



# Blessed

2012 John Knox Lenten Guide

Dear Members and Friends of John Knox Presbyterian Church,

I like the length of Lent.

It arrives when slight hints of spring are in the air. As it progresses, new life seems to be gently blooming all around us and within us. But this life takes time which the 40 days of Lent can afford us.

During this season I will not only be reading through the entries in this booklet but also the writings of Francis de Sales, the seventeenth-century bishop and spiritual writer. His focus was on the pursuit of virtue, formation of character, and the formation of undervalued personal qualities. He sang the praises of the “little virtues.” Many of his contemporaries preached of virtue, especially great, heroic virtues like courage or exemplary self-discipline. Francis urged his followers to develop instead the little, hidden virtues like gentleness, kindness, patience, simplicity, and mutual regard. These were for him the qualities of Jesus who said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29-30).

Through the pages of this booklet and this holy season of Lent, let Christ gently teach you the lessons you are blessed to learn. Then put them into practice. We’ve got time.

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing is so gentle as real strength” (deSales)

Toward the little virtues,

Tom

## **February 22, 2012**

### **WE ARE BLESSED BY THE WORD**

Matthew 28:6

Mark 16:6

Luke 24:5-7

We have been so blessed to be able to communicate with one another. Whether it is in song, prose, the written word, spoken or signed.

We can elect to speak at length about anything we know or just raise an eyebrow which can convey so much more the several written pages.

God chose the written word to speak to us (The Bible) and He chose the simplest of phrases to change our lives and world forever.

The most powerful phrase in this universe or any other is “HE IS RISEN”.

As we approach this Lenten season, let us be reminded of what God gave up for us and the trials and torture his Son endured for us to give us His gift of everlasting life.

And this most powerful of gifts is simply reiterated by the words. “HE IS RISEN”.

Father in Heaven, as we approach this Lenten Season, let us be reminded of the many blessings that You have bestowed on us and be grateful for all. Let us be reminded that as each of go through this time with you that you are reinforcing your love for us and that we acknowledge your sacrifices for us and ultimately your triumph over death which is lauded from every hilltop, city and nation with the simple but most powerful praise. “HE IS RISEN” Amen

Marilyn Bachman

## **February 23, 2012**

What does it mean to be blessed? Often I have heard it relates to happiness. Other descriptions include the idea of a gift or something that sets us apart or makes us envied by others.

At Thanksgiving and during times of trial, we are told to count our blessings. I may think of a blessing as health, or wealth, of love from family, or a kind word from a friend, or a laughing smile from a child.

But as I think more on this, I realize all of our blessings have only one source .In Galatians, Paul says ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.’ God chose us before time began to share in His blessings, to share an inheritance with Christ as adopted sons of God, through the shedding of his blood and the gift of his mercy.

Without this gift, all of our worldly blessings would be of little value as they would be temporary and fleeting. Only with the sure knowledge of God’ gift to all who will except can we truly enjoy the gifts of this world,

Heavenly Father, Help us to truly accept the greatest blessing of all, the Gift of your Love through your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to live in a manner honoring this gift. In His name we pray. Amen

Frank Sanders

## **February 24, 2012**

Years ago I visited a 92 year old woman in the nursing home and she told me something that has stuck: “I am doubly blessed because I am blessed and I know it!” She said many people have lives full of blessings but all they are discontent because all they can see is their problems.

In recent years brain science has made great advances in helping us understand how the mind works. Researchers have discovered that the brain is actually wired to pay attention to the things that threaten us- to remember them and be watchful in case they appear again. This is important if we are to survive dangerous environments. This early warning system is put on high alert when they people around us are jittery too because it must mean there really is danger lurking nearby...even if we can't see it. In this case, it is nearly impossible for us to be doubly blessed... because we can't even notice our blessings. And we are bombarded with messages of danger by the news and warned we don't have what we need by advertising.

Paul counsels us to let go of our worries and turn things over to God in prayer then slow down and ‘think about’ that which is true, honorable, lovely, excellent... in other words let our mind dwell on our blessings and his goodness. The mind needs this in order to trigger our attitude of gratitude and blessing. Then maybe we will be doubly blessed indeed.

Bob Armstrong

## **February 25, 2012**

I went on a mission trip last summer that changed my life. I learned the values of hard work and compassion, yet that is not what made the trip so influential. I came to understand what true happiness really looks like and how little of it exists. The joy I saw in a child's face when I gave him a balloon had such an impact on how I see happiness. The kids of Nicaragua have nothing, yet more than I could ever wish for. They understand what it means to be happy. They know the true meaning of love. They trust even complete strangers. I never realized how a child could display such bliss from receiving something so simple and cheap as a balloon. I was blessed to be surrounded by pure joy for a whole week. Never had I ever imagined this state of being existing in such an impoverished place. In our country, happiness seems artificial, people are "elated" upon receiving a new iPod, but that is not true happiness. The gift will go by the wayside, maybe accumulate a few scratches, and the giver will be forgotten. This fake joy in our world exists unconsciously because we have become so infused with materialism. I have seen pure happiness in the children of Nicaragua. Now, the real challenge comes in figuring out how to exhibit such pure emotion in my life. The children of Nicaragua will forever have a place in my heart for teaching me one of the most important lessons of my life. The amazing thing is, they have no idea what they gave me.

Duncan MacMillan

# February 26, 2012

## ‘BLESSED’

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

**Psalm 84: 4-5,12**

**Proverbs: 10: 22; 28:20**

As Jesus taught and preached the gospel of the kingdom to the multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem and Judea, he went up into a mountain. His disciples came unto him as he preached his Sermon On The Mount, the fundamental principles and rules of his kingdom. This has become known to us as the “Beatitudes”. (St. Matthew 5: 3-12)

...Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (pray for those who do not live a godly and righteous life)

...Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (pray for those who have suffered losses in life or need God’s guidance)

...Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (pray for those who need strength to endure life’s hardships)

...Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled (pray for those who need guidance in seeking the Lord’s presence in their lives)

...Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy (pray that all shall be granted God’s forgiveness)

...Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (pray that all in God’s kingdom will maintain a clean heart, mind, body and soul)

...Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God (pray that all mankind will be at peace with themselves and one another)

...Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (pray that no person will be persecuted or chastised for his beliefs, thoughts or spoken word)

...Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake (pray that no person should suffer due to falsehoods spoken against him or foolish behavior)

...Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (pray that mankind will hear and heed the word of the Lord and not despise God’s word)

### PRAYER:

Our heavenly Father, we pray that we will so order our lives that whatever we think, speak or do in your name will be pleasing in your sight and that you will continually bless us. Amen ~Herb Erskine

## February 27, 2012

Genesis 37:1-11

Genesis 42: 42 & 45

### Some are Blessed

Have you heard someone say, you seem happy today? To be happy and give happiness to others is worthwhile. The desire in itself is not wrong; we have desires and wishes to grow in knowledge and experience for this prepares us for the future we think. As Rev. Tom MacMillan suggests, “listen for the pursuit of one’s life.”

