

Building on Our Blessings: Stories of Faith  
*First Pres NPB 2017 Lenten Devotional*



## Dear First Pres Families,

The architecture and foundations of our church have become a part of each and every one of us in ways those who designed them could never have imagined. Adorning our worship spaces are beautiful stained-glass windows which, when lit up, evoke a key principle of living a godly life – letting our lives shine as reflections of Christ. Being made in His likeness, we are enabled to live our lives in a way that the love of Christ shines through our words and actions. When we allow His love to shine merely by the way we live, others see His beauty and love reflected in us and are moved just as we marvel at the beauty of our church windows when lit up by the sun. The stones covering the walls throughout the campus signify the foundation on which we stand. God is our rock and when we build our lives upon His truths and allow His love to be the cornerstone for all we do, we will be blessed beyond measure. It is His light and His firm foundation that has allowed this church family to grow and flourish for over 50 years.

The theme of this year's devotional is "Building on Our Blessings: Stories of Faith." This theme was inspired by the title of our 2017 capital campaign which will support renovation projects focused on building on our current foundations and accentuating the blessings with which we have been bestowed by God. The stories of faith shared within these pages bring us to a place where we can recognize that just as God has been faithful, we must also be faithful by returning to Him a portion of His blessings. They are also intended to remind us that God is in every single decision of our daily lives, both big and small.

Let's be honest, the subject of giving can often "ruffle feathers." But being equally honest, it is more than likely that this feeling comes from a place of conviction. When we consider giving to the capital campaign or the general fund we must take into consideration what God gave for us, what Jesus surrendered for us, and what the Holy Spirit offers us each and every day. In this season of Lent, we are given the opportunity to come together as a church family and reverently reflect upon the fact that we are not in this world on our own. As citizens of heaven, we are given the honor of allowing the beauty of Christ's sacrifice to shine in each and every thing that we say and do. We are given a sense of security that those of this world are not blessed to know. We have a firm foundation on which to stand, unlike the sinking sand those without Christ must battle to balance on every single day.

From Ash Wednesday to Easter, we hope you will join us, not only on these pages, but also as we gather together throughout the Easter season. Please find a schedule of our Easter events in the back of this booklet. We hope you will join us in the coming weeks as we celebrate our risen Savior and the path he took to secure our salvation. As we journey together through the next 48 days, let us not only consider how far our faith has brought us, but also embrace the reality that we have the ability to transform our faith through the act of giving to both the capital campaign and general fund, and furthermore give to those around us by sharing the love of Christ that He so graciously shared on the cross for us. It is our prayer that as we venture through the following pages, they will be an inspiration, encouragement and hope. We have a God that shines and is magnified brighter than any earthly light we have ever experienced. Use these devotions as a daily source of help during the Lenten season. Draw on the Scriptures, reflections, and prayers, as you prepare your mind and heart to celebrate and honor all that we are blessed with as children of God. Ask God to cultivate a spirit of generosity and thankfulness that will help this church to shine brighter and become stronger with each passing day!

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

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

# Ash Wednesday

*“Then the angel spoke to the women, “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He has been raised from the dead, just as He said would happen.”*

**Matthew 28:5-6**

I pulled the old, worn, faded pink Pyrex bowl from the kitchen cabinet. It wasn't the prettiest bowl in the line-up, but it was the most versatile and useful. I always seemed to go for that bowl when mixing ingredients for cakes or casseroles. It was a good, sound, round bowl, perfect by design, and made to last. From counter to sink, the bowl would settle into warm sudsy water for washing. Yet, the bowl's most important and amazing commission was soon to come. The bowl had a further course for me to take. Its touch upon washing ushered in memories – sweet and poignant visitations from the past.

The bowl first belonged to my husband's mother. It made its way to my kitchen after her death. Her hands had once handled and touched the same bowl. My mind embraced her image. The movements in her kitchen soon resurfaced. Visions and sounds of family gatherings were revived. The more I continued to wash and handle the bowl, the more the flow of memories poured to mind. This worn, faded bowl became more than a bowl of glass and glaze. It was a bowl of revival; restoring and streaming traces of loving times and faces from the grave. I continue to reach for my revival bowl. I use it, touch it, wash it, and move it so as to remember and stir the power and pleasure of what went before.

The Season of Lent is much like a revival bowl. It must be reached for, moved and touched so as to reawaken and refresh our faith and Christ connection. We should reflectively take this penitential time leading up to Easter as a time to revive and breathe new life into our Christian walk gripping tightly to the pillars of our faith – Christ suffered, Christ died, Christ rose, and Christ will come again.

***Holy and merciful Father, how great is Your love! Thank You for this Lenten season of redemption and revival as we reflect upon the passion, death, and resurrection of Your beloved Son. We pray to be worthy Christ-bearers as we hold fast to the creeds of our faith. Refresh our hearts, minds and souls with Your promise of living water and the bread of life found in Jesus Christ. Amen.***

**Annie Dougherty**



Thursday, March 2, 2017

***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”***

**Proverbs 3:5**

1 Chronicles 28-29 tells the story of how King David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, but God revealed to him that his son, Solomon, would be the one to do this. David, out of total love and devotion to God, decided to give sacrificially to the building project. He gave massive amounts of gold, silver, bronze and precious stones. The leaders, officers and commanders gave generously. The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord.

At this time in the history of First Pres, we find ourselves in a similar situation. The Lord has made it clear that now is the time to update His church. It is a recurring theme in the Bible that where God guides, He provides. In our case, He has given us some extravagantly generous gifts, combined with dedicated leadership gifts that we can rejoice about. Now it is our turn to step out in faith, recognizing that if we earnestly pray for His guidance in what we should give, that He will provide.

I prayed that prayer. God placed in my heart a financial amount that was far bigger than what I thought I could afford. My first thought was, “How will I manage that?” God spoke to me through a message I heard later that day, that I need to trust Him completely, not just in some areas of my life. That evening, I was praying from the book of Psalms. I came to this verse: “Turn my eyes away from worthless things; renew my life according to Your Word.” There was my first answer to where some of the money would come from – get rid of my cable bill! An added bonus is now that I spend less time watching TV, I am spending more time in His Word. I am so excited to think about how He is going to work in my life next so I can continue to do His will.

***Heavenly Father, in this season of Lent, when we reflect on Your ultimate sacrifice for us, let us all begin giving sacrificially to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

**Gayle Coughanour**

Friday, March 3, 2017

***“Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”***

**Proverbs 16:24**

I have enjoyed doing big things. In my work life, it was teaching Conversational English to immigrant adults at Lake Worth Community High School. The classes were full and represented many different languages and people groups. Hearing my students' excited reactions when their English became understandable was pleasing to me. In my retired life, my big thing was being a volunteer advocate for abused and neglected children. (Guardian ad Litem) My role was to investigate, interview the relatives, teachers, and listen to the children. Then, I wrote a report and shared the children's desires in the courtroom.

Through the years, because of several knocks on my head, I have become unable to commit to doing big things. I began to wonder what God's plans were for me. Listening to a podcast, I heard: “God loves you and He has enabled you to make a difference in someone's life today.” It seemed like God was telling me to “Get up, get dressed, and get out.” So, I ended up at Publix! Almost immediately I noticed a distressed looking younger woman. She told me that she was sad because it was the anniversary of her mother's death and she missed her mom's guidance so much. She continued talking and I listened!

The next “encounter” was at Legacy Place where the data from my iPhone was being transferred to a newer model. The young tech person appeared to be nervous as she looked around at all the waiting customers. She proceeded to tell me that her mom had died several years ago and she's tried different jobs, with no success, etc. Once again, I simply listened and encouraged her.

I've had other opportunities to listen and encourage since then. Each time, I tell the other person that she, or he, is loved by God and He cares deeply about each of our lives. There are many hurting people out there who could use some encouragement.

As we begin this season of Lent, I remind myself how blessed I am. Because of Jesus, my sins are forgiven and I have the promise of eternal life with Him. Quoting one of my favorite Southern Gospel songs, “When He was on the cross, I was on His mind.”

***Thank You, God, for showing me that I can still be used by You,  
even though I no longer do the big things. Amen.***

**Sara Parente**

Saturday, March 4, 2017

***“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.”***

**1 Corinthians 3:10, 14**

“I love this church!” At our church-wide picnic celebrating the rollout of our campaign to modernize our campus—Building on our Blessings—I talked to lots of folks to explain the campaign and get a sense of their opinion of it. The responses reflected excitement and even exuberance, with one woman exclaiming, “I love this church!”

My wife, Mary Lou, and I deeply share this view, which causes my lawyer’s mind to think... What is it about this church that generates such emotion in people (especially as we have been referred to as the “frozen chosen”)? Is it because of our enlightened preaching and teaching; our uplifting worship services; our spirited dedication to missions; our commitment to Christ-led education (which has produced some 100 people wholly dedicated to Christian ministries); our close fellowship; our youth ministries; our women’s and men’s ministries; our seniors’ ministries; and so on? The answer, of course, is yes, but these are manifestations of something much greater, namely Christ’s love of His Church and our joyful obedience to His great commission to make disciples of all nations.

The Lord has blessed this church abundantly and, building on the foundations of those who have preceded us and the faith of those among us, we have not hesitated to walk through the doors He has opened. It is our prayer that by and through our Building on our Blessings Campaign, we will continue to work as Christ’s earthly delegates, passing on our blessings to future generations, thus honoring His prayer, ***“Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”***

***Heavenly Father, we know that our church is not merely bricks and mortar, but the hearts and minds of Your people who love You and thank You for all our opportunities to serve You. We ask for Your continued blessings, as we seek to do Your will. Amen.***

**Angelo Arcadipane  
(Co-Chairman, Building on Our Blessings)**

Sunday, March 5, 2017

# *First Sunday of Lent*

***PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW.***

In November 1964 I attended First Pres. The following Sunday I met with the Session and joined the church that day. I then began singing in the choir and did so until Easter Sunday 2016 when eye problems made it too difficult to read the music. During those 50+ years I was blessed in so many ways. In addition to singing in the choir, I was able to participate with my French Horn in the FPC Band, and in several choir/orchestra concerts. Those were always fun and exciting for me.

I made the commitment early to the music program, which meant not only showing up on Sunday, but attending rehearsal. That was sometimes the tough part as we struggled to learn new music, understand the message it was meant to give, and yet work together with the group to be able to present it on Sunday morning to bring a blessing to the congregation. But, truthfully, the blessing was ours. Granted, there are a few soloists in the choir. But most of us are just folks who love to sing and find this a good way to serve. At rehearsal we would try to learn all the nuances of the music, where to sing louder or softer, where to take a breath, and more importantly, where not to. It was often beyond what we thought were our abilities, but we are a family, and we do it the best we can, knowing God will “fix it from our mouths to the congregation’s ears.”

Blessings come from the words of the old hymns and anthems, the message in the new ones written, some from the words, while others from the way the accompaniment flows. Blessings come from the friendships made. Blessings come from the prayers shared at each rehearsal, and the love and concern for each other. Blessings come from bringing joy and, hopefully, inspiration to the congregation. Blessings come from recognizing how often the music fits in with the sermon. Blessings come from sitting within a family each week sharing our talents.

And, today as I sit in the congregation and hear the choir share their voices in praise to God, I am still receiving God’s blessings.

