to be God's light. The mark of the cross was placed upon my forehead as an infant, and is placed there again on Ash Wednesday as a reminder of whose child I am. I am a child of Christ, and as such I need to shine the light in my workplace, my neighborhood, on my Facebook page, with my relatives, friends and the strangers that cross my path. I need to say something, instead of silently looking away when anti-Islamic comments are made in my presence, and I need to pray. Pray for those in faraway lands and very close to home who are being terrorized and attacked by evil. Let's be the light we are supposed to be in this world. If not us, who?

*Gracious God, You sent your Son into the darkness to shine your light. Help us continue to shine your light into this hurting world. Amen.*

-Rebecca Green

**Tuesday, March 15, 2016**

One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: "Which is most important of all the commandments?" Jesus said, "The first in importance is, 'Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.' And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment that ranks with these."

The religion scholar said, "A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that's better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!" When Jesus realized how insightful he was, he said, "You're almost there, right on the border of God's kingdom." After that, no one else dared ask a question. Mark 12:28-34 *The Message* translation

You are almost there, on the border of Love. And Justice. And Peace. Be bold and dare to keep asking the questions that will open your heart so that you can see the way to union with the Creative Power of the Universe, with Christ, with God, with Love.

Richard Rohr writes: "Love is the only thing that transforms the human heart. In the Gospel we see Jesus fully revealing this divine wisdom. Love takes the shape and symbolism of healing and radical forgiveness--which is just about all that Jesus does. Jesus, who represents God, usually transforms people at the moments when they most hate themselves, when they most want to punish themselves or feel shame and guilt. Look at Jesus' interaction with the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). He doesn't belittle or punish Zacchaeus; instead, Jesus goes to his home, shares a meal with him, and treats him like a friend. Zacchaeus' heart is opened and transformed."

There is no one way to do it right. It will be messy, and hard, and you might lose some friends along the way. But through loving service, through presence and time, and trial and error, you will cross over the border again and again and you will gain true life, connection, and Love.

*May I live in the questions and open my heart to your transformative love and grace. Amen.*

-Pastor Carole Parmeter Dyer

**Sunday, February 21**

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10 and Matthew 7:24-27

**Lead Me, Guide Me**

Lead me, guide me, along the way; for if you lead me, I cannot stray.  
Lord, let me walk each day with thee. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

I am weak and I need thy strength and pow'r to help me over my weakest hour.  
Help me through the darkness thy face to see. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Help me tread in the paths of righteousness, be my aid when Satan  
and sin oppress. I am putting all my trust in thee. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

I am lost if you take your hand from me, O am blind without thy light to see.  
Lord, just always let me thy servant be. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Text: Doris Akers, 1922-1995

*God of our salvation, you are the rock in whom we take refuge. Hear our cry and make our way safe. Plant our feet on solid ground. Support us with your love shown to us through the cross of Jesus. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

**Monday, February 22, 2016**

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

The theme in this verse that stands out to me is that out of all the most valuable and important things in life, love is the greatest. I feel that because God has shown us His love, we are able to love Him back which empowers us to love others. Love bonds a family, strengthens a friendship, and creates a relationship. Love empowers us to do many things. If we have love for someone, we are encouraged to go strengthen and build that relationship. If we have love for a specific career or hobby, we go immerse ourselves in it. If we have the passion or love to succeed, we try our hardest to. If we wrong someone, then they can be encouraged by love to forgive us. And because we love God, we worship and praise Him, rely on Him with prayer, and build faith in Him. Our love makes us who we are and that's why love is the greatest.

*Dear God, Thank you for empowering us to love, which therefore has made us able to love others. Please help us to show your love to those around us. Amen.*

-Hannah Rodrigues

**Monday, March 14, 2016**

He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” Mark 4:2-9

The idea of taking the Word of God and doing good with it is inspiring to me. We are often told, after a Godly experience, to “take it down the mountain” with us. Meaning that we have to share and spread that experience with others. This idea applies to the passage in that we need to take the seed and spread it like good news.

I find this passage meaningful because I feel that I need to follow it more. I see myself in the position of the seed among the rocks. I experience God in this passage by witnessing His Word in church and then seeing it go to good use.