In my reading it has been said that “only something as vast and deep as your real self can make you truly and lastingly happy.” We have heard it said, “happiness in life is not so much getting what you want but “wanting what you get.”

In the Genesis story of Joseph’s brothers, and Jacob, human wants, desires, and personal happiness is evident. Joseph is blest and blesses others.

There are times when each of us has sought happiness by proceeding in the wrong way, making the wrong choices. We can get caught up in a futile struggle to fulfill attachments to things on this earth. It is our human condition to seek pleasure, approval, improvement of self-image for advancement, money, or work as deserved. However, there are cravings and with these inevitable companions of destructive behaviors or emotions of fear, anger, jealousy, or even depression. What we seek is love. Mature love is based on sufficiency and wholeness—not deficiency or fear. Trusting God in the face of adversity and then responding to His love changes both us and those we know. Do you believe our Father in heaven sent His son Jesus who died and rose again? Our time can become God’s in our purpose, and reason, beyond our self-alone.

After reading the story scripture again, what prayer would you pray?

M. L. Hannum

## February 28, 2012

*The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.* Psalm 24:17

I chose this particular day because 41 years ago I first learned from my first husband that my marriage was in trouble. Oh I knew that things were not as good as they could have been, however, I didn't realize how much pain my husband was in at the time. Needless to say, I was devastated. I, of course, had hope that through talking and possible counseling our problems could be resolved. Unfortunately, that did not happen. I guess my husband's pain at that time was so deep that he couldn't even discuss it with me. For the next several month I walked around in a trance asking God *How could this be happening?* But happen it did and in the fall of that year we were divorced and I was left to fend for myself. I must say, at this time, that he was very supportive and couldn't have been better with the children. I was very lucky.

Then in 1977 at a Synod School week long event, I met Al Hart during a little get acquainted gathering held at Wooster College. Someone said to me *Go over and talk to that guy, he's really miserable!* Yes, he was miserable as his wife had recently told him that she wanted a divorce.

After a year and a half courtship, we were married on November 4, 1978 at the Avon Lake Presbyterian Church where Al was "pastoring". It hasn't been all perfect, but boy God sure did know what he was doing when he let Al into my life. With Al's encouragement I have done more things than I ever thought I could do. He has not only helped me realize many of my gifts (which I didn't recognize before), but has afforded me the opportunity to use them in ways which I hadn't dreamed about.

So, actually at a time when we both were saddened by the events in our lives (I'm sure our respective spouses felt the same way), God knew better and all four of us were probably better off. If we have faith, God does indeed deliver us from our troubles.

*Written especially for this Lenten Guide by Jan Hart*

## February 29, 2012

Proverbs 30

Leap Year 2012

Did you notice that Proverbs 30 includes a conversation between a believer and one who denies God? What about those we know who are not Christians? In our KJV of the Bible we learn from this reading that this is a personal confession of Agur, the son of Jakeh; it could be a prophecy, a good prediction for the next four years.

From the two people in the story one says, “There is no God! I can do anything I want!” After all I am more animal than man anyway, as an intelligent mind with wisdom seems to escape me.” Then the believer answers: “Every promise of God proves true.” He protects everyone who comes to Him for help! Don’t second-guess Him; He could call you to task about your life!”

Knowing the power of God, the believer asks for two things before he dies. “Keep me from telling lies or listening to them and give me enough food to eat.” As this proverb continues it says there are four things that are never satisfied: hell, a barren womb, a parched land and a forest fire.” The believer lists four mysteries, four things considered intolerable, four small wonders and four dignitaries. (The Message in contemporary language).

The believer does not have to understand all of these things in his earthly life. He trusts God’s wisdom and believes in God as his protector and Lord. Certainly there are consequences for our actions; God’s judgment and mercy is true and sure. Blessings come as God wills.

Prayer: Merciful God, help us to witness to our belief in you as our faith and actions can change others. Lead our nation to renew our Christian values in worship, in our church and in our American land for the next four years. Amen.

M. L. Hannum

## March 1, 2012

One of the scripture passages suggested as preparation for this missive comes from Genesis 39: 1-23. It illustrates how perfect God's blessings are even when we do not feel particularly blessed.

In this passage, Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and is eventually sold to one of Pharaoh's officers. Not many of us would consider slavery a blessing from God but the scriptures tell us, "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, ..." verse 2.

Joseph prospered so much that he was soon placed in charge of the officer's household and all he owned. The Lord blessed the household and everything the Egyptian owned because of Joseph. Things were looking up and for the first time in a long time Joseph felt blessed. That was until the officer's wife tried to seduce Joseph and when he refused her advances she accused him of the unthinkable. Once again, Joseph was betrayed and this time he was imprisoned. What kind of a blessing is that? We are told in verse 21, "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden."

What strikes me about this tale is Joseph's resilience. He did not quit; did not become bitter or seek revenge-even when the tide was against him. Instead he used all of God's blessings to grow; to learn and to bless the Lord as well as those around him. Somewhere in his heart Joseph knew God had a plan for him and God was in control. Joseph did what he needed to do – allowed himself to be blessed by God and, in turn, blessed the Lord through his blessings to others. It all worked out well for Joseph. Following his imprisonment Joseph once again prospered and became second in command of all of Egypt; through his planning many were saved from starvation during the famine and he eventually reconciled with his family. Would Joseph have been as wise a leader had he not experienced slavery for himself; been falsely accused and imprisoned? Were those simply dark times in his life or were they blessings to be realized?

Yes, blessings can be strange things. I used to think of them as things I wanted, things that would make me happy; but I have learned that God blesses me in many ways and those blessings are not always things I want or things that bring me immediate happiness. I have learned being blessed is not about me but it is about God and how He equips each of us to do His work in this world.

As we continue our walk through this season of Lent let us consider all of our blessings – those that challenge us as well as those that bring us immediate satisfaction. Also, think of Joseph's journey and how he used his blessings to glorify God and bless others.

May each of you feel richly blessed to be on this journey; to be a blessing to our Lord, Jesus Christ and to one another. ~Connie Smith

# March 2, 2012

## Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

### Matthew 5:

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them.

### *The Beatitudes*

He said:

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## March 3, 2012

Scripture for reflection - Mark 2:23 - 3:6

As you read, reflect and pray about the day ahead of you, expect to see many burning bushes and holy ground. Why settle for a few berries when the full blessing is available to you? This was the message from Tom in his sermon on Jan. 22 and it resonated with us. Too often we miss what God seeks to share with us because we get so wrapped up in our "to do" lists.