***PRAISE HIM ALL CREATURES HERE BELOW. AMEN.***

**Denise Clarke**



Monday, March 6, 2017

***“I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.”***

**Psalm 40:1**

My family moved to North Palm Beach in 1980. We immediately settled in at First Pres. I became involved in Sunday School, TEAM on Sunday nights, Club on Wednesday nights, retreats to Windy Gap and Southwind, and a mission trip to Haiti. I felt secure in my faith and my place in the church.

Then I went away to college. My parents moved to North Carolina. After I graduated, I got a job and I, too, moved away. I stopped going to church and felt very lost, confused and disconnected from my faith.

Chris and I got engaged and, of course, we wanted to be married at First Pres. My mother tartly suggested it might be nice if I were to step foot in the church at least once before my wedding day. Both Chris and I met with Lucky for pre-marital counseling. I was very honest with Reverend Arnold about where I was in my relationship with God. I wanted to do as my mother suggested. I told him that I was not only deeply troubled by my doubts, but that I longed to regain the relationship I'd once had with God. Lucky told me, “Just meet God half-way.”

I barely had to take one step across the chasm before God had rushed all the rest of the way to me. I only turned my eyes in His direction before He stretched out His hand and brought me back into His embrace.

Psalm 40 says, ***“I waited patiently...”***. While this verse reminded me of my story, it was God who waited patiently for me! I am so thankful that He heard my cry and turned to me in all His grace.

***Dear God, Thank You for Your patience and enduring love. We are so grateful that You are not a “half-way” God, but the One that is always there to strengthen and redeem us. Amen.***

**Anne Romine**

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

*“Because of your faith, it will happen.”*

**Matthew 9:29b**

“When we lose one blessing, another is often unexpectedly given in its place.” This quote is by C.S. Lewis, one of my favorite authors, but I feel he may have this one wrong. It has been my experience that blessings are not lost, but that one blessing is built upon another. I see snapshots of blessings throughout my life. In the beginning I was given two Christian parents who loved each other, three siblings, and a wonderful childhood filled with Sunday School, Girl Scouts, and travel. Reading, playing outdoors on warm summer evenings and making doll clothes were encouraged. My parents were guiding me down paths that would bless me as an adult as well.

My childhood blessings were followed by tensions within and outside of my home; this was the sixties. I felt lost from my family and my baby steps of faith. But the real blessing of this period was that my childlike trust, begun with faltering steps, led to a kind of adolescent trust where I questioned, but was determined to find again another blessing.

By the mid 70's Don and I had been happily married for several years and I was still unable to get pregnant. My mom used to tell me that as soon as I could walk, I was in search of babies; those in carriages were my favorite. When I turned six, I was blessed with a baby sister and that relationship had shaped my life. I wanted a baby of my own to love. Many doctors and surgeries later, the blessing of having my own children was not to be. This brought on another huge growth in my faith as I questioned the “why's.” I would have been a good mother, probably a mother like my own. Why all the searching for babies that would never be mine? I had an ever growing number of nieces and nephews at this point and was close to them. But it wasn't enough. It was something else. Whose baby was I searching for in those carriages?

It seems to me that our blessings are layered between, and within, difficulties and struggles that keep us searching for understanding and then, of course, ultimately for God. In the early 90's I was given my next blessing, just one sentence in my church bulletin that was truly a gift from God. A program for teen mothers and their babies was looking for someone to help out in their infant nursery and I was the only one who answered. The staff, all Christians, were employed by the city but were located in a church across from the high school. I remained with that program for 10 years and was blessed in more ways than I can ever say. I have loved more babies and teenagers than I ever thought possible. This incredible blessing led me to an even further understanding of God's plan.

The latest blessing in my life is First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach; all of it, but especially the children. Several years ago, another Sunday bulletin was requesting help in the Children's Library and I have been there ever since. My heart fills with joy as I watch and listen to the wonderful children of First Pres fill the room with their laughter or sweetly recite the 23rd Psalm and other verses. God has indeed blessed me with children!

So many beautiful children, but perhaps the greatest blessing of my life has been the understanding of God's love for me and the knowledge and acceptance that Jesus truly died for me. For me! I find the thought unfathomable in concept, miraculous in nature; a humbling and undeserved blessing that is so real that it is unreal.

*Dear Lord, In this season of Lent as we go forward into the future with First Pres and our Capital Campaign, we hope and pray that as we search our hearts for all the blessings showered on us, we would express our gratitude by giving with all that we have to give, trusting that God will supply. And we pray that our generosity will bless the children now and as they grow in love for You and service in Your kingdom. Amen.*

**Barbara Sullivan**



**Sonya Haffey**

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice.”***

**Philippians 4:4**

It was 25 years ago on Mother’s Day. We were at the Jersey shore. My son, Dane, came running out screaming, “Tracy’s been in an accident!” My husband, Bob, ran to the phone. Delray Hospital Intensive Care Unit was calling to say she had been thrown 150 feet across the median and landed on the north-bound I-95. We should call a mortician; they doubted she was going to make it. We were on the next plane and four hours later we arrived to see our daughter—her nose the only thing we could recognize on her blood bloated face and neck with her left leg in traction. Her brain was swelling too fast, but on call was the head of brain surgery from Allentown, Pennsylvania, and he put her in a DEEP coma to slow the swelling. We talked to a worker from Delray Hospital, who, on his way home, saw her flying through the air, blew his horn, turned his truck sideways and called the hospital.

Tracy had 11 broken bones—femur, shoulder, 5 vertebrae, smashed pelvis, ribs and a 4 inch circle of hair removed from the skull. She hit the head near the occipital lobe and we were told she may not see or walk again if she survived. We sat for eight days and nights WONDERING.

The afternoon of day 8, she awoke and said “Hi.” She knew nothing of what happened. Two months of hospitalization and after much therapy, she was tested and we were told she had lost 80 points of her IQ. Today, our Tracy is very much alive!!! When they removed the knee and leg from traction, they said she may not walk again, but she said, “Watch me.” Finally, home in her apartment, she didn’t know the name of the thing she was sitting on. We spent the summer putting labels on everything, learning nursery rhymes and the letters of the alphabet and putting letters together to read and spell. BUT, she did not lose her short term memory. She talked to her boss at Crystal Tree Plaza and remembered the work she was working and even asked about his wife. Amazing.

Now Tracy has had back surgery, foot surgery and a hip replaced at age 40. She is learning differently than she did before. Today, Tracy is a teacher with her Master’s (got straight A’s). She works with underprivileged sixth graders, goes to their games and RUNS with them. Tracy is God’s gift to our family!

***Dear Lord, Thank You for Your gift of life and the miracle of healing.***

***May we rejoice as we walk with You. Amen.***

**Mary Ann Fleming**

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.*

**Luke 2:14**

We read of Christ's experience at the Garden of Gethsemane. . . when He got away from the crowds, even away from His closest friends. He was quiet and alone with God. He then said, "***Nevertheless, not My will, but thine, be done.***" (Luke 22:42). That complete surrender to the will of God must have replaced the stress and tension of His situation and brought Him inner peace.

I would like to say that I completely surrender myself to God all of the time; but as most of us, I take over far too often. However, I have definitely learned when my life is in harmony with His will for me; I cannot see fully the way ahead, but I have an instinctive sense of the right direction and can move ahead with His gifts of love, courage and confidence. "***In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.***" (Proverbs 3:6). I desire peace of mind and peace of heart and know the only way to acquire that peace was in the acceptance of Christ as my Savior and His purposes for my life; my peace is found in His will for me. He does not make it known for me years ahead, but rather one step at a time. As I have taken those first steps, I realize that God offers me the next steps as He gives me certain tasks in life.

Several years ago a visiting pastor at the Ash Wednesday service suggested that it was beneficial to give up things during Lent as a sacrifice, but why not "also add some type of service to God to your days during this period?" I have practiced that idea for the years since and find it quite meaningful. In fact, it brings such inner reward that I have extended it more often throughout the year. What a blessing I have found. Service to God in any form is fulfilling and rewarding, affords a closer relationship with others who are served and certainly brings more of that inner peace and closeness with our Heavenly Father.

Jesus so freely gives us peace. . .all that remains is for us to accept it. . . we can have perfect peace.

***Dear God, Help each of us to freely give of ourselves. Amen.***

**Jane Sanders (submitted in 2011)**

*With my whole heart, I will praise His holy name.*

**Psalm 103:1**

In 1998, while I was living in a Boston suburb called Medfield, I was interviewed by the newspaper. The article was called “Looking to the Future with Hope.” It was my story of what I felt by hearing and watching the news of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Cuba. He came to Cuba as a messenger of peace and truth. Catholics in Cuba must learn and practice their faith in secret because Castro declared Cuba as an atheist nation when he seized power. Seeing the Pope standing next to Fidel Castro was like “light and darkness side by side.” These are excerpts from the article:

On January 25, 1998, thousands cheered the Pope’s message for religious freedom and slamming the state atheism. His message, “Be not afraid to open your hearts to Christ” was heard around Havana’s Revolution Square where a twenty story high icon of Che Guevara, the Cuban revolutionary hero, stared over the crowd and a newly painted image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was put up earlier in the week, was across on the other side of the crowd. Atheists, communists, Christians and curious came to hear the Holy Father. The Pope spoke of freedom and justice, scolding one of the few remaining communist leaders. “Another man would have been shot for saying what Pope John Paul did, but in doing so, the Pope lay the groundwork for what some believed at the time may be the beginning of the end of Fidel Castro.” The Pope’s visit was the first time in the history of the revolution that another voice had been heard. The Pope exposed Cubans to an authority beyond Castro. Hope stirred inside my heart.

My home in Medfield was thousands of miles and many years removed from my childhood in Havana. Hopefully in my lifetime I will see the fall of communism and the reconstruction of a democratic Cuba; that is my fondest wish. Born Beatriz Pando in 1955, I was the youngest child of wealthy land owners; three sugar mills had been in the family for generations. My life in Havana was a privileged one. With Castro’s seizing power in 1959, my family knew the time to leave the country was approaching. Castro took possession of our sugar mills with the command of “leave now,” backed up with the might of soldiers. In 1961, when I was only six, my parents, grandparents and three siblings fled Cuba. We left for the United States carrying only suitcases. We settled in Key Biscayne where my dad went to work at the Key Biscayne Hotel and my mom at the Miami Seaquarium. But unlike others who come to this country in a quest for a better life, we left Cuba as political exiles. We were forced out, we left better jobs and a better life in Cuba before Castro.



That week as I was watching the TV, I found my emotions bubbling close to the surface. News stories allowed me glimpses of Havana and its people, granting me the opportunity to recognize my Cuban heritage in ways I had not been aware of. The Cuban way is to “make a way, find a way, create a way.” Cubans waste nothing, finding a method to address whatever task is at hand. It wasn’t until then that I realized I do the same in my own life, much as my mother and father who, at the age of 41 with four children, had to begin their life over again in a new country.

Watching the Pope say mass in Havana’s Revolution Square and then attending mass myself was so powerful for me, as I was able to sing out loud and voice my beliefs out loud on the same day. In the United States no one is halting me to sing or pray out loud. The church in Cuba has suffered immensely since the regime came to power. Not only were church properties confiscated, but its religious personnel were expelled from the island and its faithful were prosecuted. Those who professed the Roman Catholic faith were frequently denied schooling and employment. The church itself was prohibited from conducting public worship and ceremonies. In 1969, the government went as far as declaring Christmas not to be a public holiday.

