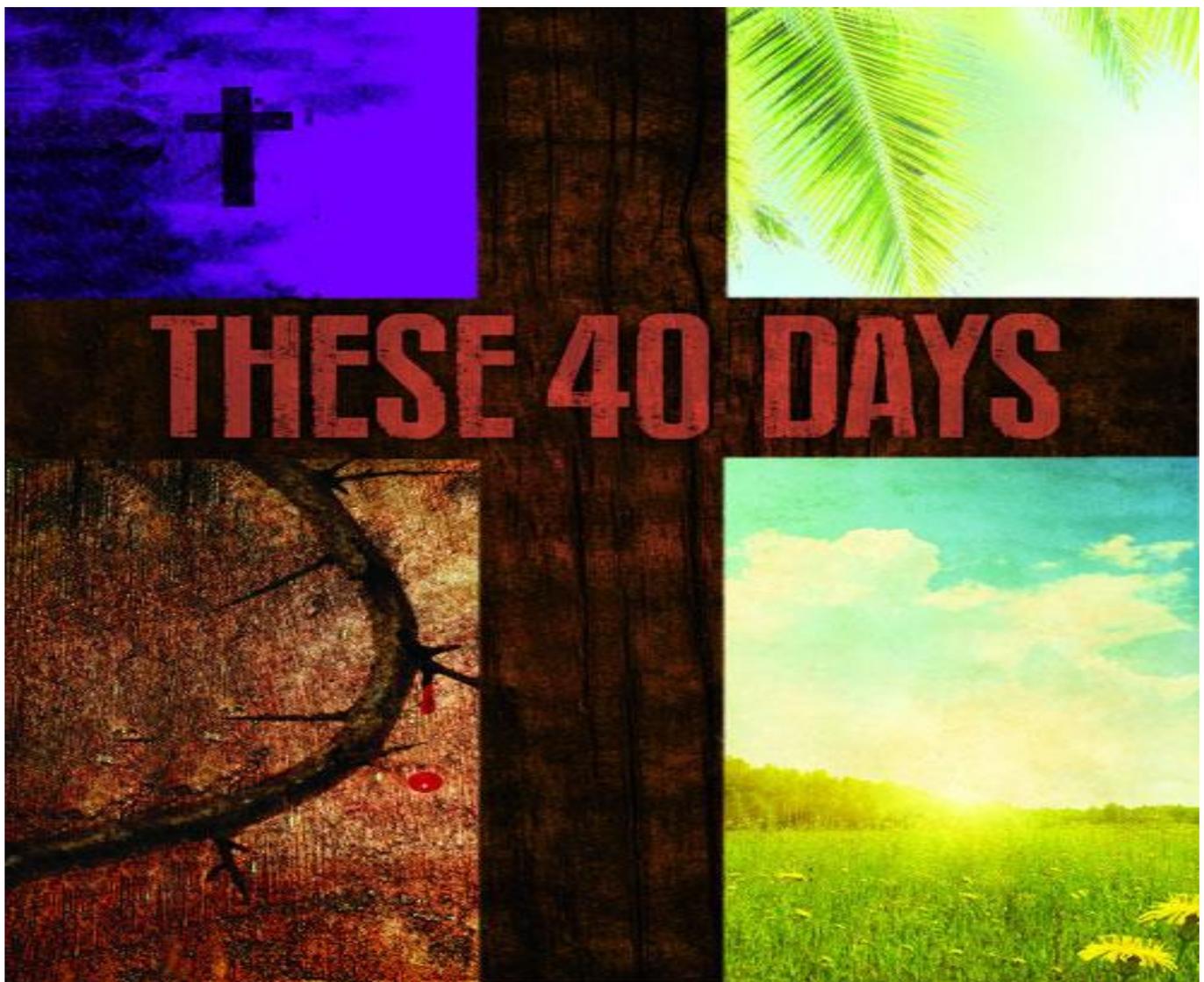


*St. Matthew AME Church
Lenten Devotional
2019*

*The Rev. Melvin E. Wilson
Pastor/Teacher*



St. Matthew
African Methodist Episcopal Church
“The Servant Church Of The Oranges: God’s Love for God’s People”
Rev. Melvin E. Wilson, Pastor/Teacher
Pastor’s Email: pastorwilson@stmatthewame.org

Ladies & Gentlemen:

Lent is one of the most important times on the Christian calendar. It is a time when we can be more focused about prayer, meditation, reflection, contemplation, self-denial and self-sacrifice. While fasting from food is definitely one of the spiritual disciplines that many engage in during Lent, there are other ways to fast which also make a serious impact. Consider the words of Pope Francis.

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

As you read the meditations contained in this Lenten devotional book which have been submitted by members and friends of St. Matthew, may their words lead us to have a “Holy Lent” and consider ALL that Jesus did for us as he made his way to the cross.

God bless!

Sincerely,



Rev. Melvin E. Wilson
Pastor/Teacher

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ASH WEDNESDAY – MARCH 6, 2019

There is broad speculation about the origin and meaning of this Americanized version of this popular nursery rhyme:

Ring-a-round the rosies,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes! Ashes!
We all fall down.

Some information suggests that the “the rosies” was actually a rash symptomatic of a plague that would appear on an infected humans’ skin. The “posies” were herbs that were carried by the person to ward off any further infection or disease. If the person was not cured or healed, they would eventually die, “fall down” as it were, and disintegrate into ashes.

From a biblical standpoint, ashes are a symbol of death and mortality. While the well-known graveside committal phrase “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” does not come from the Bible (but the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer), the Bible does make the connection between ashes and death, mourning or pain.

2 Samuel 13:19 says “Tamar put **ashes** on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.”

Esther 4:1-3 says, “When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and **ashes**, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ²But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and **ashes**.”

Job 42:6 says, “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and **ashes**.”

Ash Wednesday is a time for us to reposition and reflect our thoughts, our minds and our bodies on the pain and sacrifice that comes with this Christian walk. It forces us to ask the question, “At the end of the day, what are we really made of?” The unflattering answer is, “we are dust, ashes, tiny pieces of powder that God supernaturally infused with God’s spirit.”

We don’t like to talk about it much, but Ash Wednesday puts us in touch with death, in touch with our limited life span, and in touch with who we really are.

Remember, “from dust you came and to dust you shall return. Repent, and believe the Gospel!” Rev. Melvin E. Wilson, Pastor/Teacher

**MARCH 7TH
HAVING TOTAL TRUST**

Psalm 91:2 “I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

Whether we realize it or not, we are having an ongoing conversation with ourselves. What we say determines how we behave and live. This verse affirms the bond that we have with our God. It conveys our confidence and trust in Him. He is the one in whom we live, move and have our beings.

As we grow older, we realize how dependent we are on God, or Jesus Christ. He is the source of our strength, our power. Without Him we can do nothing. This verse expresses our praise, our assurance of who His is to us.

I have an afghan with this verse on it. It is draped over my recliner in my living room. It is a wonderful, daily reminder of what the Lord Jesus Christ means to me and who He is to me.

Prayer: Father God, I am so thankful for who You are. You are totally trustworthy, forever faithful and the dispenser of everlasting love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Rev. Dr. Shirley Roberts

**MARCH 8TH
NOT ABOUT ME**

Each morning I begin my day with Matthew 6:33, Matthew 5:16, and Psalm 69:9 and 3 times during the day my phone alarms to remind me of these words and that my life is not about me.

At 11:30 a.m. I am asked, “Am I doing (seeking Him first) what God has for me to do?” At 3:00 p.m. I am asked, “Am I being (shining light) who God has for me to be?” At 7:00 p.m. the question is, “Am I still going (aware of my impact on others) where God has for me to go?”

In these times of distrust, “fake news”, seeking Him who is the “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) to share the very good (real) news about Him who made both the good and the not so good days (Ephesian 7:14), it is paramount to tell someone where their help and strength can be found.

In times like these 2 Corinthians 4:6 proclaims loudly, “For God said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness....’”, reminding us of the requirement to be light at breakfast time, lunch time, at the ninth hour and during dinner.

In times like these somebody’s testimony is already written for them to share in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “we are afflicted (mental, physical, financial pain) in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed (racism, sexism, homophobia), but not in despair; we are persecuted (#BlackLivesMatter, violence in the home and in the streets), but (thanks be to God) not abandoned; we are struck down (safety net programs, student loan and predatory lending debt) but not destroyed....”

In times like these each morning I know I must begin my day focused on thee for my representation, travels near or far, is not about me.

Our Father, from “the rising of the sun until the going down of the same” thank You for the spirit of not about me intentionality to be who You would have me to be, do what You would have me to do, and go where You would have me to go. I am a willing vessel, in the name of our “other-oriented” Savior, Jesus, Amen.

Rev. Leslie M. Watson (Malachi)

**MARCH 9TH
PEACE**

Philippians 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

God’s grace and mercies surpass all understanding. At different times in our lives we find ourselves in circumstances where peace is mostly needed. We’re anxious about life, family, relationships and finances. The scripture above states to be anxious for nothing. As you go through life and seek God, you’ll realize that praying for peace during the storms will allow you to navigate and overcome whatever the struggle may be. In some instances there may not be an immediate change after prayer, but if you pray for peace during the situation you’ll be able to endure to the end.

Have you prayed day in and day out for God to show you the way, but you’re still distressed about your situations? Are you still dwelling on your past mistakes? God tells us to pray to Him and ask earnestly with a thankful heart. Submit your request to Him and only God’s peace will bring you comfort.