The scripture above reminds us we to be aware of our brothers and sisters needs AT ALL TIMES. Understanding Christ's call to us to put Him first in our hearts enable us to make choices that allow us to see the "burning bushes" in our lives. We are reminded of this poem of "TWO WOLVES":

An old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. "One is Evil - it is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, intolerance, arrogance, false pride, self-pity, lies, ego and prejudice."

"The other is Good - It is joy, peace, hope, humanity, kindness, empathy, compassion, truth, and faith."

The grandson thought for a moment and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "THE ONE YOU FEED."  
Which wolves will you choose to feed this day?

Duanne & Tim MacMillan

**March 4, 2012**

*Rachel*

I see a lot from my office – a ‘virtual fishbowl’ looking out onto the hallway. This big picture window gives me a view of daily church activity that is often unique. The office waiting area – two chairs and a small table set in the hallway - is one such view.

Rachel is there faithfully every Wednesday morning waiting for her AA meeting to begin. Her name is not Rachel. I don't know her name. I am not up on the AA protocol regarding names. Someday I will introduce myself to her, but truthfully, it doesn't seem necessary right now. She is content to be right where she is and does not at all appear to be inviting social interaction – which is fine. We usually nod at one another as a universal sign of welcome and then I go about my work day. She never asks for anything and, if it wasn't for her location, I would not know she was in the building. She also doesn't occupy herself with anything - cell phone, book, handbag, – she just sits and seemingly knows that this is where she needs to be. She waits so patiently – smiling at me when our eyes meet as they sometimes do. But, for the most part – she expresses what I would call ‘happiness in being’- true grace - in each moment. I can only guess, but she seems to be happy to be alive, blessed and knowing that she is taking one day at a time and that the ‘God of her understanding’ is in charge. What an awesome place to be in this crazy world!

A View from My Desk

Jeff Nichols

January 16, 2012

## March 5, 2012

Suffering as a blessing?

“So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.” 1 Peter 4:19

“What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man. When that happens, be happy! Yes, leap for joy! What a great reward awaits you in heaven.” Luke 6:22-23

It is difficult to see our current suffering as a blessing. The specific kind of hardship Jesus is referring to in the above passage from Luke is one that many of us are familiar with. He is acknowledging that we, as Christians, are going to face adversity for our faith. Jesus does not say this suffering is just a possibility; he is letting us know that it will happen. The passage reads “...when people hate you, exclude you...” not “...*if* people hate you, exclude you...” People will hate us. People will mock us. But as Jesus says we need to embrace these times! And we are to take the adversity head-on, with confidence in our Lord and savior. In other words, Jesus is saying: “if people have a problem with you simply because you are standing up for me, you are doing the right thing! Keep going!” This is not easy. Not one of us enjoy suffering. So why would the Lord want us to be happy when we are persecuted for our faith? Peter helps us understand this concept in 1 Peter 4. He writes that “these trials make [us] partners with Christ in his suffering” (1 Peter 4:13). Jesus was hated and mocked for his radical teachings. He suffered a brutal death. But as we endure hardships for following Him we become partners with Him in that persecution. And if we endure suffering for our faith, we will be blessed

Claire Bianchi

## March 6, 2012

Psalm 146: 1-2, 5-6.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have being.

Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever.

I dislike winter intensely. By March 6 during normal Ohio winters dirty snow has been on the ground for weeks; I've been frightened driving on icy roads; I've been deprived of energy that daily sunlight provides; I've gained a few pounds and, despite walks on the treadmill, I feel like my body is losing vitality. A little voice says maybe Ohio is not a good place to be during the winter.

This morning the little voice asked, could winter be a blessing? I look out my kitchen windows and see cardinals and blue jays at my birdfeeder. There is a wide open field beyond my yard that goes on for acres and is beautiful just for the unfilled space it provides. There is a stand of old trees on one side that offers interesting branch patterns to a pair of red tailed hawks. My gardens hold hydrangeas with visible buds. Even the vegetable garden has green spikes of winter wheat ready to fertilize the ground during spring rototilling.

Inside the kitchen there is the blessing of an orchid getting ready to bloom and a late Christmas cactus covered with orange-red blossoms. Best of all there is a little dog warming my lap. There is a sewing room filled with challenging projects, a shelf of books to read, a telephone to talk with friends and loved ones, children and grandchildren nearby and a church family that connects warm, caring people.

God's blessings abound. We just have to look and be glad.

Dianne Magnani

**March 7, 2012**

*Listening to James*

I never know when he arrives, and I rarely know when he leaves, but I always know when he is around. His name is James and he plays the piano – really well. His improvised playing always finds a way to seep into my office – most often around noon- when I usually need it most - after a busy (often frenetic) morning, where many people are served and most of my very “important” work remains undone. At that moment, it is truly a blessing to catch a taste of his music. Work will just have to wait until later, when things settle down. For the “now”, I can wait and just enjoy what James has to offer.

James’ gift is his quiet, unobtrusive presence, his undemanding demeanor and his playing – oh, his playing! Music that is freewheeling, yet tight; outside the lines, yet disciplined; out there, yet somehow recognizable. James and his music (the stacks of sheet music he brings often stay piled on the floor) are God-given gifts for all who notice.

He is, in a word, an angel – arriving when I least expect it, offering me what I most need in that moment, and leaving – seeking nothing – without fanfare – shrouded in mystery. In essence, his visits are spiritually-gifted lessons in learning to wait (fasting); how to wait (meditation) and how to receive blessing (contemplative prayer). He is one of God’s many messengers in my life, but only if I am ready, aware and noticing.

A View from My Desk

Jeff Nichols

January 12, 2012

## March 8, 2012

“How deep is your love? I really need to learn. ‘Cause we’re living in a world of fools, breaking us down, when they all should let us be. We belong to you and me.”

-The Bee Gees

I was recently listening to Spotify, a computer program that allows you to “star” your favorite songs so that you can remember them for later. The Bee Gees came on, and for the first time I really listened into their song, “How Deep is Your Love.” While the song might not be very spiritual, parts of it link very well to our views of God. I believe that this song’s lyrics blend very well with Psalm 27, starting with Verse 7.

“How deep is your love, O LORD. Be merciful to me, for I really need to learn. I will seek your face, LORD. Do not hide your face from me; do not turn me away in anger, you have been my helper in my deepest, darkest hour. Do not break me down, but let me be, O God, my Savior when I fall. Though we are living in a world of fools, the LORD will receive me.”