Hundreds of thousands gathered in the Square for the Mass, chanting “John Paul, we are with you” in a country where Cubans have not been allowed to have voice. With the Pope’s words, he offered Cubans a glimpse of thought and worlds beyond Cuba. My hope is this glimpse would open the hearts of Cubans and usher in a new era. It will be too difficult for Castro to keep suppressing Cubans. They will know that when God created man, He created man to be free.

*Dear Jesus, I thank you for the foundation you provided me of my heritage,  
and for my parents and their faith that they instilled in me. Amen.*

**Beets Pando**

***“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”***

**Ephesians 6:14-15**

In order to stay competitive in the power generation business, big gas turbine companies have to keep the cost of their products down. One way they do this is to use lower cost materials. But, unfortunately, low cost materials cannot survive in the extremely hot environment unless they can somehow stay cool enough. By designing systems that keep higher pressure cool air flowing over the material exposed to exceedingly high temperatures, that part can survive for years! If the cool air is stopped, even temporarily, the part can begin to burn up.

It's the same in our lives. By reading God's Word each and every day, we maintain that higher pressure and keep ourselves from burning up and caving in against the pressures around us. When we miss our daily time in the Word, it is easier for the temptations of this world to slowly eat away at us, tearing our spirit down a little bit at a time. Make it critically important to your survival to trust in God's Word to renew your spirit every day. We can't survive in this world without it.

***Dear Lord, Help us read Your word every day and trust in You to renew our spirit and to give us strength to withstand the pressures that surround us each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

**Scott Smith (submitted in 2012)**

Sunday, March 12, 2017

# *Second Sunday of Lent*

*"I am the vine, you are the branches.... Apart from Me you can do nothing."*

**John 15:5**

Several years ago, I began to fast about once a week. Please don't be impressed- my fasts are truly basic. For me, a fast means that I don't eat lunch that day and that I use my hunger as a cue to bring my concerns to the Lord in prayer. I began this practice in order to see answers to long term prayers, to put an end to my snacking impulse and to find the Lord's help in preparing for situations that seemed overwhelming. I had my own purposes for fasting and God has honored them and given me help in all these areas.

Lately, however, I have realized there has been another benefit from my fasting: on fast days, no matter what happens, everything seems to be leading me in the will of God for that day. Connections I have needed to make with people seem to happen effortlessly and the people I run into fit in some, usually unexpected, way into what God is doing in my life. Just this week, I connected by phone with a woman who was able to meet me in person that day and uniquely suited and available to speak with my Teen Moms group about child development. This was a concern I had been praying about and seeking wisdom about how to address. I marveled at how God directed me right to her and how perfect she was for the need and how she was available.

This clear connection of my life to God's purposes may be for me the most significant benefit of fasting. It makes the image of the branch and vine real in such a sweet way that it reminds me of David's words- "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for Thee." I never imagined that such a humble practice would have such a rich reward.

*Lord, draw us always nearer to You, that we may be led by Your direction, and not distracted from Your purposes. May we find joy day by day in our connection as branches to You, our Vine. Thank You for the privilege of being part of Your work in our world. Amen.*

**Elizabeth Nielsen (Submitted in 2012)**

Monday, March 13, 2017

*“For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...”*

**Colossians 1:16a**

### **With A Song In My Heart**

I think many of us have songs streaming through our minds a large part of our day. As I walk to retrieve my newspaper in the early morning hour, a favorite song of mine comes to my mind as I pass the trees, bushes and flowers. I sang this many years ago with my best pal as a duet during a church service in which the Junior Choir participated. I was eleven then and very shy. You may know it. It starts out, “I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses.” In passing a beautiful deep red rose, I touch its velvet petal gently and dew drops fall, wetting my fingers. As I continue onward “and the voice I hear falling on my ear,” we are greeted by His creations. I smile at the cawing of a cocky bluebird as he tries to coerce the noisy red-headed woodpecker’s, “rat a tat tat” on the wood of their feeder, into sharing the seed. Suddenly a brazen squirrel jumps in, deciding he will end their argument.

The evening hours, to end my day, He has painted a sky in another one of His majestic creations. The colors He has chosen could never be duplicated. And just to continue the breathtaking event, He showers the scene with sparkling light, one trying to outshine the other.

You see, I am not alone for “He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His own and the joy we share as we tarry there” is surely something we all have known. For our gracious God has filled not only my heart with song, but He has let me know He is with me.

*Dear Lord, We thank You for your presence with us in the garden of our lives  
and in the beauty of all you have created. Amen.*

**Gail Webster Littlefield**

*“...she turned around and saw Jesus standing there.”*

**John 20:14**

I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.

And He walks with me. And He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

He speaks and the sound of His voice is so sweet, the birds hush their singing.  
And the melody that He gave to me, within my heart is ringing.

I'd stay in the garden with Him, though the night around me is falling.  
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe, His voice to me is calling.

This beautiful hymn was written in 1912 by C. Austin Miles, who wrote other gospel songs and edited hymnals. He was a photographer, who developed his own photographs. When he was reading John 20 in his darkroom and read about the first Easter he is quoted as saying “As I read it that day, I seemed to be part of the scene. . . My hands were resting on the Bible while I stared at the light blue wall. As the light faded, I seemed to be standing at the entrance of a garden, looking down a gently winding path, shaded by olive branches. A woman in white, with head bowed, hand clasping her throat as if to choke back her sobs, walked slowly into the shadows. It was Mary. As she came to the tomb, upon which she placed her hand, she bent over to look in and hurried away. John, in flowing robe, appeared, looking at the tomb; then came Peter, who entered the tomb, followed slowly by John.”

“As they departed, Mary reappeared, leaning her head upon her arm at the tomb. She wept. Turning herself, she saw Jesus standing; so did I. I knew it was He. She knelt before Him, with arms outstretched and looking into his face, cried, ‘Rabboni!’

“I awakened in full light, gripping my Bible, with muscles tense and nerves vibrating. Under the inspiration of this vision I wrote as quickly as the words would be formed the poem exactly as it has since appeared. That same evening I wrote the music.”

Excerpts from [Then Sings My Soul; 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories](#) Robert J. Morgan, 2003  
Thomas Nelson Publishers

*Dear Heavenly Father, this Easter season, may we take the time to spend in Your presence daily so that we, too, can hear Your voice and do Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

***“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”***

**Proverbs 22:6**

Growing up in Singapore, my mother made sure we attended church. We went to Zion Presbyterian Church that was right in my neighbourhood (that's the British spelling). This is where my story of faith began and, looking back at it now, I am quite amazed at how my Sunday School teachers, my youth mentors, and my pastors back in Singapore all helped make sure I stayed on my walk with God. They laid down the foundation for my faith and, even after moving halfway around the world, I continued to go to church and eventually accepted the call to become baptized here and then to become a deacon.

Learning about the symbolism of the rock walls throughout our campus made me think about all the hands that have touched my spiritual life. Churches are physical buildings to worship in, but they have also helped to build one in me. It was a long process and, in my case, spanned across oceans and continents. But ultimately, God had a purpose for the time and resources that my mentors spent on me and I know it is my duty to build on these blessings, both in my life and in others as well.

***Dear Heavenly Father, You had known me from a child and had blessed me with Your faithful servants to lead me to You, Lord. I pray that I can follow their example and witness for You in my everyday life. And I pray that You will use me to bless those around me with a deeper knowledge of You. In Your name I pray, Amen.***

**Winston Chico**



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

**Isaiah 53:5**

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

**Hebrews 12:2**

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

1. We need to recognize that our sin has to be paid for by suffering and death—His or ours! Therefore, thank Him for His suffering.
2. It was a once for all as to time and value. He does not suffer over and over. It is done once and for all. “. . . But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by one sacrifice of Himself.” Hebrews 9:26b.
3. He did it because He loves us; not because He had to or was forced to bear our sin. “For God so loved the world.” John 3:16.
4. My sin put Him on the cross. I am in that sense a “Christ killer.” How that wounds my spirit but I sin and that sin has to be paid for—I put Him on the cross.
5. It was a joy to Jesus: “for the joy that was set before Him,” “scorning the shame,” “looking toward” (providing) my salvation and yours.

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

**Rev. Hunter Norwood**

(Hunter was a Presbyterian minister and missionary with South America Mission.  
He taught Agape Sunday School Class for about fifteen years.)

***“And, the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all the nations will hear it, and then the end will come.”***

**Matthew 24:14**

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He was constantly alluding to the fact that someday He would return to earth and initiate the end of the world; He would, in fact, complete the process of the Kingdom of God coming to earth. He also told His disciples on a regular basis that He would suffer mightily and be killed. Talk about mind-bending, wild, mixed messages! The disciples knew that they were being called to put one foot in front of another, following Jesus in faith, always being tested at every juncture, never knowing, but always trusting how their faith journey would continue to unfold.

One day, as they sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples turned to Jesus and asked point-blank, “Tell us, when will all this (destruction) happen? What sign will signal Your return and the end of the world?” Jesus often told His disciples that no one but the Father knew those kinds of details; that it was the disciples’ responsibility to be prepared because the end of the world could come at any time. But, on this particular day, Jesus talked at great length about all the many things that would take place in the world prior to His return. And the last thing He said is perhaps the most significant. ***“And, the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all the nations will hear it, and then the end will come.”*** (Matthew 24:14)

In other words, our job as followers of Jesus is to help the Gospel be preached throughout the whole world in order to prepare for Christ’s return and the establishment of His Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus could not have been any clearer in His teachings. This Lent, be in prayer about what role you personally could play in helping the Gospel advance to the remaining unreached people groups of our world. The blessings of helping Jesus establish His Kingdom on earth are beyond our imagination, but within our grasp through faith in our Lord.

***Dear Lord, help us work in Your Kingdom on earth to bless others as we have been blessed. Amen.***

**Rev. Dan McNerney (Submitted in 2012)  
Associate Director, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship**

**Psalm 119:105, Ephesians 1:4-6, Jeremiah 29:11, Ephesians 3:18, Colossians 1:9**

Two years ago I came to North Palm Beach to be near my sister who lives on Singer Island. Among the cherished things that I had left behind were my church and my prayer group with whom I met faithfully every week for seven years. So I began praying that God would lead me to a home, a prayer group, a church and Christian girlfriends. It would be hard to replace my church but even harder to replace my prayer group, for it was in this group of eight Christian women from different denominations that the real fellowship of believers took place for me. Their fellowship and prayers had sustained me through my mother's death, a very serious illness, the ending of my marriage, and all of life's various problems in between.

After looking for several months, my sister and I found a charming little apartment on the Island, several blocks from her house and across the street from the beach... answer number one to my prayer. I discovered that my landlady was a Christian, too, and we began to talk and share our faith. The love and support of my sister, together with my new friend's testimony, encouraged me so much during this difficult time.

As I was searching the internet for local churches, I discovered the website for First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach. The first church I ever joined had been a Presbyterian church, so I decided to try it. I attended a service and saw in the bulletin the notice for a Saturday prayer group. I went to the next meeting. Little did I know, they had been asking God for partners to join them! They gracefully included me in their group and I have been praying with them ever since... the second answer to my prayer.