Prayer: Father God I humbly come to you to say Thank You! Thank You for the peace in my life. When I’m faced with obstacles and difficult decisions in my life, I’m so thankful that I can come before You and submit my prayers and petitions unto You, knowing that You will give me inner-peace and guidance to overcome the trials and tribulations. Lord I love You for who You are. I give You all the glory, the honor and all the praise. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Bro. Terry Spicer, Steward and Class Leader, Class #8

**MARCH 11TH
THE LAST CHICKEN**

Proverbs 27:1 “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

From my late teens to well into my adulthood, I had a dear friend, Maria. We had a great time going to parties, dances and out to eat, but as her health began to fail, we limited our festivities to dinners at her apartment. When we planned our get-togethers she would always ask me what I wanted her to fix. She was a marvelous cook and could make a feast out of anything, but I always answered, “Your, chicken!” Maria would try to convince me to have something else but inevitably she let me have my way.

It was the most amazing chicken - juicy, moist, superbly seasoned and cooked in her miraculous toaster oven. I say miraculous because that was back in the day when toaster ovens were the size of today’s four-slice toasters. I couldn’t see how she could cook a chicken leg in there, much less a whole chicken, but she did. There was no better way for me to spend an evening than in sharing Maria’s company and her chicken. Sadly, her health challenges became more severe and our visits began to take place in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities and there was no more chicken.

You hear people say, “Tomorrow is not promised,” and they usually mean something like be your best self every day because there is no guarantee that any one of us will wake up tomorrow. Indeed, Maria did make her transition but that is not why I share this story. I share it because when I think of that chicken I am reminded to be present in the moment. I can’t tell you the date Maria and I had “the last chicken,” but I can tell you with certainty that when it happened we had no idea we would not eat another together. We were always simply present in the moment.

I believe that each day God graces us with events, some big, some small, that are gifts for us to relish, enjoy and remember; that we can take out again and again when we need a smile. But we might miss them if we are not consciously in the moment. We get caught up with daily obligations, concerns and worries and we miss God’s gifts. Like right now it’s snowing and I’m looking in my yard, enjoying how pretty the snow looks on the trees. Thank You, God. I could have missed His gift by not allowing myself the space and time to soak in the snow scene and instead could have spent time looking at the weather on television, worrying about how the snow is expected to turn to ice or if I will have to go out and shovel. I’m sure this particular gift will be very useful in August when it’s 90 degrees!

My Tai Chi instructor says that in order to really do Tai Chi well you have to be intentional and present for every moment of every move or else something will be missed. So too in life, “...for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gifts You continually give us to make our lives pleasant despite what may be challenging circumstances. Help us to be fully present and live in the moment so that we will surely receive every good thing You have intended for us. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sis. Leslie Allen, Class Leader, Class #30

MARCH 12TH
GIVE IT TO GOD

2 Corinthians 4: 8-10 (NIV) “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

Today in this fallen world we are confronted with many trials and tribulations. Every day we hear reports of atrocities too numerous to enumerate such as: wars, diseases, mass murders, violent robberies, fires, accidents, natural disasters and more. Our individual problems can be horrendous: financial, emotional, physical, lack of work and others. So what can we do? Give it all to God. We have the blessed assurance that our God is ever present and we need to focus on His presence and unconditional love for His children.

We must trust God and thank God in all our circumstances. God is always present because He has promised never to leave us. God’s promises are true because God cannot lie.

We must pray without ceasing because there is power in prayer. Read the scriptures that give us understanding, joy and peace. Worship God with gladness; come before His presence with thanksgiving and praise. “You are my God and I will exalt you. Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is Good! For His mercy endures forever.” (Psalms 118:28-29 NKJV)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Jesus, Your only begotten Son to die on the old rugged cross for our sins so that we might have a right to the tree of life. Thank You for His Resurrection proving that death is swallowed up and is not the end, but the door of everlasting life. Lead us and guide us so that one day, we will see You face to face and glorify You in Heaven. Amen.

Sis. Shirley Grundy, Steward and Class Leader, Class #21

MARCH 13TH
WHAT ARE YOU GIVING UP FOR LENT?

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

Love and **time** are two things we never have enough of. Pastor Wilson's preached two sermons on *love* where he asked us to consider an alternate way to sacrifice during Lent. Instead of giving up chocolate or sugary drinks why not give up unhealthy relationships and work on reconciliation and forgiveness. I started working on relationships during Lent versus sacrificing tantalizing treats like my favorite jelly beans almost 4 years ago. Quite frankly giving up the jelly beans is easier than changing behavior. When you are in relationship with someone whether it be a spouse, friend, parent, sibling, coworker or even church member, you build trust and love for that person. Pastor preached there are various types of love (get CD for 1/19 if you missed it). We experience a host of feelings when we love... joy, happiness, hope, trust, compatibility, and security. When we feel our love is betrayed or taken advantage of, feelings of anger, despair, mistrust, revenge and hurt develop. The hurt is so consuming, it diminishes our capacity to feel and express love. Pride, stubbornness, bitterness, and unforgiveness begin to take residence. Our personal relationship suffers from this preoccupation, and our spiritual relationship experiences collateral damage.

If we don't take the time to mend the relationship, we may run out of time. For me, it feels like we receive a transition email daily. Confusion, grief and guilt takeover and we find ourselves wishing we had more time with our loved one, time to make amends.

This Lenten season let's fast from those unhealthy relationships and pray for love to heal them. It may take longer than forty days but it is time well spent. Jelly beans can never take the place of love which is fulfilling versus filling.

Prayer: FATHER, thank you for blessing me with my family. Continue to work on our relationship so we act in love and not from a place of anger and defense. I pray for patience, and understanding. You taught us to “...forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven us, so we also must forgive...”(Col 3:13) Please let me practice this every day. I ask this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sis. Sherrill Austin, Steward and Class Leader, Class #7

**MARCH 14TH
NO JUDGEMENT**

Matthew 7:1-5 (Message) “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ‘Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.”

If you look up the definition of the words Judge, Judging or Judgement you will find many different meanings. However, for the sake of this devotional the meaning that will be utilized is “to quickly form a bias and/or personal opinion about someone or something.” **Please Note: Judging someone is not bad, but the difference is in the way we do it.**

Have you ever passed Judgement on someone based on a conversation you may have had. What you have heard about an individual. What style of clothes he/she chose to wear. One’s Appearances. How can one show hypocritical Judgement that focuses on the faults of others while excusing one’s own sins?

Through the studying of God’s word, Bible Class and in particular this scripture referenced above, I have come to realize that one should not judge anyone so they will not be judged. Nevertheless, this is easier said than done and I am consciously working real hard to change my behavior. For instance, instead of immediately forming an opinion I do my best to pause and pray before I speak. We never know what someone is going through or has been through until we walk in their shoes. One never knows given the same set of circumstances you might have done something worse. Lately, I have been working on doing my best to put a positive spin on everything no matter what my opinion or bias may be.

I have some Christian Sister/Friends that I have developed a strong close relationship with over the years. We often share about our respective churches, our spiritual journey, boyfriends, marriage, kids, grandkids and just life in general. We have prayed, cried, laughed and screamed together. But over the years we have established that we will have “No Judgement” about our discussions. This has allowed us to listen, be open-minded, and encourage each other. This is not to say we always agree but we respect each other’s position enough to agree or disagree without Judgement.

Next time you see or hear something that you may not agree upon, just say, “No Judgement.”

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your love, Your word and the teachers You placed on assignment to teach us how to live in Your word in this world. Help us as Your people to continue to learn and be more and more like You every day and to love everything you created with NO JUDGEMENT.

Sis. Shelley D. Harris, Steward and Class Leader, Class #22

MARCH 15TH
I LIFT UP MY EYES TO THE MOUNTAINS

Psalm 121:1 (NIV)“I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from?”

The Psalms comprise a collective of songs arranged in five sections, which were designed for use in individual and corporate worship and were part of Israel’s hymns that were chanted, pleaded or sung joyously in worship. This particular psalm is a pilgrimage ascent used possibly while ascending to Jerusalem or the steps of the temple and it starts with a rhetorical question. Where does my help come from?

It is a reminder to all God’s people who had journeyed from bondage to freedom, and were later in exile, that their God is a mighty helper, a strong way-maker, the supreme God who rules and reigns forever. This strong God is constantly at work to watch over, protect, keep and provide for His children. This God is immutable. God does not change.

So whether your present circumstance causes you to feel that you are in a valley, or whether you are in midst of a present negative report, or you are grappling with a major conflict in your life, your situation is no match for the God who is all encompassing in power and glory.

Our God is a powerful helper. In times of difficulty, God can deliver you; God can destroy and utterly remove that which is affecting you, but preserve you in the midst of the situation. Let’s speak life to our bodies, life to our relationships, Favor over our children, Favor when we work, Favor when we drive, Favor over our church and the communities we where we live!

Lift your heads up and speak of the goodness of God, even before your breakthrough comes.

Lift your eyes up in thanksgiving, thankful for all God has delivered you from.

Lift your hearts up, and welcome the King of Glory, the Spirit of Truth — our Helper.

Prayer: The psalmist says, “I will lift up my eyes upon the hills from whence comes my help - my help comes from God - the maker of the heaven and the earth.” Be encouraged - God is our helper. Amen.

Rev. Carl Stuart

**MARCH 16TH
IT IS THE BLOOD**

Exodus 12: 5-7, 21-23 “⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ²¹Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. ²³When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.”