The one lyric that I feel breaks the metaphor is “It’s me you need to show, how deep is your love?” In today’s world, we are blessed with so many abilities that some people use to their full potential. However, many of us either don’t realize the many blessings that God has given us, or choose to ignore them. As Christians, we are taught to look to God for advice and to help us through our daily lives. However, God’s love is so deep and powerful that even when the fools around us break us down, He is there to be our Savior whenever we fall. Even when we don’t need his help, God is there to make sure we are kept warm in his love.

Perhaps, then, the aforementioned lyric is not our question for God, but God’s response to us. We ask God for so many things that he just wants to make sure that we are listening. We wander away from him, and at the end of the day he just wants us to be in his arms again. He wants us to recognize our blessings so that the world he created can achieve the greatness he intended..

Prayer: Lord, thank you for providing me with your blessing. Help me remember the depth of your love, and allow it to encompass everything I do. Keep me warm in your love, even when I softly leave your presence, and continue to be the light, even in my darkest hour. Amen.

Matt Schwarz

**March 9, 2012**

Do you ever feel that God is not there? The feeling of God's silence or absence can be frustrating, heartbreaking, and sometimes – ironically – deafening. Echoing the cries of desolation found in Job and Jeremiah, the words of Psalm 22 inquire about God's distance in the midst of crisis, effectively asking God, 'Where are you?' At the heart of the suffering in the psalm (and our lives also) lies a contradiction between theology and our experience. The psalmist understands faith in God ('trust' is endorsed 3 times in vs. 4-5) and affirms that God has been present since his birth (vs. 9-10), but his current situation suggests abandonment, pleading, 'Do not be far from me ... there is no one to help,' (v. 11). Most of us are palpably familiar with this part of the psalm, however, the psalm offers another profound truth – one that is often hard to reconcile with the first – it expresses confidence that God answers our pleas. In the psalm the change in tone is abrupt, but in our lives it rarely is. Nevertheless, the two parts of the psalm must not be separated. We must cry out to God in the bleakness of our suffering while never letting go of the glimmer of hope in spite of our circumstances. Jesus, too, found a voice and solace in Ps. 22 when he uttered their first words on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' We can comfort ourselves in that these words can be ours also.

Kristian Bendoraitis

## March 10, 2012

Scripture: Revelation 22: 14 (King James version)

*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

My father, the Rev. William D. Glenn, died suddenly on this date in 1998. He left behind many items from his service as a chaplain during World War II, including a tiny pocket New Testament. As a chaplain, he was called upon to do many graveside services for those who died during that terrible war. The scripture, above, is one of five that he marked, all of which are in Revelation (21:1-7, 22; 22:1, 6, 14). Pop's unexpected death, and that of my stepmother which followed about a month later, were what led to my finding John Knox Church again and ultimately becoming a member.

Like many men who serve in wars and have seen things that God's children are not meant to see, he rarely spoke about his activities. Among his possessions, however, are a number of letters he sent home from his time during the war. Two were copies of letters sent to him by a staff sergeant, whose brother, Lloyd, had died in my father's outfit. The sergeant hoped that my father could tell him where Lloyd was buried since he was in France and could visit the grave for the comfort of Lloyd's wife. My father sent detailed directions and the sergeant wrote in his second letter, "I realize how difficult it was to get the few details you did, of how our Lloyd did meet Him, who reigns over us all... To say that I thank you is so inadequate... May God bring you a measure of the peace that you have given to this little family. Man to man, I look you in the eye, and unashamedly show you the tears of joy, that you have put there."

The items my father left behind - his wartime messages, sermon notes from the early 1940s through the late 1970s - help our family remember him. One last item was among his effects - his pastor's robe. It now serves John Knox Church and sits on the shoulders of our new associate pastor, Susanne Bendoraitis.

Staff Sergeant Joseph Dodwell closed his first letter to my father with this prayer which is applicable to all those conflicts which have followed World War II: "I realize the sorrows and sufferings of the men of God, who are asked every day, to do the impossible. May God bring you a measure of the peace that you have given to this little family. May this war end soon, may all you men who have been close to the reality of war, get that well deserved rest." ~Elise Fleming

## **March 11, 2012**

As the alarm goes off, I'll hit the snooze button just one more time. As I stumble out of bed and go into the bathroom for my morning routine I ponder all of the many blessings that can be taken for granted just in that few minutes of the early morning.

I am thankful that I can hear the alarm ring in my ear. I am thankful for the electricity that allowed the alarm to waken me. I am thankful for the ability to see to get to the bathroom. I am thankful that I have two strong legs and feet that carry me to the bathroom. I am thankful for the toothpaste and toothbrush to brush my teeth. I am thankful for the hot water, soap, and shampoo for my shower.

I could go on and on throughout my entire day and list the many, many blessings that are so easily overlooked in our everyday life. Stop and think of the many blessings that we neglect to appreciate everyday in our daily routine. Let us take nothing for granted and let us always be grateful for the many "little" things that help us get thru each day. Many do not have the countless conveniences, good health, or the comfort of living in a safe environment that we enjoy and easily take for granted.

May we always remember to praise our Lord for our little blessings and may we glorify His name in all we do.

Lydia Flauto

**March 12, 2012**

**BLESSED**

“Aaa-chew !! aaa-chew !!”.... *God Bless You !* ~ I sneezed and a stranger ‘blessed’ me. Oh, so easy to say.

Where did this phrase originate? Pope Gregory I the Great (AD 540-604) ascended to the Papacy when the bubonic plague started in AD 590 (his successor succumbed to it). To combat the plague, Gregory ordered unceasing prayer for God's blessing. When someone sneezed (seen as the initial onset of the plague), they were immediately blessed ("God bless you!") in the hope that they would not actually develop the disease. ‘Snopes’, of course, has several different versions to its origination.

When I think of being blessed, my first thoughts are to my loving parents who were blessed when I was born. I was blessed to have five older sisters and my twin sister who loved and cared for me. And again, I was blessed through my childhood, teen and adult years to have many devoted, special friends.

On the first day of spring, March 20, 1967, I was truly blessed when I met my husband. Later that year, after asking my father for his blessing, we married. Our three loving children are a blessing to us; more joyously, we are blessed with three wonderful grandchildren. Now in my retirement years, I am blessed with cherished memories.

Ahhh, life is good.

**Mazie Peoples**

***Old Irish Blessing***

**R**emember to forget the troubles that passed away.

**B**ut never forget to remember the blessings that come each day.

## March 13, 2012

### Genesis 45:1-15 What God Intends for Us

Many of us have had the opportunity at one time or another to see Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. One of my favorite songs from the show is *Close Every Door*, which is sung in act I. In this song Joseph laments—"Close door to me, hide all the world from me, bar all the windows, and shut out the light . . ."