*Dear God, Help us to make good of your Word and give it a safe place to bring the most out of people. Plant the seed of your grace in us so that we will branch out and share the good fruit that is Your word.*

-Jeremy Rodrigues

**Sunday, March 13, 2016**

Read Colossians 1:15-20 and Mark 8:31-9:1

**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

*God of our redemption, keep us ever near the cross. Remind us of the extravagant love you showed to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Teach us to take up our cross and follow you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 23, 2016**

“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.”  
Revelation 2:10

This King James version was given to me on my Confirmation day. I was baptized in the Lutheran church; my family attended weekly services; my childhood years include Sunday School, Choir School, Senior Choir, Luther League; I was married there, and baptized my first-born child in the same church where I was baptized. Our Lord has always been a big part of my life—then and now.

The reason the Bible verse is special to me is because of who gave it and when it was given. Pastor Keen thoughtfully, prayerfully, and carefully chose a Bible verse for each confirmand. After two years of Saturday mornings with his group of pre-confirmands, he really knew us. I didn't understand why he chose that particular verse for me. But he had a reason. You see, my 43 year old father got ill in December, died in March, and then I was confirmed a month later. But over the years, it has kept me in the faith. It has given me hope in my sad times—of which, I've had my share. We all have. Pastor Keen knew what I needed.

While this verse has brought me through some tough times, it has also tied me to my community of believers—you who are here now as well as those who have moved on. This community has been my 'family' for many years. My dearest friends were made here, in this place, over 45 years ago. There has been a lot of sharing, rejoicing, crying, praying, listening, learning...here...in this place.

My mom's funeral was held here about 15 years ago. She came with me regularly. My church family and friends filled the pews that day. At the end of the service I stood in front and invited guests to pass to the lounge by coming to the front where I displayed Mom's favorite things. Then we sang a favorite hymn and as I stood in the front by myself, one by one my faithful friends came up to the front to sing with me...and that is how I experienced God then and still do now...so, I offer this hymn as a prayer of thanksgiving:

“Bless be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear; and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear. From sorrow, toil, and pain, and sin we shall be free; and perfect love and friendship reign, through all eternity.”

Text: John Fawcett, 1740-1817

-Pat Barnett



Wednesday, February 24, 2016

## Trick or Treat

Two boys were walking along a country road and off to the side they saw an older man fishing in a creek. He was wading in the water and his shoes were on the bank of the creek.

“Let’s hide his shoes”, said one boy to the other.

“That would not be right”, said the other boy. “That’s a mean trick. Let’s put a dollar in each shoe and see what happens”. So the boys put a dollar in each shoe of the older man and hid in the bushes to watch.

A few minutes later, the man came to the shore and put on his socks and shoes. He felt something odd and took his shoe off. He looked inside and saw the dollar. He then found the dollar in his other shoe. The man looked around and did not see anyone. To the boy’s amazement, the man fell to his knees, started to cry, looked to heaven and said “Thank you God for taking care of my family in this time of need”.

Seeing this, one boy said to the other, “I guess a treat is better than a trick”.

Sometimes our kindness can mean more than you know. Jesus said in Luke 3:11, “...Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” Philippians 4:19 says, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”.

-Marv Moon

Saturday, March 12, 2016



“And the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14



**Friday, March 11, 2016**

What Is Really Real?

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.” Psalm 51:12

The great challenge of faith is to be surprised by joy. I remember sitting at a dinner table with friends discussing the economic depression of the country. We kept throwing out statistics that made us increasingly convinced that things could only get worse. Then, suddenly, the four-year-old son of one of my friends opened the door, ran to his father and said, “Look, Daddy! Look! I found a little kitten in the yard ... Look! ... Isn’t she cute?” While showing the kitten to his father, the little boy stroked the kitten with his hands and held it against his face. All at once everything changed. The little boy and his kitten became the center of attention. There were smiles, strokes and many tender words. We were surprised by joy!

God became a little child in the midst of a violent world. Are we surprised by joy or do we keep saying: “How nice and sweet, but the reality is different.” What if the child reveals to us what is really real?

*Dear God, like an innocent child, let me once again feel your joyful presence.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
Christ Our Hope  
Daily Lenten Devotions  
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**Thursday, February 25, 2016**

**PATIENCE**

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.

*Henry W. Longfellow*

From **Leaves of Gold: An Anthology Of Prayers,  
Memorable Phrases, Inspirational Verse And Prose**  
By Clyde Francis Lytle

-Kit Snider

**Friday, February 26, 2016**

“And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” Luke 11:4

'Forgive our sins as we forgive,'  
you taught us, Lord, to pray,  
but you alone can grant us grace  
to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless  
the unforgiving heart,  
that broods on wrongs and will not let  
old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals  
the truth we dimly knew:  
what trivial debts are owed to us,  
how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls,  
and bid resentment cease;  
then, bound to all in bonds of love,  
our lives will spread your peace.