When the Israelites were in the land of Egypt and Pharaoh would not let them go, God implemented a seemingly drastic measure. Each household would get a spotless yearling lamb, kill it and place the blood on the sides and tops of the doorposts. God said he was going to go through the land and strike down every first born of people and animals, but if he saw the blood, he would not allow the destroyer to strike anyone in that house down. Ever since then, God commanded that the Israelites celebrate the Passover every year so that they could remember what God did for them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Remember the meal Jesus was sharing with his disciples was the Passover meal. This was the beginning of the feast to last 7 days. It was during the Passover celebration that Jesus was arrested, crucified, and buried. Leviticus 17: 11 states, “¹¹For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

It was the blood of Jesus, the spotless lamb who knew no sin, that atoned for our lives. Atonement is the act of reconciling us or bringing us back into a peaceful relationship with God. Why would we need to be atoned? For our sins. God is unable to be where sin is, that is why Jesus came and died and was raised from the dead. His blood atoned for our sins, so that in much the same way that Jesus died, we too should die to sin and be raised to a new life in Christ.

We were in our own Egypt where the devil had us enslaved to our sins. But while we were yet in our Egypt, while we were yet in our sins, Jesus’ blood was shed as an atonement for our sins. Once we give our lives to Christ, we are covered with the atoning blood of Jesus. So, when God looks at us instead of meting out the justice we deserve, God in essence passes over us because He sees the blood of Jesus as it were on the doorposts of our hearts. It was the blood of lambs, and it still is the blood, the once and for all blood of Jesus that can save us from our sins.

Prayer: God, we thank You that we no longer have to sacrifice the blood of bulls, goats, lambs, and birds, because we wouldn’t be able to afford it. Thank You that the blood of Jesus has made salvation free. Thank You that the blood of Jesus was shed for my sins so that I can be in a right relationship with You. Amen.

Blessings,
Rev. Dr. Ho-Shing-Scott

MARCH 18TH
WHAT'S IN A BOOK?

Revelation 20:12, 20:15 (NIV) ¹²“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done. ¹⁵“If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Some people are part of a “book of the month” club. There are some who love their new e-book toys ... Amazon’s Kindle, Apple’s iPad, Barnes’s & Noble’s Nook, Sony’s Reader ...or whatever one you have. Or maybe you do it the old fashion way, you go to a bookstore or to the library. Some like a good story in the newspaper or a good magazine. And let’s not forget, many of you **do** read your Bibles, daily. Some books reveal mysteries, some love stories, might be a true story, or a fiction. Whatever you’re looking for you can probably find it in a book.

There will come a time when all of us shall have our story revealed in a Book. The contents will be that of an autobiography. Yes, we will have written it ourselves. How we have lived, not only in church on Sunday, but our lives, Monday through Sunday.

In the Old Testament, God’s people continued to sin. And although God was merciful, He also got tired of their mess. It states in Jeremiah 9, *“They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me, declares the Lord.”* At times, God has been so angry that He destroyed entire nations of men, women, and children. That’s in the Book.

Many people say that church folk should talk about love and not about all of that fire and brimstone. Well, the reality is both are in the Good Book, the Bible, both are a part of the reality of our lives, and both are a part of what our end will be... living in heaven or hell. How will your autobiography read? Will it show you lived like you knew exactly how and when you were going to die? Were you having sinful fun now with the intention of getting it together later? Will it be full of “I can’t stand that person” or “That person I just can’t love”? How will it read?! **It’s all being recorded now!**

During this Lenten season, work on your story!

Yes, Jesus did come as a ransom for our sins. Yes, Jesus did sacrifice His life for us. Yes, God gave His only begotten Son that we might live. That’s **His** story...what is your story? What will be revealed when the book is opened for you?

Prayer: Lord, I pray for strength and courage to live a life that is pleasing in Your sight. Lord I really do want a home in Your kingdom. Please forgive me Lord for my sins which impact my story because Lord, I truly want to be found in the Book of Life. Amen.

Rev. MJ (Marian Sykes Johnson)

**MARCH 19TH
WHY ME?**

Isaiah 41:9-10 “I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

It's beginning to settle into her head now. They say she has cancer. She doesn't feel sick. She doesn't look sick. But apparently she is sick. She is now beginning to wage war on an enemy that she cannot see. It is a ravaging enemy, and she will remember at all times that she is at war. She can cry, but she must remember this is an enemy that will take no prisoner if given the option. She must gather up all the ammunition she can carry and fight. She knows that all of her tomorrows will be different. If she forgets she's at war, she will be tempted to surrender to fear. Satan finds his greatest strength is planting the seed of fear in her heart.

While we may never understand why God allows some of us to get cancer, we all can know for certain that God is sovereign and that He loves us through all of the storms in this life. Never underestimate the power of prayer and faith.

God has a reason for allowing things to happen. The Bible tells us, “For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11). We may never understand His wisdom but we simply have to trust His will. God has a plan for your life. Pray for His direction to follow it, patience to wait on it and knowledge to know when it comes.

God's Word says the prayer of faith shall heal the sick. Go to God today in faith and ask that He heals you from sickness. We receive healing by faith. Open yourself up today to God's blessings, healing and miracles. Let all worries leave your heart. Don't forget that you have a God who cares, who loves you so deeply and will never let you go.

Prayer: Lord, Your Word is the true medicine that heals. It is the source of hope and our every breath. Help me to listen carefully and never lose sight of Your Word through the distractions of the world. Lord, I want Your word to penetrate the depths of our hearts. I want to live by Your word and receive all the benefits of knowing You. Thank You that Your word brings life and healing.

Sis. Debra Thomas

MARCH 20TH
I NEED YOU; YOU NEED ME

Romans 14:1-13 (Message) “1Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with - even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently. 2For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume all Christians should be vegetarians and eat accordingly. 3But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. 4Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help. 5Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience. 6What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. 7None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. 8It's God we are answerable to - all the way from life to death and everything in between - not each other. 9That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other. 10 So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly - or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. 11Read it for yourself in Scripture: "As I live and breathe," God says, "every knee will bow before me; Every tongue will tell the honest truth that I and only I am God." 12So tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God. 13Forget about deciding what's right for each other. Here's what you need to be concerned about: that you don't get in the way of someone else, making life more difficult than it already is.”

God created all of us and commands that we love each other. But, how easy it is to see how someone is different than you. Not only do we notice the difference but we focus on it. We judge and comment about how someone lives their life or how they dress or the food they eat or where they work, etc. We may talk about what we would do in their situation and criticize their choices. We might decide they are not educated enough or have enough common sense. We might even judge their moral fiber as if we have never been in an immoral circumstance.

In the Scripture we are told to not focus on what we don't agree with with our brothers and sisters. It is not our place to determine that someone is worthy or not or to condemn them. The Message Translation makes it clear in verse 4 that we do not get to determine who God invites to His table. In God's eyes we are all his children and he loves us the same. Not only are we told to love one another, we are told that we need to be concerned about not making their life more difficult that it already is or getting in their way.

We need each other to live our lives the way God intended. During this Lenten Season let's determine to focus on how we can love and encourage each other despite our differences.

Prayer: Father God, we love You and thank You for the life You have given us. We thank You that You have created us so colorfully different. During this Lenten season, God, we ask that You help us focus on loving and encouraging each other. We ask You God, to keep our thoughts and comments on loving our brother and sisters because we need each other. Amen.

I Need You to Survive - Hezekiah Walker https://youtu.be/uMcJL_UDAvw
Sis. Karen Deas, Steward and Class Leader, Class #5

MARCH 21ST FAITH AND FAMILY

Acts 16:31-33 “And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus; and you will be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.”

Family is an institution ordained by God. God designed families to provide a safe, nurturing, loving and disciplined environment. It's designed to meet basic human needs, that develop values and character in an atmosphere of unconditional love.

Faith and family are intertwined. Family is important to God and essential to society and the church.

God provides guidance and wisdom for a variety of family situations: encouragement and inspiration for parenting, sibling dynamics and family relationships. We see from the beginning where family members were to look after and care for one another.

Apostle Paul talks about what Christian homes should look like when he gives the command, “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your mother and father (which is the first commandment with a promise) so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Parents, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:1-4)

The Christian Family begins with a personal commitment to God. One of the greatest blessings we can receive in this life is the love of family and the bonds that exist between its members. Our earthly families are intended to reflect God's unconditional love. Husband are called to love their wives as Christ loves His church and wives are called to devote themselves to their husbands as the church devotes itself to Christ emulating the love that exists between God and His church in a family.

Some families are struggling with brokenness, strife, emptiness, and the inability to forgive each other. There are Individual family members that feel neglected, unloved, rejected and/or alienated. The Bible reveals family dynamics starting in the very beginning with Cain and Abel that was not pleasing to God.

We need to ask ourselves, “Is God pleased with our family dynamics?” If the answer is no, this may be a good time to consider reconciliation by “healing old wounds.”

My brother and I were never close when we were growing up. We were always so different from each other. During our teenage years I was the “militant”, he was the “flower child.” We also did not socialize together. I loved to dance, go to parties and sporting events. He did not. He was a straight A student; I was not. After high school we had limited contact except at family gatherings. At our mother's “Celebration of Life Service” I spoke to my family about the need for us to be closer. I prayed and prayed for my family to become closer and He answered my prayers. Now, my brother and I are so very close. He is one of my best friends. God did it for me He can do it for you.

As Christians we need to take heed to God's Word, “Love one another as I loved you.” Our lost family members need our prayers and in some cases need us. Pray about it.