In life we sometimes find ourselves involved in situations like Joseph's that seem to provide little hope. We ask, "Why God, am I placed here?" In these circumstances few of us are willing to praise God when we are experiencing troubling times.

In the Genesis account we don't find many beautiful or funny songs sung to memorable tunes found in Webber's musical. The Joseph story we find in Genesis is complex and messy—Joseph's brothers tossed him in a pit and later sold him to a passing caravan and had no idea that they would one day stand before him begging for food. For Joseph this story begins with betrayal and ends with an unexpected reconciliation. Joseph was able to look at the big picture and realize that 'God did it!'

Joseph told his brothers that the One responsible for his coming to Egypt was "not you . . . but God" (v. 8). This is a truth we desperately need to see--that God moves behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose in each of our lives.

Rejoice in this wonderful blessing from God that when we live out His plan we will have more meaning in each of our lives than if everything had happened according to 'our' plan. Like Joseph let us rejoice in the knowledge that God can accomplish His purpose in each of our lives.

*Dear Lord Jesus, guide and energize our lives to glorify you in all that we do. Amen.*

By Lynn Bondurant

**March 14, 2012**

Romans 8:28; “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” Now this is not my assigned verse, but it perfectly vocalizes my recent experience that I think God will make an exception. September I had some vision problems followed by daily headaches and other symptoms that persisted for months. I eventually visited some doctors who determined the cause-- I had a brain tumor. For obvious reason this frightened me and I turned to God for support, and it came. Someone from John Knox gave me a bookmark with a poem, entitled “A Bend in the Road” about how God throws us challenges, but that doesn’t mean our path is ending. This poem impassioned me for my lesson to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes that Monday. I gave what I think is my best lesson, and numerous members approached me after saying how touched they were by the message, including one girl who was attending for the first time and felt God’s promise just then-- she has attended every meeting since. My trial also revealed to me the tremendous amount of love I have in this world, and how many people’s lives I have affected. With my headaches now gone and the tumor benign, I can look back and see the hand of God in my life, reaffirming my faith and strengthening that of others.

Daniel Pritchard

## March 15, 2012

John 1:47

Luke 15: 11-32

One cannot approach Easter without reflecting upon the incredible blessing the human race received on that day so long ago...."Forgiveness." Such a simple word, on the face of it, but when we are faced with the sure and certain knowledge that we have said or done something that truly wounded someone else, particularly someone we love, it takes on a whole new dimension.

In her book, "God Never Blinks," Regina Brett recounts an occasion when she visited an Abbey in an attempt to recharge her spiritual batteries. She struggled with believing that God really loved her in spite of her all-to-human frailties.... that she could ever be "good enough." After hearing her confession, Father Francis retold the story of the Prodigal Son. She'd heard it all before and was initially disappointed that the monk didn't offer some new or profound insight. But then, she saw his face, glowing from within as he repeated the last line a second time. "While he was yet a long way off, the father ran to greet him." The son hadn't even had a chance to apologize before the father ran to him with open arms. All it took was for him to turn back toward his father. "God loves us because of who He is" the monk said. "Not because of who we are."

"AHA!" thought Regina. God loves us because it is His nature to love. We can't earn that love, nor can we lose it . We are "enough" not because WE are enough, but because God is!

What a blessing!

Peg Anderson

## **March 16, 2012**

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Revelation 19:9 NASB

I love weddings. The nervous groom, the beautiful bride, the proud parents. I love choosing an outfit to wear, whether the wedding is in a barn (yes, we did that one a few years ago) or a cathedral. And who does not enjoy the reception with the wonderful food and joyous music? An invitation to a wedding is truly special.

Did you know that we have been invited to the best wedding ever? This wedding is unlike any wedding we have ever attended. The groom will not be nervous for He is the Lamb of God—Jesus the Christ. The bride will be more beautiful than we can imagine for the bride is the church. Her wedding dress is “...fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” That is us. We are the saints and our acts make up the church. We are a part of the wedding and guests at the wedding.

Can we be sure of the invitation? Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

Jesus has knocked. If you have heard His voice and opened the door to Him, you are invited to dine with Him at the marriage supper.

We are blessed.

Joanne Corradi

**March 17, 2012**

Grace and peace,

Tom O'Brien

C. S. Lewis in his last Narnia book "The Last Battle" ends with the phrase "the true story, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Yours is a unique story, a first edition. It is as yet incomplete – there are, you hope, plenty of blank pages ahead. But you may consider that your tale is pretty ordinary and dull. Your image of yourself may be of someone who plods along quietly and alone, and that no intelligent publisher would dream that your manuscript could become a best-seller.

But when you catch on to the fact that your text is co-authored, everything changes. You look back on the chapters written so far with a new interest. You begin to see what the ghost-writer – God! – has been up to. You discover that the story-line is incredibly rich. The plot got under way a long time ago, when the world was brought into being. This book will be no paperback, then, but a blockbuster.

Maybe you begin to get into the habit of consulting with your ghost-writer on how to construct the next chapter, and then the one after that. As you look further ahead, you come to see that the final chapter will be written posthumously, not by you but by God. Yet it won't be simply a conclusion followed by a full stop. Instead, there will be a comma or semi-colon, which we call 'death' and then the plot will open out into exciting scenarios you could never have dreamed of. The chapters written so laboriously in this world will seem like a short introduction to the endless volumes about the life to come, and your role in it. The scenario will be unimaginably exciting, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 1Co 2:9

**March 18, 2012**

**To Be Blessed**

Andrew Knowlton

Being blessed, for me, is a simple thing to realize and I realize it every day.

Being blessed does not mean that one wears the best clothing, buys a new car every two years and has the most extensive shoe collection. For me, being blessed goes back to the basics. I find myself blessed to have my parents support while I have the opportunity to go to school, as well as having a place to live, raiment and nourishment. I am blessed to have the resources to succeed in life and to help others while forging friendships along the way. Being blessed is something I think of every time I go to school, eat a meal, do laundry and even when I lay in a warm bed on a bitter cold winter night.

In a Boy Scout prayer (commonly known as the “Philmont Grace”, which originated from the Philmont Ranch in New Mexico), the six blessings (and necessities) of life are acknowledged: For food, for raiment, for life, for opportunity, for friendship and fellowship, we thank Thee O’ Lord. Amen

## March 19, 2011

We are incredibly blessed to have a Savior who guides us, guards us and gently moves us to places we may not want to go! Years ago when I first read Psalm 121 the distinct image of God following me as I climb and trip and wander the bumpy road of life came to mind. I found comfort in the image of Him protecting me as I went about my days. I quickly decided that would be my "life verse" because I had heard that's what Christians do. OK, I was all set! I could blaze new trails! I could summon God's help with Psalm 121!