When I shared with my landlady that I had found a church and a prayer group that I really liked, she said she had been attending First Presbyterian for years! Feeling that this was confirmation of the answer to the third part of my prayer, I joined the church and have become a part of a family whom I am growing to love more and more each day.

Through our church's strong network of women's fellowship, service and Bible study groups, God has lovingly provided me with the last part of my prayer... Christian girlfriends. And there is a strong believing brotherhood among the pastors and men of the church that I feel is an additional blessing for which I had not thought to ask.

Although this may sound like an advertisement for First Presbyterian, that is not my intent. Rather I would like to point out God's great faithfulness in providing a light for what sometimes seems like a very dark path, and that He provides this light for all of His children. He chose us from before the world began. He has plans for each one of us and He is faithful. One of His names is Jehovah Jireh, which means the "Lord Who Provides." Ask Him and He will provide.

***Father, Thank You for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Please help us to come to know what is the height and depth and breadth of Your love for us in Christ Jesus. Fill us with the knowledge of Your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Open our mouths to boldly give an answer for the hope that lies within us. Please keep our feet firmly on Your path and our eyes on Jesus, for all our lives. We ask this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.***

Sunday, March 19, 2017

# *Third Sunday of Lent*

Your Holy Majesty,

Perfect beyond human comprehension of what perfection is, no thing or thought on earth compares to your Holy Perfection.

Beautiful Lord,

My eyes have not yet seen any loveliness comparable to Your beauty. The magnificent earth and all Your artwork within it is but a vague image of the beauty You behold. Impressionism of Perfect Beauty.

Brilliant Father,

The vastness of Your knowledge and magnitude of Your intelligence is beyond my mind's capacity to conceive. The intricate, interwoven plans that You have made for each of us is unfathomable. The communication You have created and made available to us is an intelligence so beyond our comprehension that we discount its reality. Like the complex networks of computers and telephones is the science of my silent prayers to You. Wireless communication to the God of the universe; the greatest power available to mankind; a prepaid plan...24/7 tech support...in my own language... worldwide coverage and unlimited minutes!

Powerful Spirit,

With one breath, You shake the whole earth. Ionized air can lift tons of pounds; God breathed air --Spirit of God---moves mountains, sets planets in orbit, and comes down...a cross...to speak...to me; Spirit to Spirit; Soul to Soul;

Holy, Perfect, Beautiful, Brilliant,

Powerful Love...embraces me,

Makes the imperfect...Perfect...

And I embrace...Love.

**Rhonda Krill (submitted in 2011)**

*“So Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and all the others who were specially gifted by the LORD and were eager to get to work. Moses gave them the materials donated by the people of Israel as sacred offerings for the completion of the sanctuary. But the people continued to bring additional gifts each morning. Finally the craftsmen who were working on the sanctuary left their work. They went to Moses and reported, “The people have given more than enough materials to complete the job the LORD has commanded us to do!” So Moses gave the command, and this message was sent throughout the camp: “Men and women, don’t prepare any more gifts for the sanctuary. We have enough!” So the people stopped bringing their sacred offerings. Their contributions were more than enough to complete the whole project.”*

**Exodus 26:2-7**

After God gave Moses the instructions for building the tabernacle in the wilderness around Mt. Sinai, Moses asked the people of Israel to bring offerings to provide for the construction. And the people all brought what they had to contribute: some brought fine animal skins and beautifully dyed linen for the tent curtains, some of them brought gold and other metals for the tent fittings and utensils, some brought wood for the tent poles and the building of the ark. All the people found joy in contributing to the building of a beautiful place for worshipping God. In fact, they brought so much gold, silver, bronze, wood, goat skin and linen that Moses finally had to tell them to stop bringing it! Their enthusiasm had led them to contribute more than could be used for the tabernacle.

Some of the people were skilled metal workers and others were experienced in woodcraft. These talented folks gave their time and effort to make the beautiful tabernacle according to the instructions given by God. When the tabernacle was finished, everyone in the community could look at it with pride and joy knowing that they had in some way contributed to its construction. They knew it was God’s house in their midst—a place for people to meet with God.

As we each consider how we may contribute to the First Presbyterian Capital campaign, let’s remember the enthusiasm of the Israelites who gave so generously and joyfully. May we all have the privilege of contributing in some way to the completed building and may it always be a place where people meet with God!

*Lord you have blessed us just as abundantly as you blessed the Israelites. May we, like them, find joy in contributing to your work in North Palm Beach by helping to build on our blessings. May the finished campus always be a place where you are present to meet with your people. Amen.*

**Steve and Elizabeth Nielsen  
(Co-Chairman, Building on Our Blessings)**

***“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give you a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”***

**Psalm 51:15-17**

On September 11, 2001, I was boarding a plane, headed to Chicago for meetings. Despite hearing that there had been a possible terrorist attack in New York and Washington, I was still irritated by the cancellation of my flight and the disruption of my plans. Like most Americans that day, I spent the rest of the day in disbelief and shock at what had transpired. That evening, because I was not traveling, Robin and I decided to attend a newly formed spiritual formation group experience - Companions in Christ - that was beginning at our church in Louisville. We almost did not go, but were drawn there because we wanted to be with people of faith for comfort and to talk about what we were feeling. What we were unaware of at the time is that this amazing contemplative experience was the beginning of our own personal journeys of profound spiritual transformation.

While I had grown up in the church and remained active and engaged as an adult, my understanding of God came from external sources. Through sermons, group Bible study and reading of Scripture, I had knowledge of God, but I did not know God. I was a servant of God in that I followed Him to get reward or favor, but I had no idea what it meant to be His son and to have an intimate, secure personal relationship with the Father. That only came when the Holy Spirit led me to seek Him directly and listen for Him through silence, solitude, submission and contemplative prayer. Prior to the Companions in Christ group, that began at a time of disorientation and disorder, my prayer life had been filled with personal checklists, requests for blessings and, occasionally, for the needs of others. My focus was always on the external (the world) and how it impacted my life. John Cassian, a third century Christian theologian, discussed the importance of our prayer life being like a feather, light, dry and carried by the breath of the wind, but if “damaged by the moisture” of external guilt and fear, will not rise, but rather falls to the ground. In Luke 21:34, Jesus warns us to not allow our hearts to be weighed down with the worries of life.

I have come to understand that Christ waits for me in the silent places of my soul. He waits for me to seek Him, not shadows of him. He is the High Priest with access to the inner courts and waits for me there so that He can present me to the Father, blameless because of what He did for me on the cross. However, in my striving, busyness and doing (which I rationalize is in serving Him) I choose to live in the outer courts where the world tells me I should stay. To meet Him there, all He desires from me is to be on my knees, submissive in His presence with a contrite heart and broken spirit (Ps 51:17).



It sounds simple, but, in reality, is not that simple for me. I know that when I do leave behind the guilt, sorrow, fears and anger that weigh upon me and approach Christ in silence and submission, with no agenda other than to open myself to what He wants to tell me, I find the peace and fulfillment I so desperately seek.

***Almighty God, I pray that during this time of Lent that the love of Christ will make our souls light as feathers and carry us to a place of peace and solitude where the Father waits with open arms. In Christ's holy name. Amen.***

**Scott Hansel**

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away."***

**John 10:11-12**

In November, the knuckles and joints in my hands started aching so badly at night that I was nearly in tears. Intense pain in my shoulders kept me up all night. My knees were so stiff and sore that I could hardly get up and stand, let alone walk like a healthy 53-year old. It was a real wake-up call when I saw the doctor and was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis.

I cried out in fear, "What's this? Please, my hands, my mobility – don't take this from me, Lord!" Visions of the severely deformed and crippled hands of my beautiful Aunt Gilda ran through my head.

But the Lord was silent as He allowed me to experience the full pain of my affliction. I slowly began to understand that if this is what He wanted me to go through, He would be there with me and not put me through more than I could handle. I had faith that somehow He would work this for my good and His glory. My wife and daughter stepped in to comfort me and research treatments. When I was uneasy about the side effects of steroids, my primary care physician insisted I take them. They worked immediately and I've had no side effects.

I am now on a long-term treatment plan and I feel great. One of my mentors, who is in his late 70's, told me he has been on the same RA treatment plan for years. He chops wood, tours the country in his Miata, and is one of the most active people I know. Sure enough, the Lord has brought help and relief, as well as encouragement and strength – all in His perfect time.

***Lord, You have been so faithful to me. Where should I put my faith other than in You alone? Thank You for the many blessings You have bestowed upon me and my family. Please give me the wisdom, courage, and strength to be obedient and to tell others about all that You have done for me!***

***Amen.***

**Jeff Mallat**

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

**Ephesians 3:14-19**

In late 2016, I had my heart broken. It was my first real heartbreak, and it was thorough. Someone I had loved and trusted for many months seemed to change completely and turn their back on me entirely- and I wanted to know why. I spent weeks crying out to God, asking Him to give me just one inkling as to why this had taken place. Even in the comforting arms of a merciful God, I felt terribly broken and hurt.

A few months later, I chose a word to define my 2017: “whole.” I was still sore from heartbreak, and still puzzled as to why it had happened, but God was telling me that rather than being someone who longed for an “other half,” I needed to be a whole person on my own. Furthermore, I needed to depend on Him to make me whole, rather than searching for answers that would neither fulfill nor fix me. Ephesians 3:19 stuck with me: “...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Pursuing Christ more relentlessly than knowledge began to repair my hurting heart.

Soon after I chose “whole” as my word, a friend contacted me with some information that perfectly explained why my heart had been broken. It provided the answer I had been looking for all along. Had I known a few months earlier, all my confusion would have ceased and I could’ve stopped asking “why.” However, had I known a few months earlier, I may never have allowed Jesus to repair my brokenness and fulfill me without giving me an answer. In your brokenness, how can you allow the love of Christ to fulfill you rather than searching for an answer that cannot bring you true comfort?

*Dear Lord, help me to be faithful and pursue You even when times are hard.  
When I am feeling lost and confused, let me lean on Your love rather than  
pursuing the things of this world. Thank You for Your faithfulness to me!  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

**Marlee Mallat**

Friday, March 24, 2017

***“Let us go with complete trust to the throne of God. We will receive His loving-kindness and have His loving-favor to help us whenever we need it”***

**Hebrews 4:16**

The most difficult event in my life has been the passing of my father and my mother-in-law. Watching a daily decline in their health produced feelings of helplessness, frustration and despair. The only way these feelings could be alleviated was through prayer, especially when family prayed together.

Hearing the prayers of others was an encouragement. Placing loved ones at the feet of Jesus gave a sense of peace. Almightly God was to take over as I gave Him the control.

Answered prayer did not always come right away, but the timing was perfect. Whenever I think back on these two situations, peace continues to come over me. I have the confidence that God did guide me and that my loved ones remain in His care.