Prayer: Almighty God thank You for the biblical principles for families. Thank You for the different types of family: nuclear; extended, and adoptive. Thank You for being the foundation for our families; we honor You and magnify Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sis. Kathleen Turpin Merritt, Steward and Class Leader, Class #13

MARCH 22ND
HOW TO GET CLOSE TO GOD: COMMUNICATE

Isaiah 55:6, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near."

In a made-for-TV documentary on marriage a wife says to her husband, "We live together, eat together, and sleep together, but we have nothing to say to each other. We've become intimate strangers." Of course. Without meaningful communication there can be no closeness.

What is true in our relationship with our spouse or other family members is even more true in our relationship with God. One of the reasons some of us don't feel close to God is that we're not communicating with God on a personal level. We need to learn how to communicate with God. We need to take time to listen to what God is saying to us through the Bible. We have to listen to God as He speaks to us through circumstances and things that happen to us. We have to learn to ask, "What is God saying to me through what happened, and what is God saying to me through my spouse, my parents, my children, my friends, and other Christians?" After we have listened, we have to talk with God in prayer. We can't expect to feel God's closeness unless we talk to Him. Make sure you come to God and listen to Him. Make sure you take the time each day to talk with Him. Otherwise God will seem like a stranger. Imitate the Lord Jesus, who spent time alone every day to communicate with his Father.

Prayer: Lord, help us to take time to communicate with You. Teach us how to pray, and teach us how to listen to You as we pray. Help us to follow Jesus' example each day. Amen.

Sis. Jacqueline Herran, Steward and Class Leader, Class # 3

MARCH 23RD
THE TRUTH OFTEN HURTS

Proverbs 23:23 “Buy the truth and do not sell it—wisdom, instruction and insight as well.”

A substitute teacher in Montville, New Jersey got into a lot of trouble a few months ago. She did what some claim to be a horrible thing. She told the kids in her class that there was no Santa Claus, reindeers can't fly, there is no such thing as a tooth fairy, there is no magic (like Harry Potter) and the Easter Bunny does not exist. Now, I have no idea if that teacher was trying to be harmful or what was her motivation, but I know one thing, she got into trouble for telling the truth. And I found it amazing that an irate parent said that the teacher tried to ruin the spirit of the holidays.

I won't judge if that teacher should have done what she did. But I'm much more concerned about the parents (including my own) who start a life-long relationship with their children by telling them false things from the beginning. I, along with many of you, went through the nonsense of a tooth fairy; why would someone want a bloody piece of bone in exchange for money? I was told Santa Claus was real; although my father and the TV character Fred Sanford both doubted that an old white man, in a red suit, would come to our neighborhood, and sneak into our house at night without the fear of being shot. However, the worst of all the silly characters was and is the idiotic Easter Bunny. At least the Tooth Fairy was not a substitute for a religious event. And many still note that Jesus was born on Christmas Day. But the Easter Bunny, that has nothing to do with Easter, has just about taken over the real and most priceless purpose of that day.

And that's a crime against God.

For me, the day of the resurrection of the Christ shouldn't even be called Easter. I think I would name it *Genesis Day*. When we think of Genesis, we think of the beginning, creation. Well, when Jesus came out of that tomb triumphantly, it was the beginning of true life for us. All of the richness of His preaching, all of the promises and all of the freedom He offered were verified on that glorious day. On that quiet Sunday morning, a new Genesis started. The original time of creation revolved around the start of the physical earth, planets, and stars; all quite real and beautiful in their own way, but ultimately temporary. When Jesus returned, this new Genesis opened a door for us to a permanent spiritual existence that is far greater than the planets, stars – the entire universe.

That school teacher was disciplined for throwing shade on the Easter Bunny.

Don't you throw any shade or any doubt on the reality of the Resurrection. As Christians, followers of the Christ, you know the truth. And armed with that certainty, there's no trouble in your path for shouting to the world — *“The Savior lives!”*

“Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” (1 John 2:22-23)

Bro. Isaiah Tremaine

MARCH 25TH
WHAT ATTITUDES PLEASE GOD?

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1-2 (NLT) “So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. And you won’t spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God.”

As Christians and as leaders we face challenges all the time and must make decisions based on what is right. We are informal and formal spiritual leaders that influence our family, friends, various social relationships, and work. What about our inner life? The challenges that we face internally are as important, if not more important, than those we face externally. Being in touch with our heart and mind helps to maintain integrity and self-respect according to God. We must remember we are accountable to God always. Therefore, we need to practice that our spiritual leadership is in every aspect of our lives. God is looking for leaders who will be people “after his own heart.” (1 Samuel 13:14)

I can remember when I had a leadership role in my community that could have been conflicted for me; I could have compromised my integrity. People were always trying to persuade me to take a side that I knew was not right but it appeared as the most obvious solution, but I knew the influence I had would have an impact on my family, and my community. I knew that as a Christian, I am a spiritual leader at all times and my attitudes or behaviors must be pleasing to God. Therefore, my attitudes had to be pleasing to God. No matter if the consensus was against what I knew was right, I had the responsibility to walk as if I know God. I will be honest, it was a battle at times, but with constant prayers and knowing who I am in Christ I persevered. People around me came to respect my positions and stood with me at times to do what is right. To God be the glory! When we struggle within ourselves, turn to God and all His teachings. Jesus teaches us to be strong in Him no matter what comes our way.

Prayer: Father God, all knowing and loving Father who is above everything! Father, allow us to be more like Jesus, to lead and influence our family, our church community and in all areas of our lives so we can be true leaders. Help us to focus on our spiritual leadership looking to Jesus as our exemplar. Help us to be in touch always with integrity, passion in our hearts and mind so we are accountable to You, Father God, worthy of Your son Jesus so we can have an attitude pleasing to Him. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sis. Versie McNeil, Steward and Class Leader, Class # 16

MARCH 26TH
WAITING ON A BREAKTHROUGH

1 Chronicles 14:11 “Then David said, God has broken my enemies by my hand, like the bursting forth of waters. Therefore they called the name of that place (Baal- Perazim) Lord of breaking through.”

There are many times when people give up just before a breakthrough on the brink of success. But don't give up! You can wait for 10 years and then suddenly, one day you wake up and everything has changed. Your dream has finally been fulfilled, the situation you lived in for so long is finally over, or you finally achieved the accomplishment for which you labored for years.

Be grateful that God has a plan for you and He has heard your prayers. You may not realize how close you are to your breakthrough. Even if you have to wait not three but even four or five more years, if you will keep pressing on, thankfully you will have the victory you need. Whatever you do, do not give up on the brink of your breakthrough. Do not stop hoping, believing and obeying God. Instead say, “I will never quit.” “I will never give up.”

Prayer: Thank You Lord, that my breakthrough is on the way. I am not without hope and I am not on my own. You are with me, and You have a good plan for my life. I trust You Lord, and I refuse to give up. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Sis. Teri Corum, Steward and Class Leader, Class #11

MARCH 27TH
BE GRATEFUL IN ALL THINGS, GIVE THANKS

Philippians 2:14-15 “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that no one can criticize you.”

Do you ever get bent out of shape over the things that don't matter? Most of us do it because we're negative by nature. Ever since Adam and Eve, we have been going around excusing and accusing. We excuse our own mistakes and then accuse others for their mistakes; we hide, and we hurt. We blame others for the problems in our lives. Amen.

There are 4 types of complainers:

1. The whiners. You can get up in the morning and say “Good Morning Lord” but the whiners choose to say “what so good about it?”
2. The Complainers. Their favorite expression is, “Nobody loves me.” They're good at wanting to have a pity party. They pout and complain when they don't get their way. We all know at least one.
3. The negative ones. They always have an attitude, all bent over and negative, not positive about anything.
4. The perfectionist. Nothing is ever good enough for them, “Is that the best you can do?” I know you can do better (smile).

Matthew 12:36-37 says, “But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Prayer: Father God, I will give thanks in all circumstances at all times, even in the midnight hour for God hears a sincere prayer. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” I Praise You for Your Mercy and Your Unmerited Favor, and most of all I Praise You for this Joy that I have, this unspeakable Joy. I continue to put on the Whole Armour of God, that I may be clothed with Christ. I thank You and pray that everything that I do be to Your Glory. In the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Hallelujah Amen.

Rev. Dolly Ryan Roberts

MARCH 28TH
CROSSING OVER
Mark 4:35 - Mark 5:21

In the Book of Mark, chapter 5, after Jesus has taken the disciples across the water, before He can get completely out of the boat, it's time for Him to get to work!

Read Mark 5:2 "And when he had come out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit."

Wait. Didn't Jesus JUST GET THERE! I can imagine this man chasing Jesus down for help. And Jesus obediently turning to perform yet ANOTHER miracle. Jesus rebukes the demonic spirit from this man and THEN in verse 21 the scripture reveals that Jesus has gone BACK over the water where he would run into the woman with the issue of blood (and a few other people in need of His healing power). SHEESH! Does this guy get a break?

It made me think. In these two chapters, Jesus takes disciples across the river, for what any regular person would think is a break from their long day of labor. But no, this trip across was frightening and tumultuous. Then, when they arrive on the other side, to perhaps just lay out on the beach and recover from the long ride, here comes ANOTHER assignment for the Lord. And once that is completed, they cross back over to encounter MORE people who need help. Why did they cross over in the first place? Did Jesus know this man with an unclean spirit would be there desperately seeking a healing from God? Of course He did. He actually purposely took them out of the crowd and on the boat, so that they would be with Him alone (sort of like when you go to your teacher after class for one on one help).