-Rosamond E. Herklots

*Forgiving God of healing and peace, help me to live these words in ways that bring wholeness, comfort and grace to others.*

**Thursday, March 10, 2016**

“To love another person is to see the face of God.”

From *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo

I went to a student production of *Les Misérables* today, in which a former student performed. I've seen it many times but this line always brings me to tears. It strikes me as important to the giver as well as the recipient.

-Kathy Mitchell

Wednesday, March 9, 2016

### Letting Go of Fears, Doubts

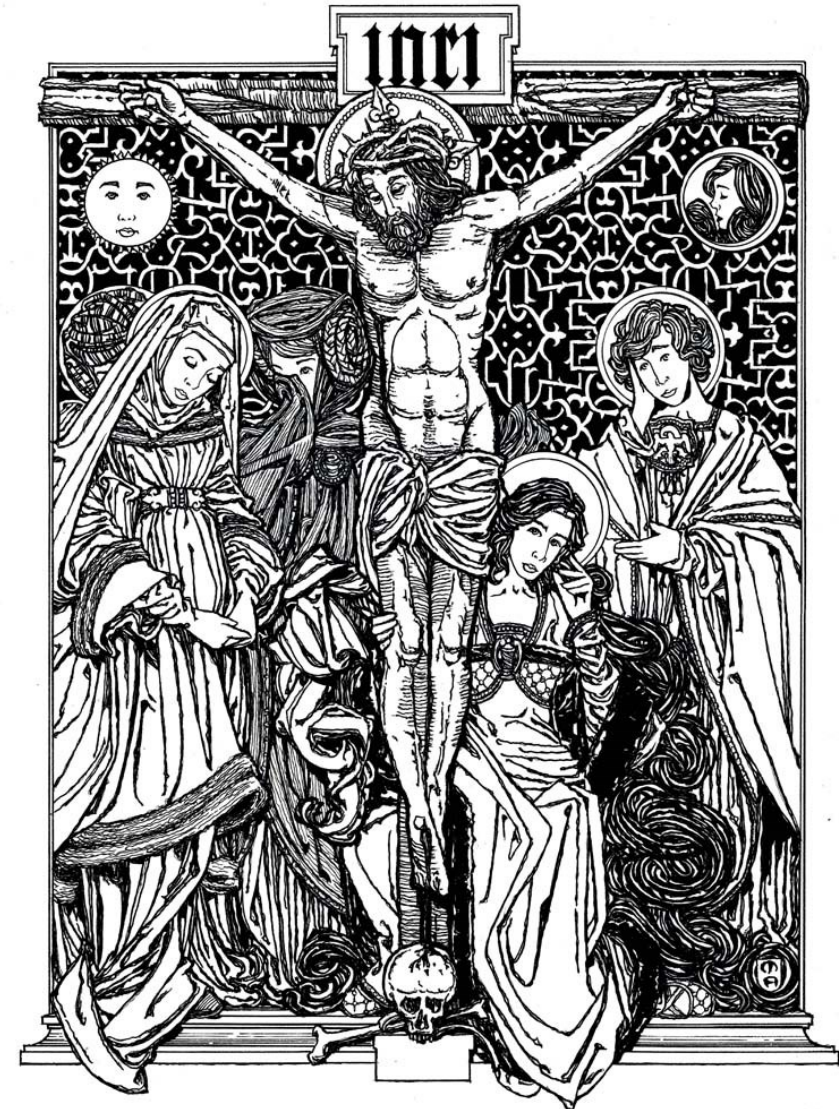
“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law...” Matthew 7:12

O, Lord, you kneel before me; you hold my naked feet in your hands, and you look up at me and smile. Within me I feel the protest arising, “No, Lord, you shall never wash my feet.” It is as if I were resisting the love you offer me. I want to say, “You don’t really know me, my dark feelings, my pride, my lust, my greed. I may speak the right words, but my heart is so far from you. No, I am not good enough to belong to you. You must have someone else in mind, not me.” But you look at me with utter tenderness, saying, “I want you to be with me. I want you to have a full share in my life. I want you to belong to me as much as I belong to my Father. I want to wash you completely clean so that you and I can be one and so that you can do to others what I have done to you.” I have to let go of my fears, distrust, doubts and anguish and simply let you wash me clean and make me your friend whom you love with a love that has no bounds.