***Father, I thank You for the gift of prayer. I am thankful when we seek You, You are willing to listen and guide us in Your wisdom. Thank You for the peace that surpasses all understanding. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.***

**Heather Dorsey**

Saturday, March 25, 2017

***“Train up a child in the way he should go and he will not depart from it.”***

**Proverbs 22:6**

When I personally think of foundations, I think of my mom and dad and my grandparents. My dad was a rough and tumble kind of guy, born and raised in Watkins Glen, New York, in the Finger Lakes region. He rarely spoke of his mother. His dad was somewhat of a genius with engines, though he had no formal training. He was the maintenance man for a well-known resort at Watkins Glen where New York City elite would vacation in the early 20th century days. He kept the generators, plumbing, heating and other facilities running at the resort, which was self-contained. He was a no nonsense, tough character who was proud of his biceps, showing them off to me when he was in his 60's and I visited him as a 12 year old. Dad's mother suddenly died when he was 11 years old, collapsing unexpectedly as she was getting her five children ready for school. Prior to her death, family life was smooth, but he never mentioned their attending church nor any other details of family life. After she died, the family fell apart. A couple of years

later his father remarried, and the new step-mother was quite cruel to the children and often had raucous parties at the house with her drinking buddies while his dad was working. Dad had only one reason to go to school: he loved sports and was very good at them, lettering in baseball, basketball and football later in high school. He had no similar love for academics, however, often skipping classes to tinker with and run the boats my granddad had salvaged from the bottom of Seneca Lake and then rebuilt. Skipping classes often led to stern discipline from my granddad. Dad rarely went home, trying to avoid his stepmother. Once he even left her home alone, tied to a chair, after she had harshly whipped his younger sister unjustifiably as they were leaving for school.

The only adult at school with whom Dad could identify was a high school coach who knew of Dad's home situation. After playing 4 years in high school, his eligibility for sports expired, but he did not have enough credits to graduate. Without the athletic attraction, he would never return to high school. He felt he could not live at home and had no money. Here is where God stepped in....

Dad's coach knew of a coach at a tiny private military school in Kentucky who had guided that small school with a total enrollment of less than 100 to win the Kentucky State High School Basketball Tournament against some of the largest high schools in the state in 1927, the current year. He contacted that coach in Millersburg, Kentucky, and told him of Dad's situation. That coach, J. Ward Reese, told Dad's coach that if Dad could get to Millersburg, he would take care of the tuition and that the eligibility would not apply in Kentucky. Dad worked all summer driving a taxi in Watkins Glen to save up enough money for a train ticket to tiny Millersburg, a town with still only about 800 citizens. He played on Millersburg Military Institute teams and graduated in 1928. Coach Reese knew the coach at Kentucky Wesleyan College, located then in Winchester, Kentucky, only 20 miles away from Millersburg. Coach Reese arranged for Dad's tuition to be paid and he entered Kentucky Wesleyan College, lettering in all 3 major sports during his 4 years there and graduating in 1932. Dad soon met my mother there. Though 4 years younger than Dad--she had skipped 2 years of primary school by learning with her older brother while Dad lost two years--putting them both in the same class at Wesleyan. Mother came from a family with two of the most Christ-centered souls I have ever known (my other grandparents), and it was just what Dad needed.

They were married after their junior year, graduating together. Coach Reese stepped in again, offering him a job teaching and coaching at MMI. This was in 1932 (the year I was born) when no jobs were available anywhere. Dad spent the next 40 years there--teaching, coaching and later becoming principal to kids from 6 to 16, many from broken homes. He also taught Sunday School and had a daily chapel for the students at the school. Scripture was always read--and applied--while Mom played the piano and kids sang hymns. This was done both at MMI and at a summer camp for boys that they ran on the Kentucky River for 30 years. Dad never used profanity, though he had a testy temper and was a strict disciplinarian. Following his high school coach's advice, he never smoked cigarettes or drank alcohol.

He never talked much about his relationship with God, except to affirm his faith by reading Scriptures to students, campers, and boy scouts and telling inspiring stories around campfires.

Undoubtedly Dad's coaches' intervention as his mentors made his education, marriage, and even me, possible. But what was it they saw in Dad that prompted them to volunteer their time, resources and influence on his behalf?

Shortly before his death from complications of radiation therapy used to cure cancer 18 years earlier, Dad told me he couldn't do much and was sorry he was such a burden to my mom. I suggested he write an autobiography for his kids and grandkids. Subsequently he wrote several pages on his early years. In it were only a couple of lines about his mother. He said: "She worked very hard, kept the family together, and she always attended prayer meeting on Wednesday night." There was that foundation!

*Father thank you for our parents, coaches, teachers, pastors and others who provide us with a foundation on which to build, aiding us in doing likewise for those who follow us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Gordon Betts**

Sunday, March 26, 2017

## *Fourth Sunday of Lent*

*"And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is  
he Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.'"*

**Isaiah 6:1:3**

On my first eight day rafting trip through the Grand Canyon, I continually felt the desire to glorify God for this unique wonder He gave to us to enjoy. From the beautiful clear water at Lee's Ferry through the layers of rocks the river had cut through down to the bottom where pink granite peeked through the black rock one could only wonder at the beauty He generously shared with us.

Praise and thanksgiving continually came to my heart and mind as we traveled through this truly relatively unspoiled spot. It was easy to understand why the guides made sure that we trespassers left no sign of our coming and going. Those guides I encountered had long been "running the river." In fact, our guide's family had one of the earliest rafting companies, so he had been on the river very early and then obtained his degree in geology, no doubt influenced by his love for the "rocks" we saw.

We were able to take side trips to see beautiful pools in the streams feeding into the Colorado. In fact, we were able to take our drinking water directly from these small streams. There were a number of ruins where Indian tribes once lived and wrecked boats from early explorers, but nothing detracted from the seemingly untouched God-given scenery. At night the moon would shine through the ragged rim and provide an additional miracle for us to celebrate.

*Dear Lord, You have provided a wondrous world for us. May we care for it as You would have us do. Let all who see and experience what You have provided glorify You accordingly. Amen.*

**Jean Hafner**

Monday, March 27, 2017

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

**John 14:27**

Going in and out of the hospital for three years to determine what was physically wrong with me was a difficult time in my life. Local doctors were not sure of my diagnosis which kept me in a state of uncertainty. Visits to Mayo Clinic resulted in three different diagnoses. In 1986, a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis was given by Massachusetts General Hospital.

I was relieved to know my symptoms were not in my head, but new concerns about the disease fired up some anxieties. During that time as a single mother, other concerns piggy-backed on the diagnosis, such as the effect of my medical condition and the care of my nine year old daughter.

I asked the Lord, “How am I going to get through life?”

I felt like God’s answer was, “Trust me, it will be manageable.”

I felt peace.

The journey of trusting Him and receiving peace continued when I was also diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2006. Even though these times were hard, I would not change the circumstances, because of them I am blessed beyond words.

*Thank You, dear Lord, for showing me your peace and how to trust You. Amen.*

**Robin Miller**

*“Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.”*

**Psalm 85:11**

It was before Thanksgiving last year that my doctor told me that samples he had taken from an area where I had previously had cancer removed had been proven positive and he wanted to operate. This would be my third operation to remove cancer from the same area within a three year period. It was not the way I would have planned to celebrate Thanksgiving and then Christmas 2016, so I suggested to him that I wanted to push the operation into January 2017. Reluctantly, he agreed.

So, on January 11th I was admitted to Palm Beach Gardens Hospital to be operated on. It was two days short of a year from my previous cancer removal operation. That two month wait between diagnosis and procedure gave me a lot of time to think, a lot of time to pray, and a lot of time for my faith to be tested.

I thought about Thanksgiving and I had so much to be thankful for. To start, I had no pain, I didn't feel sick, I didn't look sick, so I wasn't going to get much sympathy anyway. I began to see things going on around me, people who were very sick, friends who were not going to have the greatest Thanksgiving or Christmas because they were too sick or in too much trouble. How blest was I.

I had plenty of opportunity to talk to friends and family about my predicament and my faith was strengthened by those talks and about the promises of prayer for my recovery. Quite frankly, I really didn't know how many people there were praying for me, but I did know that many were- those that told me, those who strengthened me and many who didn't even know me. It was a great comfort.

I have always loved the Thanksgiving Eve service at First Pres and I seldom miss my annual opportunity to publicly express my thankfulness to God for all He has provided during the previous twelve months, as 'morning by morning new mercies I see'. 2017 was going to be no different.

After the operation, while I was in the recovery room, my doctor stopped by to tell me that the procedure had been a success, that they had got it all and that he would have the results from the samples that had been sent on Monday which was six days later. On Thursday evening, just the day after my operation, my cell phone rang at about 8.00pm. I saw that it was my doctor. "What now?" I thought.

The doctor said, "I just received your test results and there was no cancer to be found. I just wanted to let you know."

I was speechless.

That Sunday happened to be my turn as a Prayer Minister and two ladies came up to me together. We heard that you were sick and we have been praying for you they said.

I was able to thank them and we prayed and praised God together. Their prayers had been answered. We stood there with tears of joy in our eyes.

*Great is Your faithfulness, Oh God, my Father.*

**Colin Wright**



Wednesday, March 29, 2017

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Annie Talley**

***“The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back I offered my back to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting, Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced, Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”***

**Isaiah 50:5-7**

Recently we have been reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* with our daughters. It is a wonder to see their faces and hear their questions as characters are introduced and developed. We are currently reading *A Horse and His Boy*, but not too long ago we finished *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

The Lenten season is about the journey to the cross, a journey that begins at the dawn of time, a journey that had been accounted for before the first words of creation were spoken. Just as the journey comes to an end and the time nears for the crucifixion, Jesus experiences dreadful sorrow. Sorrow so deep that he sweats blood. Lonely and alone, he comes closer and closer to the hour of salvation for humankind. The pain, the punishment of the sins of the world is His alone to bear for the salvation of the world. No one else can do it, and no one else will be with Him while he does it. His words on the cross echo, “Father, why have you forsaken me?”

Lewis paints this picture so well...Aslan the powerful, regal, magical lion (the Christ figure in Lewis’ story) walks into the clutches of the witch to take the punishment (death) for the sins of the traitor, a young boy named Edmund. Lewis describes the scene like this: “He looked somehow different from the Aslan they knew. His tail and his head hung low and he walked slowly as if he were very, very tired.” The children, Lucy and Susan, catch up to him and begin a barrage of questions...”Aslan! Dear Aslan!” said Lucy, “What is wrong? Can’t you tell us? Are you ill, dear Aslan?” asked Susan. “No,” said Aslan. “I am sad and lonely.”

It is an extremely difficult scene for the children in the book and for the children to whom I was reading. My kids echoed Lucy’s questions. “Daddy, what’s going to happen to Aslan? Why is he sad? Why are the little girls crying? What is the witch going to do to him?”

Jesus was scared. He was lonely. He was distraught. The emotional and physical sorrow of what was to come on the cross bore down on him. But he pressed forward. He pressed forward because of the incredible weight of His love for us. He went willingly to the cross because His love for us was so great.

“His sorrows abounded, but His love did much more abound.” -Johnathan Edwards

***How wonderful is your love for us. We are so thankful  
that you have loved us... we who do not deserve such love.  
Our prayer is that You continue to change our hearts that we  
would reach out and love others with such an overwhelming love.***

**Eddie Nabhan**

Friday, March 31, 2017

***“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, You will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”***

**Matthew: 18:3**

### **MY GREATEST BLESSING**

When I was ten years of age, my father died suddenly. I no longer had anyone to call Daddy, Papa, or Father. I have continued to feel his absence throughout my life. His death forced me to rely on my oldest brother to attempt filling that vacancy—although no one can sufficiently fill a vacancy left by a father or mother. However, I was blessed with a mother who, with God’s help, took on the task of raising four boys and three girls. With the physical help of my older siblings, my mother did a great job. She taught us right from wrong and over the years we all learned to be self-sufficient, to obey the laws of the land, and to always lend a helping hand to others.