The trip on the boat was a lesson in Faith...Jesus did not let the storm deter His faith in knowing He would reach His destination intact. Jesus is the ultimate teacher, so He demonstrated this to His disciples by sleeping through the storm and then quieting it when it frightened them. Once they crossed over, He shows them how to put that Faith to work. He heals the man with the unclean spirit by Faith, and tells him to go back and tell all of his family and friends about it. Once that lesson is over, it's time to go BACK to where they were to continue their ministry. It's breaks like these that help strengthen the disciples as leaders. These tutorial sessions give them an opportunity to truly see God at work through Jesus, without the distraction of the multitudes.

In our own lives, we find ourselves in "after school" sessions with Jesus often. He pulls us aside to "crossover" to something that we think will be a HUGE promotion or breakthrough, when in reality being chosen for the session in the first place is the actual promotion and breakthrough. Once we crossover, we find another lesson not a huge celebration. "What gives?" we ask. We keep thinking there is some "end" to all of this when there isn't. Life is an eternal cycle of lessons that, if we choose to acknowledge and learn from, enhance our time here on earth. The breakthrough we keep looking for already exists in the journey itself. The revelation upon revelation is the promotion. The disciples were handpicked to follow Jesus. They were handpicked to ride on that boat in the storm. They were handpicked to witness Jesus healing the man with the unclean spirit. They were chosen because Jesus saw in them what he sees in us...Him. He saw the Love that we all have inside of us that is just aching to get out and help others feel better, walk more boldly, and live without fear. He didn't take a lot of breaks while He walked on Earth because our lives were at stake. He wanted to touch as many lives as He could, so that we would have as many examples and stories as possible to refer to when we needed a better understanding of what it means to be Faithful. As a teacher, He wanted to leave no assignment undone, so that we wouldn't have anything left to "finish" once He had left us.

So yes, when He stepped out of that boat, He could have said, "but wait, I just got here," but He didn't because He Loves us too much to take a break from teaching us. He wants us to have His Heaven here on earth, and He knows that can not happen if we don't Know Faith. He knows that can not happen if we don't Know Grace. He knows that can not happen if we don't Know Love.

Read His word and He will reveal so much to you. Let Him in, so that He can Let you Out.

I Love you, Sis. Ashley

MARCH 29TH
KEEP THE FAITH BABY!

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and the He rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Adam Clayton Powell was a pioneer of the civil rights movement. In 1937 he began pastoring at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem where he led the fight to integrate businesses and increase employment opportunities for Harlem residents. He was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1945 and served until 1971 but his tenure as a congressman was fraught with controversy. In 1967 Powell’s House colleagues sought to have him unseated. In a sermon that year he encouraged his congregation and supporters to not give up hope and coined the slogan, “Keep the faith, baby!”

A definition for faith found in Webster’s dictionary is “firm belief in something for which there is no proof.” In Hebrews 11:1 the bible similarly defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.” Sometimes in life we are faced with challenges that we don’t know how to handle. Whether it’s financial challenges, health issues, or trouble in relationships, we find ourselves hoping for solutions. Dealing with life’s challenges is easier when we have hope that there is a solution and even easier when that hope is undergirded by faith that God will see us through. With faith the size of a mustard seed we can move mountains and tear down strongholds in our lives. Sometimes, though we forget that God can fix it. On more than one occasion Jesus questioned the faith of the disciples like when after calming the storm he couldn’t help but ask them, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40)

Our faith in God is as strong as the evidence of His presence in our lives. For some doubting Thomas’s, however, evidence of things unseen is not enough. They want visual proof. But is visual proof really enough? Imagine if the technology we have today was available 2000 years ago. Would the story of a child’s immaculate conception seen on the 11 o’clock news be met with skepticism? Would a video of Jesus turning water to wine go viral and still find dozens of doubters trying to explain how the video is fake or just a nice trick? Would we find eyewitness news reporters at the tomb trying to explain the disappearance of Jesus’ body even as He appeared before them as He did when He walked with the disciples?

Even without the visual evidence today’s technology can provide, through faith we know that God has the power to turn trials into triumph. Just remember that God loved us so much that He gave His only son that if we believe in Him we will have everlasting life. How do we believe in Him when we have never seen Him? Just keep the faith baby!

Prayer: Father, I thank You today for Your unconditional love. Thank You for proof of Your love through Your son Jesus who teaches us how to love You and each other. In this time of fasting and prayer I ask that you strengthen our faith that we may be better servants at all times. This I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Bro. Jerry Roberts, Trustee

**MARCH 30TH
IT IS GOOD**

Genesis 1:1-5 (NRSV) ¹In the beginning when God create the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^lswept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

The entire story of the creation offers many lessons as applications to our life. In chapter 1, the thought of God looking over His creation and seeing it as “good” is a vision I can only imagine. I hear the awe of a breath-taking release. I believe it’s seven times in the chapter that God sighs such awe. He created a harmonious reality, with the greenest of grass and the breezes of fresh air, winds for all humanity to freely gallivant throughout the creation.

What if we used the Genesis creation as a metaphor for how we organize our lives? What if we orchestrated our lives so that we can look back and feel that same awe as God? Imagine looking over your handy work. When it comes to:

1. building you faith... “it is good!”
2. finances.... No debt... “it is good!”
3. work ethics... using your gifts... “it is good!”
4. family... space for love and healing.. “it is good!”
5. relationships... implying neighborly love and forgiveness... “it is good!”
6. your giving.... tithing and serving... “it is good!”
7. Self -discipline...using Godly principles to be the best of who God created you to be.... “it is good!”

Your list may look different, but it should match God’s liberating principles.

Now, it’s not as simple as it sounds. We make mistakes, for life is filled with adversities and challenges. But the GOOD NEWS is that it’s possible because of Christ, our redeemer. Furthermore, “God placed a power in us that is greater than that of the world!” (1 John 4:4) All we have to do is unleash it! That power allows us to hear the whispers of Godly sense. It’s not about fearless living but spiritual listening. If you trust Him, God speaks through the right people, attracts the right resources and places you in helpful circumstances. God is always with you!

This Lenten season, you may feel that your life is in the wilderness and will take too much work to climb out. But, God didn’t create the entire creation all at once. The scripture reveals a process of Him tackling one area at a time. In the end, all comes to together. Let His process inspire you to greatness. When you do you’ll look back over your journey, give a breath taking release and think, “It is good!”

Prayer: Dear God, Guide my life. Let it be Your voice that leads me to live in spiritual prosperity and contentment. Your creation resembled a breathtaking reality. Through faith allow my life do the same. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Rev. Crystal Newby-Reynolds

APRIL 1ST
OUR WALK WITH JESUS IS A JOURNEY – THANK GOD

John 8:12 “Again Jesus spoke to them saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’ ”

In the world we live in today, often times we don't follow Jesus and walk the pathway He has set for us. As I focus on my walk with Jesus, I find it difficult (at times) to carry out His plan. Too often we listen to others and ourselves but not God. There are times it seems as though I am walking through a cloud of darkness. When this happens I get upset, second-guess myself and become unhappy because of various situations happening in my life. But as Christians, you and I must realize that our lives are filled with optimism and promise. We must also realize that in our most difficult times of our journey, we can be inspired by the word of God to provide us strength and direction. God continues to provide opportunities for us to grow even when we fall off course. As we continue to deal with life and it's ups and downs, I know we often have asked the proverbial question, “why me”? We can find the answer to that question in Jeremiah 29:11, it states, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” In spite of “us”, God continues to keep us on the journey He has planned for you and me. Our walk with God is never a lonely walk.

With the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, God grants us a new beginning; a path to follow; a journey to continue. When we stay faithful and follow His light, our paths are protected and secured by Jesus, who lights the way that leads to a glorious destination.

Thank you for your light and the journey!

Prayer: Our Father and our God, in our journey with You, may we never lose our sense of direction! Although clouds may obscure our vision, let us become closer to You so that we may follow Your footsteps. May Your words be an encouragement and Your love our protection. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, I pray. Amen.

Sis. Robyn Sorbino, Steward and Class Leader, #Class 34

APRIL 2ND
DELAY DOESN'T MEAN DENIAL

Isaiah 40:31 "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Often times we pray for God to do this or that in our lives and then wait. If we don't see any results we feel like we have been denied or unheard by God. Just continue to pray. God may be directing you to another area in your life. Perhaps you are not ready for the answer. Maybe God wants to see your faith and belief in Him, so don't take delay as denial. Continue to trust, pray and worship. No matter if it takes a month or a year. Your answer will come.

Prayer: Father God, forgive me in my haste. Please teach me, teach me how to wait. Amen.

Sis. Christine Roz Samuels, Steward and Class Leader, Class #19

APRIL 3RD
GOOD NEWS

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Let us accept this gift which Jesus freely gave to us. He who was without sin suffered, shed his blood and died on the cross so that we might have a right to the kingdom of God.

We are not living by what we used to live by, but rather by the faith of Jesus Christ. We get this faith by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17) and applying it to our lives. We must not give our past the opportunity to tell us what we can or cannot do today or in the future.

When we praise God even in the midst of troubles, we will see that no weapon formed against us shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17) and that we are the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28:13)

I am not saying that we won't have trials and tribulations; but remember that the battle has already been fought and the victory has been won. We must cast all our cares on Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7) He cares so much for us that He died on the cross: but that's not how the story ends; He rose again.