*“Do unto others ...” Dear Jesus, help me follow this commandment.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
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Saturday, February 27, 2016



“The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” Acts 5:30-32

**Sunday, February 28, 2016**

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and John 14:1-7

**Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling**

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.  
See, on the portals he's waiting and watching, watching for you  
and for me.

"Come home, come home! You who are weary, come home."  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, "O sinner, come home!"

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, pleading for you and for me?  
Why should we linger and heed not his mercies, mercies for you and for me?

Oh, for the wonderful love he has promised, promised for you and for me!  
Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon, pardon for you and for me.

Text: Will L. Thompson, 1847-1909

*God of our longing, you prepare a home and dwelling place for our weary souls.  
Give us rest in you. Build our lives on the cornerstone of Jesus. In the name of Je-  
sus we pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 8, 2016**

I love you, LORD, my strength.

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,  
and I have been saved from my enemies.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.

He rescued me from my powerful enemy,  
from my foes, who were too strong for me.

They confronted me in the day of my disaster,  
but the LORD was my support.

He brought me out into a spacious place;  
he rescued me because he delighted in me. Psalm 18:1-3 & 16-19

This psalm was written by David to praise the God of his deliverance.

I found a psalm many years ago that I go to when I'm in need of strength. It always brings me back to the source of any strength I have. I have asked God for his support and he has saved me. And the part I love best is that he did this because he delights in me.

It is one of the longest Psalms so I won't repeat the whole song here. Just the beginning, and the end. I guess you'll have to go read the whole thing ... It's worth it!

-Gary Burkard

**Monday, March 7, 2016**

## The Core of Spiritual Life

“If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36

Freedom comes when you know with your heart that you are loved. If you could accept and believe that you are unconditionally loved and embraced, you could go all over the world and never be lonely. This is a struggle, but if you experience it you will know what Jesus meant when he said: “You will be leaving me alone, yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

Freedom is the core of the spiritual life. It comes from claiming in your heart that unconditional first love that allows you to love your neighbor freely and unpossessively. Jesus shares this word of hope in our world full of violence—violence in our families, in our communities. In our personal relationships, a moral life is not enough. We must also live the mystical life, a life which is embraced by the God who says, “I love you fully and unconditionally.”

*Dear God, let me love you unconditionally.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
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**Monday, February 29, 2016**

## Joy and Sorrow As One

“For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” Psalm 30:5

Joy is essential to spiritual life. Whatever we may think or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God’s love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war or even death – can take that love away.

Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God’s love for us. We are inclined to think that when we are sad we cannot be glad, but in the life of a God-centered person, sorrow and joy can exist together. That isn’t easy to understand, but when we think about some of our deepest life experiences, such as being present at the birth of a child or the death of a friend, great sorrow and great joy are often seen to be parts of the same experience.

*In a world hobbled by pain and distress, loving Lord, help me experience the joy of your unconditional love.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
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**Tuesday, March 1, 2016**

Restoring Our Souls

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.”  
Psalm 23:1-3

For a long time, I prayed the words, “The Lord is my shepherd ...” I prayed these words in the morning for half an hour sitting quietly on my chair trying only to keep my mind focused on what I was saying. I prayed them during the many moments of the day when I was going here or there, and I even prayed them during my routine activities. The words stand in stark contrast to the reality of my life. I want many things; I see mostly busy roads and ugly shopping malls; and if there are any waters to walk along they are mostly polluted. But I keep saying “The Lord is my shepherd ...” and allow God’s shepherding love to enter more fully into my heart, I become more fully aware that the busy roads, the ugly malls and the polluted waterways are not telling the true story of who I am. I do not belong to the powers and principalities that rule the world but to the Good Shepherd who knows his own and is known by his own.

*You are my shepherd, loving God. Restore my soul.*

*Henri J.M. Nouwen  
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**Sunday, March 6, 2016**

Read 1 John 1:5-10 and Luke 7:36-50

**There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy**

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy, like the wideness of the sea;  
there’s a kindness in God’s justice which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth’s sorrows are more felt than up in heav’n.  
There is no place where earth’s failings have such kindly judgment giv’n.

There is welcome for the sinner, and a promised grace made good;  
there is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.  
There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;  
there is room for fresh creations in that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind;  
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.  
But we make this love too narrow by false limits of our own;  
and we magnify its strictness with a zeal God will not own.