According to my mother, the loss of my father caused me to “grow up” before my time, and to accept responsibility for my own future. That, in itself, was a blessing, but the lack of an earthly father has remained with me to this day. With every accomplishment, large or small, I have imagined him smiling down from heaven at his “little girl” when she has done a “good job.”

It took me a long time to acknowledge that I had never really been fatherless. I had a Father all along—a magnificent Father who watched over and protected me—one who promised never to leave or forsake me—not even in times of trouble or disobedience. He has blessed me with a long life, supplying my earthly needs many times over what my birth father could have offered.

I can brag that my Heavenly Father is the “best Daddy in the whole wide world,” smarter, stronger, and more loving than all others, and I’m not too shy to tell of His love for me. He has been a blessing of indescribable significance in my life. Praise His name.

***Heavenly Father, You love me as though I am Your only child. Yet Your love is big enough for everyone in the universe. Help me to understand that I am a joint heir in Christ, and Your love for others is as complete as Your love is for me.***

**Marie Pinschmidt**

*“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

**2 Corinthians 9:7-8**

(Excerpts from Missions Frontier’s newsletter) Greetings from Central America. October marked our 13th year in Guatemala. God continues to do wonders and show Himself in the details of everyday life. As with every year, 2016 was filled with both highs and lows. God remains the never-failing constant.

While much of our newsletter focuses on current projects, the goal of Missions Frontier is not actually the projects, but rather the relationships built through the projects. The projects are simply the tool we use to be of service to the people. They provide us/teams with opportunities to interact and to step into the shoes of another. The value of the project isn’t simply in the finished product, but rather found in God and in the people serving and being served. Every now and then, God gives us the opportunity to watch as someone recognizes, maybe for the first time, that they have God-given potential and a God-given purpose. It is often in the seemingly insignificant everyday moments, where we notice some of God’s most magnificent work and where we experience the most passion and excitement in what God has allowed us to do.

Several years ago, I did a Bible study, the focus of which was the Peace that only God can give in the midst of life’s storms. The study examined the story of Jesus feeding over 5000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. The author of the study, Beth Moore, pointed out that in asking the disciples where they could buy enough food to feed the people, Jesus made them aware of their need. Secondly, he took what little they had (the boy’s five loaves and two small fish). Thirdly, in commanding the people to sit down and feeding only those who were seated, He placed them in a posture to rest in His provision. Lastly, He asked the disciples to collect all of the left over food – 12 baskets. He gave them “immeasurably more” than they could have asked or imagined. Christ was perfectly at peace with the needs of His followers because He had perfect confidence in His father’s provision. In October, our 750+ foot deep water well stopped working. We wrote to you and expressed our need. God answered our prayer through you with immeasurably more than we could have asked or imagined. He has brought us to our knees in humility and then provided for us through you in a way that only He can do. Thank you for praying for us and for your financial support. God uses you to enable us to be here and serve. You are as much a part of this ministry as we are. Thank you again.

**Matt and Leslie Capehart, our mission partners in Guatemala**

Sunday, April 2, 2017

# *Fifth Sunday of Lent*

*“For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith.”*

**Ephesians 2:8**

I was a member of the Presbyterian Church of Upper Montclair, New Jersey, where I went to Sunday School and church services, but I never had a personal relationship with God. Now living in North Palm Beach, I am grateful to the ministers, leadership, programs and members of the First Presbyterian Church for the lessons I have learned in my journey of faith:

**Becoming a Christian.** In a Wednesday night class, I asked the leader, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” He replied, “You confess that Jesus is your Lord and Savior who died for your sins.” That night I prayed and began my journey of faith.

**Learning God is in Control.** I learned it is not my will, but God’s, while in the Wednesday night class on The Purpose Driven Life and in the Friday morning Al-Anon group for friends and families of alcoholics. The members of these groups candidly share how they pray to God for guidance and turn their will and their lives over to the care of God.

**Praying for Others.** I had never prayed out loud for anyone before attending a Wednesday night class on the Spiritual Disciplines where we were asked to pray for the person on our right. I was sitting next to a member of the church, who was the first to speak to us when we were new to the church and later was at the hospital to be with me when Ken had surgery. That night in class, I prayed for her “out loud” and have since become a prayer partner and serve as a Prayer Minister.

**Participating in Women’s Fellowship.** When we joined the church, our Shepherd invited me to attend the Sisters In Christ Luncheon, which I politely declined. Since then, I have helped set up tables for luncheons, volunteered to help on reservations, invited others to join my table, joined a fellowship group, and coordinated the Good Friday luncheon.

**Serving Others.** Having learned about faith from members of our church on morning walks and in Wednesday night classes, Al-Anon meetings, and fellowship groups, I am pleased to be able to share my faith with others as a Deacon.

*Heavenly Father, guide me in my journey of faith as I  
learn from others of your Power and your Glory. Amen.*

**Donna Wright**

***“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**

So many times in my life, Jeremiah 29:11 has been my life verse – praying it and reading it over and over again. Last year, I retired from a position at a church where I had been on staff for 16 years. Although I was sad to be leaving my job, I knew it was time and was looking forward to God’s plans for me – always trusting Jeremiah 29:11.

It was decided by key leaders at church that I would take a year’s sabbatical so that I could “decompress” from my job and the congregation could move on with the new staff who would replace me. I had been the “go to” person for 16 years and there needed to be a disconnect from me being their Administrator to being a regular member of that congregation. This was a hard decision for me to make. I love that church and the wonderful people there and knew I was really going to miss it. Plus, what was I going to do with those 50+ hours per week I normally worked?

We visited many wonderful churches in the area looking for a new place to worship, but they never felt quite right for us. We missed the people at Holy Spirit Lutheran, the familiarity of the liturgy, the music, and seeing our friends from our church.

I can’t remember exactly what brought us to First Presbyterian Church the first time- but it felt good being there. It had been a church that I called on often during those 16 years for ideas, Bible studies, job descriptions, salary ranges, etc., so I knew many of the staff.

It felt familiar – the hymns, the liturgy, the worship center. And it was wonderful to see people we knew but hadn’t seen for many years. First Presbyterian in Saginaw, Michigan, was my church growing up. I was baptized, confirmed and married there – by the same pastor. I shouldn’t have been surprised that First Pres felt like coming home.

***Give us faith, O Lord, during the times we are weary, discouraged, and lonely. Inspire us to trust in Your promises. Give us courage when our faith wavers. Help us obey Your Word no matter how challenging it may seem. Thank You for giving us the promises of Jeremiah 29:11 and a bright future in Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.***

**JoAnn Hayes**

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

***“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.  
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”***

**John 6:63**

Do I believe in what I say I do? Do I? Amidst my personal Bible study, I believe God has recently challenged my faith. Do I have confidence in His sovereignty over my life and especially the love that is the basis for it? Sometimes I question God's love for me because His will seems hard at times, but He has shown me that hardship comes when I sit astride a fence wanting His will as well as mine. So, my dilemma is to figure out what I can do to wholeheartedly, without pretense, love God with all my heart so I don't sit astride this fence where I find myself too frequently.

With a heart to question and learn, I go back to the basics of my faith. I peer at the God of this universe that sent His son to die for all who would believe. I consider the multitude of times God has rescued me from sin and its results. I ponder my conversion and how He has lovingly guided my life. I immerse myself in His Word. I love God by responding to the Holy Spirit that prompts me to obedience. I look to the crucified Lamb and contemplate His sacrifice and then my self-will expires and His love and joy holds me fast. In John 15:9, it is written, *“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love.”* Philippians 3:12-21 speaks of pressing on toward the goal with lifelong faithfulness.

Yes, I do believe in what I say I do. even though I look away or listen to wrong voices at times... many times and have to revisit the tenets of my faith.

***Holy Father, thank You for Your constant shepherding of my life. I am grateful that  
You bring to my attention when I sit astride a fence, because sometimes I am not  
aware of it and I know I cannot have spiritual vitality when doing so. Amen.***

**Susan Holland** (submitted in 2011)

Susan went to be with the Lord in November, 2016



Wednesday, April 5, 2017

*“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”*

**Genesis 18:14**

It was our fourth experience of putting a child through college. We and a generous relative had put aside funds in some 529 college counts, but by now, and with the effects of the great recession, contributions had eased and anything but in-state colleges were out of the question. Or so we thought.

As the deadline neared for choosing a school, my daughter, Emily, unexpectedly received an invitation by an out-of-state university to come dance. Having been a ballet dancer since she was four, she had her eyes set on a professional career in dance with an interest in journalism. The University of Oklahoma was not on our radar screen. But here we were, with a gracious offer to apply to the School of Dance, thinking, perhaps, if God wills, He will make a way. From a human standpoint, this was impossible.

So we talked, prayed and asked God to close doors. The doors opened. And kept opening. One by one, until she made her way into the Oklahoma School of Dance and at the last minute, the University and the journalism program.

Off she went, and after a year, the funds were essentially gone. After Brenda and I talked it over, it was time to get real with our daughter. I remember distinctly asking her into my office and telling her going back was impossible. It would take something extraordinary. Tears were in her eyes, but I reminded her God can do it. So I asked her to analyze how her year had gone. She had done very well in her classes and made good friends. Her professors and instructors seemed to like her, and she loved it there. She had grown closer to Christ through Reformed University Fellowship and relationships there. We together decided to go for it. “Let’s pray, seek more scholarships, and watch God,” I said. The pressure is on Him now!

Down to the wire, with a long way to go, we had to commit. We signed the apartment lease and trusted God. As she prepared to return, we received word of one more scholarship application. She got it! A couple of thousand wouldn’t make much difference. But it wasn’t a thousand or two – no, much more! Enough to almost bridge it entirely.

The journey’s not over, but we will wait, and we will keep trusting.

*Lord, we see you work wonders time and again, yet with each new challenge we so easily forget how well you know our needs and care about our futures. Forgive us of our doubts and help our feeble minds and hearts grow as we recall your faithfulness and your provision in such amazing ways.*

**Mike Nichols**

***“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.”***

**Hosea 11:1-4**

“Israel was so oblivious. How could they be so disobedient to such a loving God? I cannot believe that those people were so hardhearted.” This is what I thought to myself on many occasions when reading Scripture. As I would read of God’s chosen people Israel constantly complaining, asking for more than what they had been given, worshipping other gods, and looking to political leaders as saviors, I shook my head with dismay behind the pages of my Bible. I was simply appalled.

For a long time, I thought I was conducting my life in a more honorable way than Israel. Then, I began to realize I have a lot in common with them; we have a lot in common with them. Israel had idols; I also have idols. Israel was ungrateful; I am often ungrateful too. Israel doubted God’s ability to heal them; I have certainly doubted God’s healing abilities in my life. This similarity became clear when someone recently asked me, “What does the Bible mean to you?” I responded by saying, “It is my story.” In Israel’s disobedience I see my own sinful rebellion, and in God’s love for Israel I see his patience and love for me. God’s love never runs out.

The book of Hosea illustrates God’s patience and relentless love for his people. Even when Israel is unfaithful to God, He pursues her anyway. This imagery culminates in the New Testament with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Though we are undeserving, Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice and rose to life, so that we may be restored to perfect communion with God. Our God is always faithful to us!