Prayer: God You are great; there is none other like You. You created us. You knew us before we were formed in our mother's womb. I know the plans You have for us are good. God help us to continue to fulfill the plans You implanted in us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sis. Karen Taylor, Steward and Class Leader, Class #2

APRIL 4TH
COMMITMENT

1 Kings 8:61 (Message) “And you, your lives must be totally obedient to God, our personal God, following the life path he has cleared, alert and attentive to everything he has made plain this day.”

In Luke 22:42 Jesus thought about the task He was born to fulfill saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

He was fully aware of His purpose. Despite the suffering He would endure and His own feelings, Jesus was completely committed to the Father’s will. He laid down his life for all of us. Could we begin to live our lives to please God each and every day?

Commitment is “the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity.” Since Jesus died for us could we live for Him, our cause ever lasting life?

Prayer: Father, may we all become more committed to walk upright before You every day. In the name of Jesus.

Bro. Joseph J. Adams, Steward and Class Leader, Class #

APRIL 5TH
A PERSONAL MESSAGE

Mark 16:1-8

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" ⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

There are many accounts of the morning Jesus rose from the dead. However, as I read this one again, I was struck by the fact that even the angel knew about what went on with Jesus and Peter. Peter must have been feeling really bad about denying Jesus three times on the day Jesus was arrested. Jesus told him that he would deny him three time before the cock crowed. And that's exactly what happened. And Peter went away feeling very sorrowful about what he did (Mark 14:66-72). There was no account of Peter being around when Jesus was crucified, in fact all the disciples had fled, except John.

But here the angel is giving a message for **the disciples and Peter**. The passage ended by saying that the women said nothing to anyone out of fear. But, the message got through, because after Mary Magdalene's personal experience with Jesus on the morning of the resurrection, she delivered the message, that Jesus was risen. This tells me that whatever fears we are facing we just need to take them to Jesus, and his perfect love will cast out all our fears.

Back to the personal message. The disciples who had abandoned Jesus, and Peter who had denied Jesus received their message created just for them. The message is that no matter how we have strayed away from Jesus, or pretend like we don't know Him when we are among the "in-crowd" for fear of embarrassment or being shunned, there is always grace being extended to us by Jesus. That's what I love about Jesus, His hands are always extended for us to come on in. No shame, no blame, just love and grace. And that's **our** personal message.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus Christ, for not only did you die for my sins, but you also rose from the grave, and because of this I have grace. I no longer have to walk in fear and shame, but I can hold my head up high because of your grace, that pardons and cleanses me from all my sins. Amen.

Blessings,
Rev. Dr. Ho-Shing-Scott

APRIL 6TH GOT FRUIT?

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

In Genesis, God clearly explains to us that we are made in His image. This likeness is not a physical one, but we should possess His characteristics. God our Father is loving and kind. He is a faithful and gentle God who is patient with His children. These are the qualities He desires us to possess and hone each day of our lives. This is possible only when we ask the Father to bestow us with His precious Holy Spirit.

LOVE and KINDNESS

When His Spirit lives in us, we then begin to look more and more like our Father. When we allow the Holy Spirit to be our guide through life, we are enabled to truly love our brothers and sisters, especially those in the household of faith. If we REALLY want to be like God, we must love one another with the agape love that God has for us. If we are going to resemble our Father, it is imperative that we show kindness one for another. That smile that you give to someone as you walk down the street may be the only kindness shown to him or her that day. Those words of encouragement or that hug that you didn't mind sharing could very well be life altering for the receiver. You never know what someone is going through.

PEACE and GENTLENESS

Living in the Spirit also allows us to experience God's peace and to be an agent of peace. This does not mean that we won't ever be troubled by anything as we go through life. But because of the peace of God, those things that may be bothersome will not consume or destroy us because we know without a shadow of a doubt that God is riding through the storm right beside us. When God's peace reigns over our lives, it fosters gentleness within us.

FAITHFULNESS and SELF-CONTROL

Of all of the fruits of the Spirit, I think it is these two that many of us struggle with the most. Exercising our faith and having self-control go hand in hand. When it seems like our world is crashing down all around us, our hearts know that God sees all and is in control, but our mind may say something very different because of what we are experiencing. It is during these difficult times in our lives when our faith is tested and we feel compelled to handle things on our own instead of completely giving the situation to God. If we look back over our lives we would realize that God has NEVER forsaken us, even when things didn't turn out the way we thought they should have. He knows what is best for us and only wants us to trust Him.

So, as we grow...as we mature in the faith, we must produce fruit each day so we can look just like Dad!

Prayer: Dear Lord, I am so thankful that I am wonderfully and fearfully made to be just like You! Help me to not only experience Your love, peace, gentleness, and kindness, but to share them with others. Help me, oh God, to practice forbearance and self-control in all things so that I can walk in the will You have for my life. I Love You! It is in Jesus' name that I pray this prayer. Amen.

Sis. Michele Moore, Steward and Class Leader, Class #20

APRIL 8TH
PASS OR FAIL

Malachi 3:10 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”

When you were a child, cutting up, doing something you know you had no business doing, your mother or father would give you that death ray parental stare and at the same time threaten you in that icy quiet voice saying, “Don’t test me.” And you knew without a doubt that you had gone too far and that if you continued in that bad behavior, you would be very, very sorry and likely would be picking out a switch or find yourself under punishment, losing some cherished privilege. You were certain of this outcome; so you either passed the test, were obedient, and stopped doing what you were doing or failed the test and had to go get the switch.

In the scenario above, your mother and father were making a promise to you, one that you knew they would keep. Well in Malachi 3:10 God is making a promise as well, using much the same language that our parents used; He just leaves out the “don’t” before “test me,” which means that He wants us to do it. Both promises have conditions; in the case of our parents’ promise we had to stop misbehaving; in the case of God’s promise we have to “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house...” Our parents were promising something that we didn’t want, but we believed them without reservation. God, our Father, is promising something that we do want, “...a blessing until it overflows,” yet we have a problem being obedient and in trusting and believing that He will carry out this promise. We are quick to quote Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” But do we really act like we believe this? Thankfully, right now in the Women’s Bible Study Fellowship we are studying God’s promises and that study will surely help increase our faith and trust.

So, will we pass the test by bringing our tithes in obedience and receive our promised blessing or will we fail the test? Who knows what kind of switch God has.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness even when we are not obedient. Help us all to tithe in accordance with your word so that we may receive the abundant blessing that You promised. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sis. Leslie Allen, Class Leader, Class #30

APRIL 9TH
PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

Daniel 6:20 (NIV) “When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

I’ve heard it said that you are either heading toward a storm, in a storm, or coming out of a storm. Just image how many events can seem to spiral out of control. Pipes freeze in the house, car troubles, untimely illness and death surrounding you, loss of employment, bills are due, and you are expected to be in multiple places at the same time. Just before one hurdle is complete, here comes another. I could go on, but why should I fret over these things that I have no control over?

We must refuse to let our circumstances or environment define us. When the waters were raging, Jesus spoke the words, “Peace, be still.” He did not command the waves to stop or the wind to be calm. He called for peace. We will have trouble and sorrow, but Jesus has overcome the world as He taught the disciples in John 16:33 (NIV) “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

We need to find that peace because God never promised that there would be no trouble so why should we concern ourselves of these things when God bears our burdens?

This Lenten season we should:

- 1) Release our burdens to the Lord because we are not in control.
- 2) Learn to breathe and be still. Exodus 14:14 “The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still.”
- 3) Stimulate God’s peace by spending time with God in prayer and praise. When we spend time with God, things move in the atmosphere.
- 4) Connect with a believer who you can connect with God. Matthew 18:20 “For where **two or three** gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I believe Your promises and have faith in You, even though I cannot see my way through this storm. Forgive my sins Lord as You know my heart. I will continue to serve You and give You the honor, praise and glory all the days of my life. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Sis. Terrie Stanley Roberts, Steward and Class Leader, Class #25

**APRIL 10TH
HUMILITY**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NKJV) "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. So he humbled you, allowed you to hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

Have you every just sat back and thought about the goodness of the Lord? He shows us many examples of humility throughout the bible. Humility is something that is gained and practiced as we grow in wisdom and grace. Humility teaches patience, understanding and respect for all God's people. Show us how grateful we should be that He loves us so much each and every day. As we walk through our journey in life there will be trial and tribulation. We all need to realize no matter where we are in life, we need show to humility by not thinking we are more important and as a result not acting as if we are better than others. We need to reach out and lift our fellow man. We need to remember that all we have in life was given to us by our Father and it can be taken away in a snap of two fingers. Remember that we all are sinners and God forgives us each every day.

Hunger for the word and Understanding from the Master; show humility towards your Brother; Love and Encourage each other.

H - Hunger
U - Understanding
M - Master
B - Brother
L - Love
E - Encourage

Prayer: Father I humble myself in your presence, and I hunger for the understanding of Your word, so that I may share it with others. Help me love my fellow man as You love me. Give me words, knowledge and wisdom, so that I may encourage all whom I encounter. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Sis. Mattie Crowley, Steward and Class Leader, Class #10

**APRIL 11TH
TO SERVE MAN IS TO SERVE GOD**

Galatians 6:10 (KJV) “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

There is a duty to serve the community, church and God. The word says that tithing is one of the most important things that a Christian can do. It is written, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house ...” (Malachi 3:10) I submit to you that perhaps the giving of your time and talents is equally as important. When you give your time and talents to the community, when you serve your brethren you are also serving God. It was Jesus who said, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:35-40 KJV)

There are a few basic human needs and survival (air, food, drink) and shelter (clothing, warmth, sleep) are two that come to mind. We have been charged by God to be the greatest providers possible according to our abilities and circumstance. We are, “The Servant Church of the Oranges, God’s Love for God’s People” and it is our mission. It is our duty to provide unto our brethren whether they are afflicted by poverty, storms, fires, earthquakes, imprisonment or government shutdown. Our faith teaches us benevolence as a first principle, and we should practice it with liberality especially among our own families and like believers.