‘Tis not all we owe to Jesus; it is something more than all;  
greater good because of evil, larger mercy through the fall.  
Make our love, O God, more faithful; let us take you at your word,  
and our lives will be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

Text: Frederick W. Faber, 1814-1863

*God of our joy, you cleanse our hearts and renew our spirits. Have mercy on us according to your steadfast love, that we may sing loudly of your goodness. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*



Saturday, March 5, 2016

Wednesday, March 2, 2016



“And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Hebrews 10:11-14

## The Challenge of Jesus' Message

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

Matthew 5:44

What my enemy deserves is not my anger, rejection, resentment or disdain, but my love. Spiritual guides throughout history have said that love for the enemy is the cornerstone of the message of Jesus and the core of holiness. For us fearful people, loving our enemy is the greatest challenge, because our fears make us divide the world between people who are for us and people who are against us, people to love and people to hate, friends and enemies.

All these distinctions are based on the illusion that others decide who we are and that our very being depends on their words, thoughts and actions. Loving our enemy thus compels us to unmask this illusion by acting according to the knowledge that God loves all human persons regardless of their sex, religion, race, color, nationality, age or intelligence—with the same bold, unconditional love.

*When I am in the grip of my deepest fear and doubt, dear Jesus, show me how to love my enemies.*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen  
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## Thursday, March 3 & Friday, March 4, 2016

One of my favorite books on faith is a short one called *Come Share the Being*. What I love about it are the stories the author, Bob Benson, uses to describe his theology. These stories are drawn from his experiences as a Nazarene minister and a family man with his wife, Peg, and five children. Here is one from Chapter 5, "Beyond Retrieval." See if you can read this without accumulating extra water in your eyes. I haven't yet.

The point of Chapter 5 is God cares for us. The easiest way to prove this, Benson declares, is to look to Jesus, and he quotes John 14:9: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" and adds, "The longer we spend in the Gospels, the more I am impressed that if the Father is indeed like Jesus, then God is love." The chapter ends with this conclusion and family story:

Jesus' love was beyond retrieval. We are all very careful, generally, to love in such a way so that if it doesn't turn out well, we can back away without having lost much pride, or face. Very cautiously and gently we let our feelings go out, ready to pull them back on instant notice with a calm look on our face which says I didn't really care anyway.

But Jesus came and stuck His love so far out there that there was no way to pick it up and go nonchalantly on His way. I know He prayed in the garden in agony that maybe the cup could pass. And I guess the Father could have said, "Okay, you tried, you went and they wouldn't receive you—come on back home and we'll figure out some other plan." But Jesus had hardly finished the sentence before he added that He knew it had gone too far—He had cared too much and shown that love in too many places to pick it back up now. It was beyond retrieving. It wasn't a case of "picking up the marbles and going home"...

So he came to earth in love—love drew him. He lived in love and compassion drew Him to the homes of sinners and to the lepers and demoniacs. And His love drew Him to His death.

Nearly a year ago Peg and I had a very hard week.

### **Wednesday night—**

Mike slept downstairs in his room—  
where children belong  
and we slept upstairs in ours  
where moms and dads belong.

### **Thursday night--**

we were 350 miles away and he was in Ramada 325 and we were in 323—connecting rooms and we left the door open and talked and laughed together.

### **Friday night—**

700 miles from home and he was in 247 and we were in 239 but it was just down the balcony and somehow we seemed together.

### **Saturday night—**

he was in the freshman dorm and we were still in 239.

### **Sunday night—**

we were home and he was 700 miles away in Chapman 309.

Now we have been through this before Bob Jr. had gone away to college and we had gathered ourselves together until we had gotten over it—mainly because he's married now and he only lives ten miles away and comes to visit often with Deb and Robert the III. So we thought we knew how to handle separation pretty well but we came away so lonely and blue.

Oh our hearts were filled with pride at a fine young man and our minds were filled with memories from tricycles to commencements but deep down inside somewhere we just ached with loneliness and pain.

This is the Father that Jesus came to reveal and there is no greater song or hymn than the one you learned in Sunday school:

**Yes, Jesus loves me,  
Yes, Jesus loves me,  
Yes, Jesus loves me,  
The Bible tells me so.**

Somebody said you still have three at home three fine kids and there is still plenty of noise—plenty of ball games to go to—plenty of responsibilities—plenty of laughter—plenty of everything **except Mike**. And in parental math five minus one just doesn't equal plenty.

And I was thinking about God He sure has plenty of children—plenty of artists, plenty of singers, and carpenters, and candlestick makers, and preachers, plenty of everybody... **except you** and all of them together can never take your place. And there will always be an empty space in His heart—and a vacant chair at His table when you're not home.

And if once in a while it seems He's crowding you a bit--try to forgive Him. It may be one of those nights when he misses you so much He can hardly stand it.