***Heavenly Father, forgive us for being disobedient and unfaithful, just like Israel. Thank You for always loving us, pursuing us, and taking us back. Thank You for stepping into history and making a way for our salvation. Help us to be faithful followers of Jesus. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

**Melissa Barciela**

(PBA graduate student interning for First Pres)

*“...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

**Isaiah 40:31**

The eagle is back!

Her eight foot wing span almost covered the two lane highway as she pushed off the nest with amazing strength. She then climbed to about 1500 feet and was enveloped in a wind funnel, climbing even higher than sailplanes.

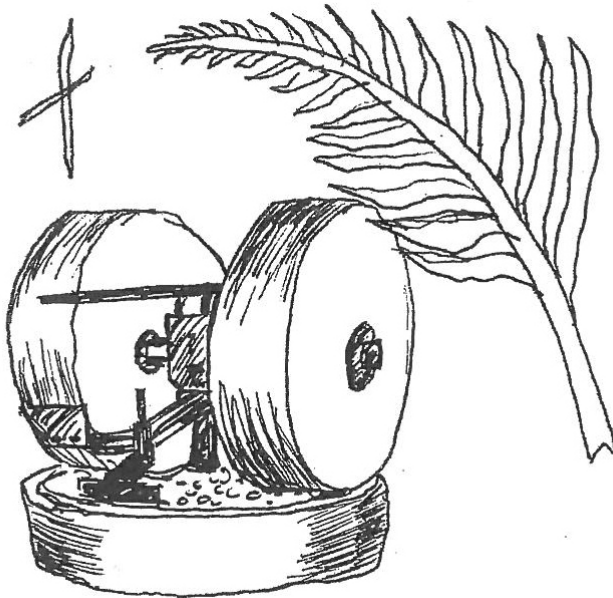
I can be like that at moments: climbing higher, not on my wings, but by being lifted up with God's love.

During those moments, through talking to God and listening to His Word, I grow closer to God. I am filled with the Holy Spirit and given guidance or direction in my life. I am assured of His love.

I can dream dreams, be transported to other lands or deeply enjoy this moment on this earth. Anxiety falls away and I can laugh, love and hope!

*Father, thank You for the many moments of Your lifting me up, filling me with Your love and giving me Your strength. Amen.*

**Meg Brown**



*“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**

*“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.”*

**Psalm 43:5**

### **A Story of Hope**

Finding one's way back to JOY after suffering the loss of a beloved spouse is a poignant journey. Each person is unique and each has a story.

With this experience we learn deep compassion and understanding of others who have traveled this road. Although no one knows what our tomorrows will bring...GOD does know. *“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

This has been evident in our lives. Tony, my husband, and I have certainly found this to be true. In January of 1999, I lost my husband, Bill, to cancer after seven years of marriage. Tony lost his wife, Pat, to cancer in July of 2005 after 49 years of marriage. Tony and Bill had retired in 1987 becoming next door neighbors, friends and golfing partners. Bill and I married after Bill's wife, Phyllis, passed away of ovarian cancer and I moved to Palm Beach Gardens and met Tony and Pat.

Over those years we were good friends and had happy times with both families. The devastating change came when our spouses passed away. The winds of change touched us all. The years of friendship resulted in Tony and I getting married in 2007 and often feeling that the four of us continue to share our lives.

We all suffered in our own ways, and came away with the realization that LIFE is change...only God is constant. I guess Hope and Trust are the lessons here. With time, God heals our hearts. We find that life must go on.

At some point we learn that our heart has an infinite capacity to love...just as parents can love more than one child, we can love more than one person in a lifetime. And to share life with another person is a good thing. We are thankful for that reality.

***Dearest God, through the eyes of faith and trust, may we continue to have hope that JOY can always be found in the gift of each day. We are blessed. Thank You. Amen.***

**Kitty Horne Cairo**

Sunday, April 9, 2017

# *Palm Sunday*

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.”*

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

Dear Servant,

You profess My name and believe in Me with your heart and you will not lose your place in My Kingdom because I love you. However, many times you step out in your own strength and things don't turn out too well. You forget to seek Me first and then to follow My leadings. I love you and will never lead you astray, so you must trust Me more. There are also times that you could impact others more powerfully, especially in prayer, if you could recite Scripture from memory. You believe My word; learn it and use it. You love Me but find it difficult to love those who are a thorn in your flesh. Don't you know they are in your life by design and not without a reason? Learn to love in My strength and you will see results. Do not harden your heart toward those who persecute or annoy you. This is temporal; seek My kingdom which is everlasting.

Continue to be vigilant in My church but listen to My voice FIRST and do not act without My permission and leading. I am the head of the church. I have used you in many ways and will again when the time is right.

Trust me totally with those children and grandchildren I have sent to you. They are Mine and your job is to pray for them that they may all open the doors of their hearts to My knock.

Even though you may become weary in serving, I will give you the ability to carry on with a joyful heart and if I want you in another ministry, listen for My voice and I will make it clear to you.

Put away your complaining and critical spirit and focus on me, not others or circumstances.

I love you and I will guide you and protect you all the days of your life. Allow My Holy Spirit to take His rightful place within you.

With love from your Savior and Guide

(This writing is from a Bible Study exercise. We were to write a letter to ourselves, from God. We then sealed the envelope and were not to open it for several months; in my case several years.)

**Anonymous**

***“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”***

**John 11:25**

I thought about all the things our Lord had to go through: the suffering, the many unbelievers, those who ridiculed Him. I then thought about how astonishing this special gift from God really was. I found these verses to be very meaningful.

**Christ:** “Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.” Matthew 1:17

**Our Redeemer:** “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1:30

**Our Mediator:** For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,” 1 Timothy 2:5

**A Sacrifice:** “and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:2

**The Lamb of God:** “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” John 1:29

**He is our Master:** “Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’” Matthew 8:19

**And our Messiah:** “This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:18

How many days pass by that I take these things for granted. There is no other time in our lives that is more meaningful than when we celebrate the Resurrection. May you be blessed during this Lenten season while remembering how the Scriptures were fulfilled.

***Father, forgive me for my sins, renew my spirit. Show me the direction and remind me to praise You for Your gift to us, Jesus. I pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.***

**Ron Doerr (submitted in 2010)**

***“The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.”***

**Psalm 37:23-24**

***“The Lord says, “I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer: I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them.”***

**Psalm 91:14-15**

As a former mountain climber, now avid hiker, and photographer of nature, I have been blessed to travel the world to see God's creation. In May 2016, I invited, as my guest, a missionary friend, Judy Becker from Dallas, to join me to photograph India's Bengal tigers and then a quick skip to neighboring Nepal for Everest and to see my favorite animal on the planet- snow leopards!

As I made my travel plans, God made the REAL itinerary. My friend Judy's mission field is with international students, preaching the Gospel faithfully in Dallas, which has the largest population of Nepalese immigrants in the country.

As Christians, we were going where our faith is less than 2% and is ***presently banned and denied entry into their countries and may face imprisonment or death.*** “No problem,” I thought. “We will go as tourists with my camera.”

India – 115 degrees, population overwhelming, but I joyfully photographed eight Bengal tigers (including cubs) in our journey. We discovered the Hindu faith has 33 million gods. I asked the Monks if they could name them.

Nepal – We were humbled by the size and beauty of the Himalayas, with Everest amongst it. My quest for seeing my beloved snow leopards was put on hold due to drought, yellow haze pollution and a displaced nation due to the devastating earthquake a year earlier. And then through Judy, God orchestrated ***His Majesty.*** Judy knows Pastor Dan who converted to Christianity (and experienced death attempts from family) and is working with a Christian Nepalese orphanage. Seventy kids orphaned from the earthquake, refugees away from the horrors of too few choices of survival, have a safe place to live and know God's protection and mercy. The orphanage was desperately in need of a working water well, to avoid disease and generator for power that was spotty at best -- and prayed for God's deliverance.

Standing in the middle of that Nepalese Orphanage, God pressed upon me, to step up. With the assistance of several, and the financial gift from the First Presbyterian Global Mission fund, we funded both the water well and the generator and were an answer to prayer to those who have suffered much. My gratitude for such a Church as mine is boundless.

***Lord, thank You for First Presbyterian Church. Please continue to bless our members as they do have the ability to enrich and change lives around the world in the Name of Jesus. Amen.***

**Barbara Zech**



***“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**

I have moved quite a few times in my career in aerospace and information technology. Each time God has provided me with good jobs, a church home and a lovely home.

I can remember looking and looking at houses in Palm Beach County when I worked for Pratt and Whitney. I had found a church that I liked, Wellington Presbyterian. I was praying one day to God, in despair, that I really needed a place for a specific amount of money, near Wellington Presbyterian. I fell asleep and woke up to the realtor calling me that she had found me exactly the right place, in my price range. It was a fit and I was able to buy it and raise my son in that community and church home. To this day, I still have friends from that community, including the minister and his wife and several friends who are now members at First Presbyterian NPB.

When I was offered a job with Lockheed in Atlanta, I wanted to be near my sister and her family in Roswell. God led me to Roswell United Methodist Church and I promptly brought my sister and her family into the church community. We were blessed by the Walk to Emmaus and many other church-led activities and life-long Christian friendships. One friendship was renewed when I discovered a friend I had known at Wellington Presbyterian, now in the RUMC community. God led me to a home a short distance between the church and my sister.

When I moved to California with Lockheed, I fell in love with the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church but looked all over the Bay area Peninsula for a home. The realtor told me that I was “as poor as a church mouse” and could not afford anything in the San Francisco area. I continued to pray for a place to live. After several months of looking, I came across a townhouse within walking distance of MPPC. It was a perfect fit and I enjoyed a wonderful life in that community and church, making life-long God-centered friends.

When I returned to Florida, having attended First Presbyterian NPB, I began looking for something nearby. God directed me to a wonderful condo and I am, once again, enjoying a perfect fit for a church home and community.

God has an amazing way of interweaving our friendships and church communities. He knows our needs and with prayer, meets our needs, perfectly designed just for us.

***Father, thank You for directing my path to the church homes, jobs and communities I have had the privilege of enjoying. Amen.***

**Meg Brown**

***“Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from Him. ‘Abba, Father,’ He said, ‘Everything is possible for You. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.’”***

**Mark 14:35**

Dr. James Martin writes in his book Exploring Bible Times about what happened at Gethsemane. The High Priest was looking for the right time to remove Jesus. During the Passover celebration 100,000 to 1,000,000 pilgrims had arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate. Caiaphas made a decision to arrest Jesus during the night because he was afraid of a riot if Jesus were arrested during the day. The plan was that certain members of the Sanhedrin could pass judgment on their rival and get rid of Him or send Him on to Rome before the people who loved Jesus were aware of the arrest.

Jesus and His disciples finished their meal by midnight and walked through town. They crossed the Kidron Valley and walked to the Mount of Olives on the lower slopes. “Jesus stopped in an industrial olive orchard known in Hebrew as Gethsemane (meaning the place of the oil, shemen, press, gat.) Separating Himself from His disciples, Jesus found a place to pray. The pressure to avoid the cross must have been enormous. What was to keep Jesus from walking up the Mount of Olives to Bethany and on into the wilderness of Judea? Within the hour Jesus could be far from the grasp of Caiaphas and his allies.”