I challenge you to be better servants to where you live, work and worship. The rewards are too great to pass up. When all is said and done, the faithful servants will be aligned on the right, “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34 KJV)

Prayer: Father God we give You all the honor, glory and praise. We thank You for the opportunity to serve. We thank You for the strength and wisdom that You continue to impart in us. We thank You for the benevolent heart that allows us to be our brother’s keeper. We ask that You use Your divine power and clothe us with the divine spirit of concern for the betterment of our brethren. We ask that You grant these our petitions in the name of Jesus. Amen.

APRIL 12TH
ENCOURAGING WORDS FROM THE WISE

Proverbs 12: 18 “There is healing in the words of the Wise.”

Here’s a question only you can answer. During a typical day, how many opportunities will you have to encourage other human beings? Unless you are living on a deserted island, the answer is “a lot!”

And here’s a follow up question? How often do we take advantage of those opportunities? Hopefully, the answer is “more often than not.” Romans 14 :19 advises us to, “Pursue what promotes Peace and what builds up one another.” And whatever we do, GOD smiles. Whether we realize it or not, we are surrounded by people who need an encouraging word, a helping hand or, a gentle pat on the back.

Every time you encourage one of these persons, you will be doing GOD’S will by obeying GOD’S word.

“SO WITH NO FURTHER ADO, LET THE ENCOURAGEMENT BEGIN!”

Prayer: Lord, help us to always remember the feelings of others. Help us to be who we truly are, the wonderful, person who God will use to encourage and uplift other people. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sis. Teri Corum, Steward and Class Leader, Class #11

APRIL 13TH
THE SECRET OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark 4:11 (NIV) “He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables.”

Psst: Breaking news, the secret of the kingdom is out!

The secret (in GK Krupto), that which was hidden, obscure, kept from public view, was being unfolded by God over the course of Jesus’ earthly ministry. That which was hidden for centuries was **suddenly being made more clear to the followers of Jesus**; God incarnate lived and taught and guided humankind.

The disciples had a front row, intimate seat as this secret was revealed. They observed Jesus in operation for three years, they were first hand witnesses of miracles of healing — the opening of eyes once blind, the deaf caused to hear, the deliverance of the man bound by legions, the miraculous feeding of the multitude with but a few fish and bread, the calming of storms and the walking of Jesus on water, the inclusion of women in healing and in conversation, and the inclusion of persons once ostracized by social and religious stereotypes.

Jesus demonstrated love unconditional. He offered grace and mercy to those who were hurting and on the fringes of society. The secret of the kingdom was being revealed to humankind. What was once hidden for centuries earlier was revealed. What was once a mystery is now opened to our knowledge.

What once excluded the commonwealth of people’s in the world, **was being offered to all who believed.**

Jesus invites those who have ears to hear and believe, so that they would be both healed and transformed. This access into the secret of the kingdom is given you, also, Today.

To access the kingdom of God, we first must know Jesus — the way to the Father — and believe in his name. We must develop a relationship with Him, Jesus, that is more than a casual Sunday morning date, we need to call on Jesus, Sunday to Sunday, in the morning and evening and even in the noon day.

Jesus liberated humankind from the bondage of sin and from a lost eternity. Through Jesus we are reconciled with God, through the death of Jesus, we must live honoring God, and thankful for all that Jesus has done, that we might live life abundantly.

Finally, let us live as kingdom people, who are transformed by the blood of Jesus, let us Speak life; Speak in love; Speak in grace; Let us pray in faith; Let us walk, live and operate in the power of Jesus, performing miracles, **for greater things we shall be able for Jesus has gone to Father, and as believers are united with Jesus.**

APRIL 15TH
BEING PRESENT IN WORSHIP, BRINGS PRESENCE IN LIFE

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

I sigh and ask myself, “How could I have become so distracted?”

The daily hustle and bustle of our day-to-day routine can be quite overwhelming and stress puts us at risk for burnout, mistakes, stroke, heart-attack, and plain ole’ bad attitude. When it seems like there is no end in sight, finding a balance is critical to our health, well-being, and the quality of our relationships. Whether our work takes us around the block or across the nation, prayer should remain a priority. Prayer will help keep us grounded while we juggle multiple, often conflicting responsibilities of work, home, spouses, children, friends, ministry, and yes, even ourselves. Prayer, as a ritual, serves as a reminder to STOP and give thanks to God from whom all help comes. Thank you Lord.

Learning how to grow spiritually is a lifelong journey. It occurs each day, with every step we take; as we apply God’s word in our lives, in new and familiar situations. If we consistently, “walk by faith and not by sight,” study God’s word, develop and maintain a strong prayer life, serve the Lord faithfully, fellowship with other believers, and strive to be all that God wants us to be, we will experience the renewing of our minds and a transformed life over time. We will be able to say, “I’m not the same. I’ve been changed.”

The steps to guide this change and regaining control over our lives, will take place during this Lenten season, as we are reminded to pray. As we reflect on His everlasting love, read His word, worship and sing praises to His Holy name. As we focus ourselves to do these things and demonstrate loving kindness to others and ourselves, despite the whirlwinds that may be surrounding us in our lives.

Prayer: Lord, I need rest. I am so tired and worn-out. I pray that I will sleep well at night. I ask for more energy during the day, a more conscious mind, and a more vibrant spirit. Lighten my load so I can have a better balance among my work, my ministry, and my home life. Replenish me, Lord. As I unwind in spirit and body, please fill me with peace and rest.

Sis. Jennifer Peaks, Steward and Class Leader, Class #27

APRIL 16TH
CARPENTER-JESUS-CHRIST

Acts 25:19 “Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.”

I have learned over the years that it is far easier to teach a person something new than to unteach erroneous ways.

When Jesus started His glorious ministry He was not teaching people who were naïve to religion. Actually it was quite the opposite. You might even say that the region was drunk with religion.

There was *Stoicism*. They believed people were born with an inner divine spark. *Epicureanism* pursued the need for internal harmony and a withdrawal from hectic life. Of course there was a whole array of Roman gods and all of their supposed capabilities and divinity.

Even the Jewish religion had divisions. There were the *Pharisees* also known as the “separated ones.” They made a point of no contact with gentiles, unclean persons, and sinners. The *Sadducees* were primarily wealthy priests who could trace their self-proclaimed importance to King Solomon. There were the *Essenes*. They claimed to be “holy ones.” They believed an epic struggle between good and evil would bring about the Messiah. And then there were the *Zealots*. They were not only zealous about God’s law, but they also pushed for an armed insurrection against the Romans.

Through all of that confusion came a young carpenter who learned the ways of the times and people. He was baptized by a relative, tempted by the devil, and charged by God with a prodigious purpose; His mission, save all of those who had lived, were living, and yet to be born. He was to represent and reflect the living God. He was commissioned to use powerful unearthly divine capabilities when needed, and generously share loving knowledge and wisdom that will allow all humanity spiritual immortality.

Thankfully, through that swamp of human religions came the Son of God—Jesus the Christ. Oh, what a great time to have been alive. Imagine having the shadow of the Christ fall on you, to breathe the same air as He walked by, to have His holy hand touch you, to hear the voice of Jesus speak directly to you. Oh, how great, how wonderful!

2000 years later—we are still surrounded by a cacophony of religions all claiming to be the correct pathway to God. This milieu of beliefs has something in common with the old ones of the past—*they don’t really matter*. Claiming to be religious does not make you ready to face God. Those attending a satanic temple claim to be religious—are they ready to meet God? No. Our sole job here on earth is to modify our life so it becomes equivalent in form with that of the Savior. Nothing else is more important. We have Jesus as the perfect example. If we behave like Him we’re going to love our neighbor, love our enemy, help the poor, display wisdom and mercy. If we live like Him, we also will have a resurrection day of our own—now just how wonderful is that!

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

Bro. Isaiah Tremaine

APRIL 17TH
EACH SEASON BRINGS FORTH CLEANING

Ecclesiastes 3:1 "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

Every year whether the groundhog sees its shadow or not, millions of people prepare themselves for what is known as "Spring Cleaning." This common practice encompasses a set of household chores that marks the transitioning of the winter season into spring, which is characterized when one thoroughly cleans their home annually, in an effort to organize and revive. Although "Spring Cleaning" is common in most households, "**Spiritual Seasons**" which are essential in helping one to understand what spiritual changes they are experiencing, can be overlooked thus resulting in a lack of growth.

When God created He said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for **seasons**, and for days and years." (Genesis 1:14) God blessed us with 4 **seasons** of winter, spring, summer and fall. Each is distinct and are enjoyed quite differently. While winter covers the ground with snow, spring gives us renewal of life, summer heats up the earth with hot rays, and fall causes gatherings for hibernation.

To everything there is a season, because every season we face is spiritual and designed to grow us, clean us, by allowing us to stretch and enlarge ourselves through uncomfortable situations. The season of pruning allows God to test your strength and trust in Him by putting you in the fire, but not burning you or allowing the enemy to take you out. When we are in the pruning season, God is building and strengthening our faith, which is causing that old man to die to Christ. God is always at work, preparing us for more and to experience greater.