About a year later I was blessed to have a moment of clarity and humility while reading this psalm as an exercise in Lectio Divina. Having read it the proscribed three times it suddenly became clear that God goes over the bumps before me, that He is indeed leading me and not the other way around...duh! Like having a sacred version of a GPS God has not only been down that road but knows how He wants me to go.

*"With blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below" Gen. 49:25 "He watches over us day and night" (Ps.121:6)*

He knows which path is part of His plan for me. Sometimes the road is bumpy but that is only because He wants me to rely on Him! So the challenges are really blessings! Whew! What a relief! I am not in charge, He is! So just like the deaf mute in Mark 7, Jesus made me hear!

*Lord, you are the guide who knows the plan you have for us. You are the compassionate teacher and shepherd. Thank you for having a plan for each one of us and for blessing us so abundantly! Help us to see each challenge, each setback, each fork in the road as a chance to draw closer to you, to listen for your voice and rely on your wisdom. Help us to remember what a blessing it is to have such a patient, wise and loving guide. In Jesus' name, Amen*

Cathy Nichols

## **March 20, 2012**

In the dictionary, the word “blessed” is defined as worthy of adoration, reverence, or worship.

A couple may be blessed by the day God has brought them together to take the hand of holy matrimony. They may also be blessed with the birth of their first child.

Over the summer of 2011, I felt blessed to be able to travel to Nicaragua and help build the Tony Flauto Preschool. To know that children will one day be able to go to school in that building is worthy of adoration, reverence, and worship.

The congregation [of John Knox] is blessed with the close-to-completion of the new expansion and addition of the church.

Blessing can change anything from just something to something even better. If you have a little glass bottle of water, it’s just water. But when it’s blessed by a priest, it is now holy water. Baptism. Bring in an average person, bless them through baptism and they are now a member of the church.

We see blessing through music. The first song to pop in my head is the song “Blessed be the Name.” In the beginning of the song, the Lord’s name is blessed in the land that is plentiful.

The legend of saying “bless you” comes from when people thought that if you sneezed, your heart would stop and you would die. Saying “bless you” supposedly would bring your heart back to beating. It’s amazing how bless can do a lot of amazing things.

Dan Knowlton

## March 21, 2012

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good  
-- Genesis 50:20—

According to The American Heritage Dictionary, one definition of ‘blessed’ is to confer well-being or prosperity upon. This definition fits well with what we most often think of when hearing the word blessed. Unfortunately, our awareness of being blessed through the positive happenings in our lives often blocks our ability to identify how we are blessed through struggle or tragedy. Lives are changed when we least expect it and through ways that we could never imagine.

2003 was a difficult year for our family. Bruce’s mother died, my sister and her husband lost a set of twins at six and a half months’ gestation, and the company for which Bruce had worked for 17 years was sold to a Cleveland company.

The death of Bruce’s mom, while difficult, was in the proper ‘order;’ she was buried by her children. But coming to terms with the deaths of two precious babies was another matter altogether. Our grief was unimaginable and I questioned how our families would ever get through such horrible losses.

Once the grief became less all-encompassing, it began to feel as though there was hope in the future. My sister and her husband had two more children, who are now 7 and 5 years old. They are the apples of their parents’ eyes and have brought joy out of tragedy. We have recognized that it is only through the loss of Thomas and Mary that Nate and Maggie are present in our lives.

Being blessed does not mean that life will always be easy or without pain, but it does mean that God is ever present and we need to watch faithfully for his fingerprints on our lives.

Laurie Knowlton

## March 22, 2012

Psalms 105: “Honor God with Hallelujahs”, “Keep your eyes open for God”, “God is in charge”, and “He keeps His promises”. And later in the Psalm the writer recalls the story of the Exodus and how God has been active in the lives of the people. I long for this daily intimacy with God. But, the truth is that it is so much easier to focus on a world that seems bleak and so much more convenient to accept my present relationship with God as good enough. In other words my convenient spiritual life is stagnate. Can I be both “satisfied” and “stagnate” spiritually?

The music, the preaching, the bible studies, the fellowship, the mission trips, the giving, the doing are satisfying. Participation in the leadership of the church, in the maintenance of the church in committees and task forces are satisfying. But is activity a true indicator of spiritual growth? Salvation is not an event. Spiritual growth is a process that can become stagnate, even as we feel conveniently satisfied.

Prayer: Lord and Savior. During this season of Lent may the mystery of the Last Supper in the upper room, and the horrifying sounds of the spikes being driven on Good Friday, and the peal of the bells and the glorious shouts “ He is Risen—He has risen indeed”, do much more than just satisfy my need to hear the traditional sounds of Easter. Lord, I want more than traditions, convenient relationships and participation in church activities. Put me where you want me to be and may my actions be in response to your plans and in so doing may I get back on a track of growing spiritually. Amen.

Ned Hannum

## **March 23, 2012**

### Exodus 2:1-22 – L. Gordon Blasius

What comes to your mind when I say the name: “Moses”? Without listing his accomplishments, it is enough to claim that he is a leading character in the history of God’s people. And the book of “Exodus” is a wonderful, primary source of authentic information.

The second chapter of “Exodus” gives us a record of Moses’ birth and early years, his upbringing, rage which leads to murder, and finally escape into the wilderness. It appears that Moses’ productive life was finished. He was separated from his family and friends, his work and responsibilities, and without direction. Moses had reached a dead end. Or had he?

The one unseen factor in his life was God. And at the moment when life appeared to have left him behind, God began to unfold a grand plan for the rest of Moses’ life! To make this possible, God had to fashion the raw material of Moses’ love for his people into a leader willing to accept the responsibility for reaching the Promised Land. A burning bush, on fire but not consumed, was God’s symbol of His presence and a promise that all would go well.

Have you reached a dead-end in your life? Do you feel stalled? Or do you have a feeling that God has forgotten you temporarily? I’m certain Moses felt that way. But I’m also certain that God is waiting for you to say: “Yes, Lord, I’m here and ready to be Your servant. Do you have a blessing for me, something which can assist me to be a blessing to others? Show me. Give me a sign. I am yours.”

## **March 24, 2012**

*Bob*

In response to a bulletin announcement last year seeking office volunteers, Tracy and I received a call from Bob (not his real name) who had recently retired. Our conversation went sort of like this:

“Well”, I said, “what would you like to do?” -knowing nothing about his interests, or skills.

“I’m not sure what you need,” he replied. Fair question, although we did state several specifics in the bulletin.

“General office help”, I said, – “filing, collating, stapling, you know. But, right now we need someone to cover the phones from 3:00-4:30 so we can focus on time-sensitive work.”