“With the pressure of the cross before Him, Jesus encountered the rare phenomenon known as ‘hemodidrosis.’ This physiological response occurs when immense emotional pressure causes the capillaries in the hands and forehead to rupture, thus forming a bloody sweat. The gospel of Luke not only remarks on this physiological incident but also connects the event to Gethsemane. Jesus was praying in the place of the olive press and was Himself, being pressed.”

***Dear Lord, we identify with Your anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane and are moved by your willingness to submit to Your Father’s will, even death on the cross. Thank You for accomplishing our salvation and overcoming death so that we may live with You now and forever. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.***

**Dr. James Martin**

Excerpts from Exploring Bible Times

Friday, April 14, 2017

# Good Friday

## The Good Shepherd, Our Good Friday Hope Psalm 23 / Isaiah 53

One of my favorite Scriptures is the Twenty-third Psalm; it is among the first that I memorized as a child. It brought me great comfort when I was young, as it does today. This psalm is a tender, joyful picture of a loving Shepherd who watches over His flock—an intimate look at how God loves and cares for His children.

With Good Friday approaching, I've been thinking of how Jewish families, in Bible-time days, prepared for Passover. They would select a perfect lamb, then bring it into their homes and care for it. The children of those households, which I suppose were like most children, would have undoubtedly bonded with the lamb. The little creature surely brought them comfort and joy. Yet, as they welcomed it into their homes, delighted in it and loved it, within a few short days their joy was crushed by the stark reality of what that lamb meant for their lives—it would be sacrificed to pay for their sins.

So today, while reading Psalm 23, Isaiah 53 echoed in my mind. The thought struck me that my Good Shepherd, the One who brings me comfort and joy, the One I welcome into my life, is my Good Friday hope! The Lamb who was crushed for my sin, the Lamb who brings me peace with God, is my Good Shepherd, the One who watches over me!

As you read the following juxtaposed Scripture verses, I hope you ponder anew the high price the Good Shepherd paid to bring us the comfort, joy, and provisions spoken of in Psalm 23. Wonderfully, this gift is available to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord!

Psalm 23 / Isaiah 53

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

***He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.***

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

***He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.***

*He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

***Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering,***

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*

***But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;***

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

***The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth... For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.***

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.*

***“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”***

**Luke 24:1-7**

***“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

**1 Corinthians 15:20**

**Happy Easter!**

**Sarah Keith**

Saturday, April 15, 2017

***“Great is Thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see.”***

**Lamentations 3:23**

I don't want to be here and I won't come again! The expressions on the faces of the group of women telegraphed the same message. Our emotions were raw and our spirits low. We were grieving. Our hurt was palpable. It was months since the funerals. Some had been caregivers to a loved one through a final illness and for others the loss was sudden and tragic. We had failed to heal ourselves. In our brokenness, God brought us out of our isolation to share our sadness, confusion, loneliness, anger, and depression under the caring support of Lynn Grandsire and Barbara Nickler.

Some of us had the blessing of a Stephen Minister during those early days. In the midst of grief and confusion, my weekly-appointed time with my Stephen Minister was a time to share my heart and concerns and fears. It was a blessing beyond what I could think or ask. A listener is a blessing from God. Most important, during each visit my Stephen Minister would lift me up in prayer to God for healing and comfort. This was an anchor for me in my darkest days.

Surprisingly, we all continued to return to the Bereavement Group. God was at work in our minds, hearts, and spirits as we shared the depth of our grief. What hard work grief is! The avalanche of emotions one experiences during grief is normal and normal is good. Despite our doubts, we knew God's love as He comforted and healed us. God is good, all the time. He was at work restoring us to His service. Seventeen years later, as our Bereavement Group joined for a reunion, I looked into the joyful faces of those sitting at my dining table. We had met in the season of our despair. Yet, over all these years, we continued to gather and support each other. We walked with each other through our healing and our faces reflected God's love as we learned to trust and obey. God has restored us to be His witnesses to all we meet. He has blessed us to be a blessing.

***Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your love and Your provisions for each day. Calm our hearts and still our minds to hear Your voice in the midst of our trials and tribulations. We thank You that You nudge, guide, and direct us to avail ourselves of the many blessings You provide. In Jesus name, Amen.***

(If you are experiencing difficult days from the many challenges of life, I encourage you to say “yes” to God's nudging and avail yourself of the love and support of a Stephen Minister or, at a time of loss of a loved one, to be comforted and loved by the Grief Share Class. God loves you more than you know and wants to comfort you through these ministries. Contact me for further details.)

**Shirley Alley**

Sunday, April 16, 2017

# *Easter Sunday*

***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understandings;  
in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”***

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

How fortunate we have been to have found fellowship at First Pres in North Palm Beach. It has been 25 years and things have just gotten better each year. The pastors have been great leaders in Christian nurturing, the congregation has shown the importance of prayer, compassion caring for each other is evident, and the church has grown in mission outreach. It is wonderful to see so many take part in the mission trips and the active participation in local ministries.

In 1986, I came into and attended a membership class with the intention of becoming a member because Barbara wanted to join the church. Barbara has been a stalwart support to me and I have seen how important and uplifting it can be to have someone gently encouraging. I found something different at this church. The focus is nurturing the congregation in Christian ways and caring for one another. The attendance on Wednesday eve shows a thirst for knowing the Bible.

Churches can be a place of conflict of purpose leading its members to taking their focus off the intended reason for being there. There have been bumps in the road here at First Pres but I commend how they were smoothed in a pleasing Christian way and dismissed with blessings. God has been good and continually showers us with His promises.

Due to my recent illness further complicating a sixty-four year old disability, I have been unable to attend Sunday services. However, I still feel the fellowship of the congregation and am grateful for it. It is a lift to my Spirit and to me.

It is the Lenten season and God's love and Grace is upon us. He has given us all that is sane in this world. As we experience a world of unrest, we must keep in mind to make ourselves aware of the happenings in the world, but to remember our safety is in our Lord and Savior keeping an eye on “Faith, Hope and Love.”

***Thank Thee, Father, for sharing Your Son and Your sacrifice, taking our sins from us  
and giving us eternal life. HE IS RISEN. HE IS RISEN INDEED! Amen.***

**Art Nickler** (submitted in 2011)

# Easter Schedule

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## **Ash Wednesday Service**

Wednesday, March 1  
7:30 pm | Sanctuary

## **Lenten Recital**

Monday, March 20  
12:00 pm | Chapel  
*Featuring the  
Youth of First Pres*

## **Lenten Recital**

Monday, March 27  
12:00 pm | Chapel  
*Featuring  
Kristina Arnn, mezzo-soprano  
Parker Davis, tenor  
Felix Santiago, tenor*

## **Lenten Recital**

Monday, April 3  
12:00 pm | Chapel  
*Featuring Dr. David McCalla,  
Organist from Faith Lutheran Church  
in North Palm Beach*

## **Palm Sunday Cantata**

Sunday, April 9  
9:30 & 11:15 am | Sanctuary  
*The Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra*

## **Maundy Thursday Service**

Thursday, April 13  
7:00 pm | Sanctuary  
*Chamber Choir & Instrumental Ensemble*

## **Good Friday Service**

Thursday, April 14  
7:30 am | Sanctuary  
*Free breakfast following the service*

## **Children's Easter Carnival**

Saturday, April 15  
10:00 am | Courtyard  
*Infants to 4th grade*

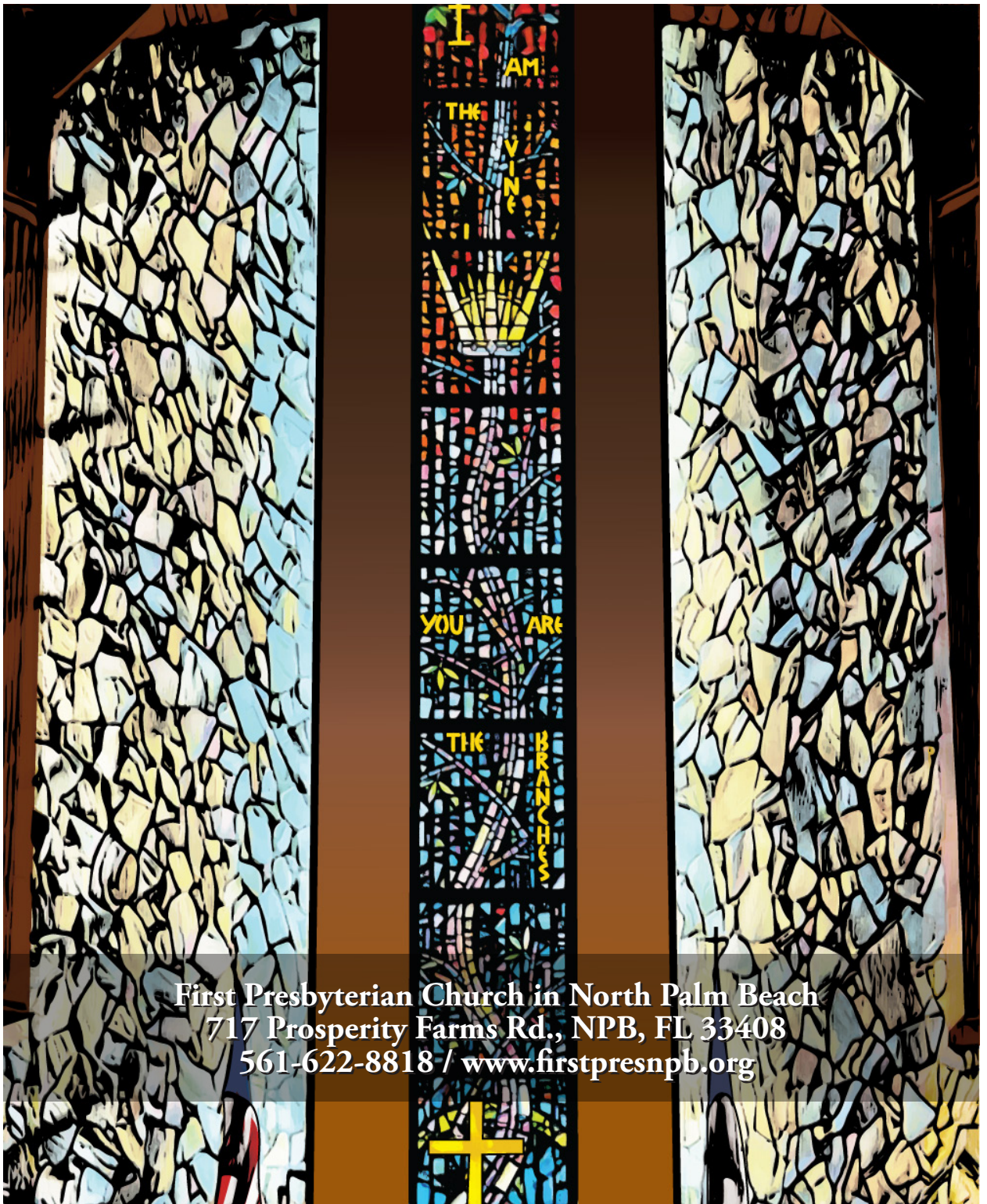
## **Easter Sunday Services**

Sunday, April 16  
8:15, 9:30, 11:00 am | Sanctuary  
9:30 & 11:00 am | Fellowship Hall

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