Make sure that during each "spiritual season" you always lift God up and give Him glory for allowing you to experience that season. Especially during the wilderness season, which is a time of "wait." I know many of you have been praying to God for something and He has not yet manifested it to you, but be of "good cheer" during this period and He shall strengthen thine heart. And lastly, all of that sowing has paid off. God has rewarded you for sowing into His kingdom, and as a result, you are reaping your harvest while you are in your harvest season, Enjoy!

My Prayer: Father God, in the mighty name of Jesus, I pray that this Lenten season will be a time of spiritual cleaning and renewal of Your people. Help us to embrace all 4 seasons as a period of time for preparation, planning and purpose towards the fulfilling of our destiny. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.

Sis. Tracey McGill, Steward and Class Leader, Class #17

April 18th MAUNDY THURSDAY
HOW DO WE WAIT ON THE LORD?

Romans 12:12 - "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

Waiting on the Lord is a difficult thing to do and as Christians, our faith can be challenged. Currently, my family, friends and myself are waiting and trusting in God for answers, breakthroughs and deliverance from unemployment, divorce, physical, mental and emotional healing, sudden death of loved ones, care taking of elderly parents, addictions, resulting in a host of emotions and feelings we sometimes cannot control even as Christians. Feelings include anxiety, frustration, fatigue, fear, doubt, depression, confusion, guilt and anger, to name a few. We also wait for a spouse, a baby, election results, and even a government shutdown with excitement, expectation, trepidation, and obsession. So what do we do with all these feelings that distract us from God? How do we wait on the Lord? In Romans 12:12, God gives us instructions on what to do while we are waiting, ***"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer."***

Let's try not to focus on the end result but be present in our waiting so we can hear and surrender to God's will. What God does in us while we wait is just as important as the thing we are waiting for. He is very present in our waiting. God is preparing, strengthening, revealing and working things out on our behalf. He is doing it in His own time. He is in Control and knows what is best for us. Waiting is the process of becoming what God wants us to be.

Personally, I have been waiting for a job where the secular and spiritual meet and to have enough money to live on. If I look back at what God has been doing in my life, He is equipping and positioning me for that opportunity. I've moved from corporate to community outreach roles and am humbled to witness persons who have survived on much less than I have. They have blessed me in some many ways during my waiting period.

God has provided us with role models who have waited in the pasts: Noah waited 120 years for the rains to come; Abraham waited 25 years for a son; Joseph waited 13 years in jail; and David waited 15 years to become a king. God doesn't expect us to wait alone. In Isaiah 42:16, God promises that He ***"...will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them..."*** and in Isaiah 41:10, He advises us ***"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God."*** God promises deliverance for those who wait and trust in Him. In Jeremiah 29:11 God declares that He has a plan for us, plans to prosper and not to harm, plans to give us hope and a future.

Being present in our waiting with an ever present God will result in a more intimate relationship with Him. He loves us unconditionally and offers an open invitation to trust in HIM. In a sense, God is waiting for our trust. When we surrender to God, He allows us to experience His love and peace. This builds a faith in HIM and a bond so deep that we can conquer whatever the future holds resulting in abundant blessings.

PRAYER: Father, I praise you in advance for the mighty move you are going to make. Please give me the courage and patience to wait on Your blessings so I am prepared to do Your will. Please forgive my sins of doubt and fear. I petition this prayer in the precious name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior.

Sis. Sherrill Austin, Steward and Class Leader, Class #7

April 19th GOOD FRIDAY
WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?" EVERYTHING!

1 John 4:16-19 (NLT) "We know how much God loves us and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgement, but we can face him with confidence because we live Jesus here in the world. Such love has no fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love each other because he loved us first."

Love is the foundation of our faith. God is Love, and God's love is the only perfect love. I must confess I love "LOVE". In other words, I love people and have loved people all my life. I may not like some things some people may do or say; however, I love people.

Love is important to our humanity. God created us to be relational with Him and each other. Love is such an important part of God's character that the Apostle John wrote "God is Love." Jesus showed us the ultimate act of love on the cross. To see love in action, study the life of Jesus. God's love is not a love of emotions but of action. His love is unconditional.

It saddens me when I hear all the negative comments about love. Perhaps it's because there are so many misunderstandings and misinterpretations about love and what it is. What does it mean to be loved? Love takes courage. In addition, the word love has been used, over used, misused, and abused. Furthermore, the word love has been ascribed to things more often than people. Listen to what some people say: "I love my car"; "I love shoes"; "I love football"; "We love our pets more than anything"; "I love Stevie Wonder's "Songs in the Key of Life" album. I believe God created love for people, not things. I am guilty of saying I love things also, I am trying to self-correct. Let's look at what the Word says about love.

LOVE IS: Patient, steadfast and enduring;
Kind, good, and pleasant;
Rejoicing with in Truth;
Always protective;
Trusting, believing and faithful;
Always hopeful, expectant and confident; and
Always persevering, enduring and abiding.

LOVE IS NOT: Envious, jealous or covetous;
Boastful, bragging or conceited;
Proud, arrogant or egotistical;
Rude, immodest or disgraceful;
Abusive, hurtful or harmful;
Self-seeking, self-centered or selfish;
Easily angered, irritable or provoking;
Keeping records of wrong; or
Delighting in evil.

God loves us and there is nothing we can do that will cause Him to love us less. Exercising faith in love, believe and receive.

Prayer: Loving God, make my love be a reflection of Your unending love for me. Thank You for Your son Jesus who is the perfect example of how we should love one another. Help us to show love toward each other in spirit and in truth. I lift up this prayer for all who have given up on love and ask You to touch and open each one of their hearts for a love healing. I submit this petition in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Sis. Kathleen Turpin Merritt, Steward and Class Leader, Class #13

**APRIL 20TH
STILL HOLDING ON**

Romans 8: 38-39 "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Some people try to do God's work in time of trials and tribulation, and start questioning God's love. Sometimes we lose our patience and faith, while God is working things out, and often miss our blessings.

When I was a young lad my parents imparted into our family the following scripture, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." (Psalm 121:1-8)

The fact that God continues to bring me and us through our darkest, and most painful circumstances, is evidence that God is Faithful! His Love and Word is true! His Grace and Mercy endureth forever! There is nothing and no one that can separate His children from His infinite love.

That's why we have to pray and praise God without ceasing; trusting, and believing; knowing He is working things out in our lives, according to His will. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5) In all your ways submit to Him; confess your sins and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He will make your paths straight.

God may not answer our prayers how we want, or when we want, but He's always right on time! HOLD ON!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I am a living testimony that the prayers of the righteous availeth much! Help us to grow spiritually and love as You commanded us. Let Your light shine on us, even in our darkest hour, and give us the strength to hold on while You perform miracles in our lives, according to Your will, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bro. Drefus Tarpkin, Evangelism and Music Ministry

APRIL 20TH
FOLLOW THE LEADER

Matthew 11:25-26 "Then Jesus prayed this prayer: 'O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!'"

I'm in the book of Matthew, and while reading chapter 11, I literally laughed out loud. A lot happens in this chapter, but one thing that really struck me was how angry Jesus sounds when he speaks of being rejected by a lot of cities, where he performed miracles. This of course comes after he gets word from John the Baptist's disciples that he doubts whether Jesus truly is the Messiah.

In the beginning of this chapter, Jesus sends John's men back to him to inform him of all the miracles that Jesus has been performing. My thinking is that Jesus figures the best way to reassure John that his persecution is not in vain is to allow His works to speak for Him. Then Jesus turns his attention to His disciples. He begins to defend and Honor who John the Baptist is and all that he has done to pave the way for Him. He speaks of prophecies in the past that predicted that John would indeed be the man he is and fulfill the work of God through his ministry.

At this point, I can imagine that the "man" part of Jesus begins to reveal itself. Jesus, seemingly, gets very emotional as he "denounces the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God." (v20) He proclaims that their judgment will be worse than the worst. "Sodom," He says, "will be better off on the judgement day than you." He's upset!

But when I got to v29, I had to laugh, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle..." LOL! So funny! After pretty much cursing the cities that denounced him to Hell, he's like "Follow me, I'm humble and gentle." So I thought, "Really Jesus?" Then I remembered v25-26. After He spoke about the judgment coming to these cities, He prayed. He didn't go to the people and lash out at them. He didn't curse them out in front of all of His disciples. We have to remember that Jesus is both Son of Man and Son of God and never committed a sin. This means He did not get filled with wrath and let His anger overtake him. The Word says there is a time to be angry, and this was one of those times for Jesus, but He didn't let that anger overcome the God in Him.

In His prayer, He thanks God that He was denounced. He thanks God for the rejection. He thanks God that His will is being done. He accepts the people of these cities as they are and accepts that it is not God's will for the Gospel to be received by them, at this time. His prayer is a testament to the definition of Love, 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the Truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

By v29, when He tells people to follow Him if they want a place of rest, it's actually profound, since He has just shown them His human-side, and how His God side keeps Him at peace when challenged by the ways of this world. He says, "Follow Me." Use Jesus as your template when you don't know how to reconcile your emotions with God's direction. Follow His example, when you get mad at people for not "getting you," and you know you are just trying to help them. Follow His example, when a friend doubts you. Follow His example, when it's time for you to share with others steps to finding peace in the storm.

In the same way that we click Facebook to like people, Instagram to heart photos, and Twitter to follow others, when you need a clue on what to do...Follow Him.

I Love you, Sis. Ashley