“OK, I can do that. When can I start, today?”

The conversation went back and forth like that for quite a while – Bob asking questions and me doing my best to respond. We eventually agreed on a start date and I hung up the phone, somewhat uneasy because I was not at all convinced that Bob understood what I wanted. This turned out to be true, but with a little time and perspective, I have come to realize what Bob was looking for. He was seeking relationships – not a job answering phones. His gifts, it turns out, are centered on his kind demeanor – his gentle presence – and his graciousness towards all. If he thanked Tracy and me once, he thanked us a million times for this “work” and until now I didn’t know why. He gave us his quiet and gentle spirit – we gave him lots of human interaction – what potent and life-giving forces in our quest for authentic Christian community!

Jeff Nichols

*A View from My Office*

January 19, 2012

**March 25, 2012**

**A Blessing or a Testing?**

Scripture: Exodus 3:16-4:12

My wife and I wanted to have a child, but we were having no success conceiving. And my wife especially wanted a baby girl. So after several years of testing, using fertility drugs and no pregnancy, we turned to the possibility of adoption. We were quickly approved for adoption by Cuyahoga County, and since I worked for the county, we were sure that adoption should be a fairly quick process. Well—after seven years of waiting for a baby, we gave up on that idea too. We would be okay and would pursue other interests outside of raising a child. Then, unexpectedly, we got a call that there was a two-year old child available, and it was a girl. It wasn't a baby, but we agreed to meet her. So once again our hopes were raised and we began the visiting and pre-placement overnights. Low and behold we accepted our little girl and the adoption was finalized a few months later. That was in 1984.

Were we blessed in spite of so many years of waiting? You bet we were! Were we tested? I don't really think so. God had a plan for us and he knew when it would be completed and when we would be ready. The Lord had worked a miracle, and as usual, did it in His time.

Prayer: Give us the patience and strength to wait on your blessings. Amen.

Greg Danchuk

**March 26, 2012**

I AM BLESSED

John Knox Church is often described as a welcoming church. Visitors often say they were welcomed, new members often say that one reason they chose to join our community of faith was because they felt welcomed. Even our own advertisements about our mission and goals often describe John Knox as a welcoming church.

John Knox is a welcoming church, but it is much more than a happy greeting or even offering the Peace of Christ on Sunday morning. At John Knox we are open to receive anyone who seeks to know us and to know what we believe, or who are just curious, or even those who have an issue with our ministry. The environment at John Knox is a safe place where views can be expressed that may stretch our own understanding. A place where views can be tested with other believers who themselves are also testing their own faith. None of us have it all together. We are all growing. We are all on the path moving toward God. We are not at the same place—some are even moving backwards at times and that is when we need to be the most caring, not condemning, not shunning, but remembering our own times of doubting and times of feeling disconnected from God.

We grow at different speeds and through different means. Sometimes we make leaps in our faith and sometimes our growth just sneaks up on us and suddenly we realize that we are seeing another person or another situation through God's eyes rather than trying to bring the world into focus through the lens of our own experience and understanding.

Prayer: I am so blessed by the people of the John Knox, by the history of this welcoming community where we can assist each other along the path toward a closer relationship with God and where we are encouraged to not let our spiritual growth become stagnate. Amen.

Jerry Snyder

Ned Hannum

**March 27, 2012**

*John 6: 1-14*

## **Heavenly Compounding**

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle in Jesus's ministry that is described in all 4 gospels. It was truly an amazing event! It is an example of how God multiplies blessings in ways that defy what we see as impossible, showing that with God, all things ARE possible.

In the Financial Peace University series, a 13-session course currently being held at John Knox, the instructor, Dave Ramsey, speaks of the 'explosion' that happens with your money when you save even a small amount every week, and let it grow through compounding interest over a long period of time. The example goes something like – if you save \$20 per week, and let it compound monthly at 12%, it will be worth \$3.16 million dollars in 60 years! The power of compounding shows how small outlays get turned into big, incredible results, which seem supernatural to our conventional thinking.

The Gospel of John text describes how the 5,000 were fed - "Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish." In the end, they gathered up more leftovers than they originally started with. So God, looking down on his servant Jesus and the 5,000, brought forth miraculous results from the blessings Jesus offered on the hillside in Galilee.

In a way, we discredit God when we fail to communicate with him, when we fail to take our concerns and needs to him in prayer, when we fail to acknowledge that the God who parted the seas, who raised the dead, who changed the early church's most fierce enemy, Saul, into its strongest and bravest servant, Paul, can do ANYTHING and will deliver for us, if only we believe and trust in his life-changing ways.

May we call on God always – through both corporate and individual prayer, using prayer as the 'currency' on our faith walk. For God takes our prayers and 'compounds' them into blessings, just as he did with the fish and the loaves.

Bruce Knowlton

**March 28, 2012**

“Blessed is the servant who loves his brother as much when he is sick and useless as when he is well and can be of service to him. And blessed is he who loves his brother as well when he is afar off as when he is by his side, and who would say nothing behind his back he might not, in love, say before his face.”

Francis of Assisi

## March 29, 2012

God's Love

John 3:16 (KJV) For God so loved the world,...

Sometimes we forget that our very existence is an expression of God's Love. We wouldn't be here if God thought there was no hope for us. We are born onto this Earth to learn about ourselves, our fellow human beings and hopefully we take the opportunity to get closer to God. As important as it is for each of us to strive to get closer to God, it is at least as important to pass that knowledge on. We are here not only to learn from one another, but to teach one another, also. Because God loves all his children (even the disobedient ones) those of us who listen for that "...still small voice" are charged with encouraging others to listen.

...that He gave His only begotten Son,...

God's chosen people were going down the wrong path. After everything he had shown them, done for them, including sending instructions by way of Prophets born among them, his chosen people were listening with their ears to people (priests) that had inserted themselves between Him and His children. Religious leadership is necessary. Without it, we will not remember to be thankful. If we are not grateful for what God has given us, we cannot be humble. If we are not humble, we can not learn. These priests, however, were not content with just doing their job, they decided to expand their role and demanded ever more from the people. And the people obeyed them (instead of praying and asking each other, "Is this really what God wants of us?") and were led astray.

...that whosoever believeth in Him...

It was then that Jesus was sent to spread the Word to ALL mankind. God not only loves you, but is now encouraging you to strive to know Him. His chosen people turned inward. It was all about them and the relationship they told one another that they had with God. This made them special in their own eyes and they translated that to mean that they did not have to work for God's approval and that they could rightfully forget the rest of God's children. Of course, this was NOT what God wanted from them, so Jesus was sent.

...shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

It is God's expressed wish that we grow in love, kindness and obedience. We should never remove ourselves from God to the point that we can be so busy that we'll do what someone else instructs rather than look within ourselves and ask God what He wants of us. I know that for myself, I don't want to be the thoughtless servant that buried the talent his master gave him. If God were ever to say to me, "I sent you my Son to tell you of my everlasting love for you, I gave you the gift of acceptance once you had repented your sins, what have you done with these gifts?" I don't want to have to look away in shame. Hopefully, in all humility, I'll be able to say, "Lord, I did my best." ~Dave Ford

**March 30, 2012**

*A Letter to Dad*

Dear Dad,

Hi, how are you? I know you are in a good and holy place right now and I know you are near. I want to continue to know more about you – I have missed so many opportunities to do so. I hope you can set things right with the two of us and, for that matter, with everyone else - Now -maybe more than ever. So, please bring it on from where you are to us “down here”! Make things right according to your plan. Please! I am waiting as patiently as I can!

I pray that you will continue to keep us all healthy and well fed because there really is enough for everyone to share – just like you told us all along. And, continue to forgive our shortcomings and fallenness – as we try to continue to do the same for others. Also, please continue to keep all of us safe from ourselves, our materialism and our selfishness - and from evil, a real presence who is always ready to exploit our faithlessness. You are the One running things: here, there and everywhere. This whole life of mine (ours) is ‘your show’ – not ours! So, show us the way – do what you need to do to set things right! Let us see your beauty and your power and let us forever be faithfully at your feet as your eternal children.

So, anyway, I miss you, I love you, and, I want you more in my life. But, I know that it is up to me so I’ve got to get moving toward you because I know you are always moving toward me!

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Your loving son,  
Jeff

Jeff Nichols

*Inspired by Eugene Peterson’s The Message: Mathew 6:9-13*

## March 31, 2012

Mark 10:46-52

Have you ever felt truly helpless and not sure who will listen? The story of Blind Bartimaeus offers comfort to any of us who have had similar feelings. This is the last story before the triumphal entry in Mark. Bartimaeus is the lowest of the low, but he knows what he wants and he believes Jesus can heal him. For him, his faith makes all the difference. He has courage, he is crying out to Jesus in faith, expecting that something might happen. Even when others quiet him, telling him he is unimportant, he is persistent. Jesus has compassion on him, notices him, and calls him to himself. He responds to Bartimaeus' request to see by saying, "Go, your faith has made you well." And what does he do with his new-found sight? He follows the healer, the one who saw him and listened. I wonder, who was blind in this story? Bartimaeus was blind physically, but the crowd was blind as well, not seeing him as Jesus did- as worthy of notice and with a faith that could heal.

By the end of the story, instead of 'seated at the side of the road,' Bartimaeus has been transformed from a helpless man who was going nowhere to a restored man who sets out on the road of discipleship. May we be a people transformed from helplessness to wholeness as we cry out in faith to a God who invites us to follow him!

Susanne Bendoraitis

**April 1, 2012**

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

*Ephesians 1:3*

Blessings! What an appropriate subject for my life! But it wasn't always so easy to see how God was working in my world.

Disappointments, sorrow, pain, even anger can overwhelm and cause us to lose focus on our faith. It is difficult to see how all these can become blessings. Patience runs thin. We are sure God has forgotten us.

But at some point, if we reach out our hand, Jesus will gently take hold of it and turn what was ugly into something unexpected and beautiful.

Prayer: Almighty and ever-present God, help us to be patient, and confident that our problems and fears can be blessings in disguise, transformed by your awesome power in our lives. Amen.

**April 2, 2012**

Matthew 5: 1-12

2 Corinthians 9: 1-8

God blesses us daily and life is such a wonderful and precious gift.

So I make today and every day a day for giving thanks for the special people who have played an importance role in my life. I give thanks for those who have nurtured me, listened to my dreams, and gently guided me along the way.

As I pray for others, my thoughts travel to South Africa and Abongile who is 10 years old. She and her family live in a community severely affected by the HIV and AIDS crisis. So many are blessed by the work World Vision accomplishes throughout the world.

I was truly blessed in November 2011 and rejoiced in making my 10<sup>th</sup> trip to Estelí, Nicaragua. Following Sunday worship, members of the Shalom Presbyterian Church presented me with a certificate and the most beautiful floral arrangement imaginable. My thoughts often return to the many treasured memories and special people. Tony Flauto was one of those remarkable Christians who blessed so many. It would have been his 10<sup>th</sup> trip.

Prayer: Dear Lord, may we all take time to savor each day of our journey. Fill us to over flowing with your love and we will be blessed. Prayers and blessings to all the members and friends of John Knox Church. May we live fully and freely by being the very best people we can be. Amen

Susan Beck

## April 3, 2012

Once a year, I have to go and have a series of 3 appointments for blood work. Each appointment takes about 3 hours and is administered through an IV at Fairview Hospital's Cancer Center. There is no discomfort, it is just time consuming. I find myself impatient and uneasy as I sit, hooked up, wanting to leave. Last week I was able to experience a blessing which began as an annoyance.

2 chairs over was a woman yakking on her cell phone. There was a TV set just inches from her face that was set near full-volume. She was blabbing on about who knows what, when all I wanted to do was catch a few zzz's while I received my treatment. All I could do was listen to her conversation. It's gonna be a long 3 hours—she isn't even hooked up yet!

She was telling the person on the other end about how anxious she felt with her first treatment. How would she feel physically? Who would be there to help her as she walked through this chapter in her life? Why was this happening to her? What if the treatment didn't work? My heart softened. She was afraid—lonely---uncertain.

A social worker came to talk with the woman 2 seats over. She hung up her call and turned off her TV so that they could engage in meaningful conversation. I turned to face them, curious and prayerful. The social worker talked with such kindness and compassion to the woman, who was alone for her very first cancer treatment. She explained that every person experiences different feelings along the journey. She showed her some literature on buying wigs and scarves. She talked about the many local support groups. She gave her phone number to the patient and said, "call me anytime, day or night. I am here for you."

The patient's phone rang again. The social worker excused herself and the woman took a call from a caring friend or family member, calling to check up on her. I closed my eyes and said a prayer. God, take this lady into your loving arms and help her body to heal. Show yourself to her in the kindness of others. Give her comfort and strength as she walks this difficult path.

The social worker reappeared, just as the woman hung up her call. In her arms were several beautiful care quilts for her to look at and to choose one for herself. With tears streaming down my face, I saw that God answered my prayer right then and there! He brought John Knox PC's blessing into that treatment room and wrapped it around her shoulders. ~Sally Schwarz

## April 4, 2012

### Mark 2:1-11 – L. Gordon Blasius

Years ago I illegally drove through a corner parking lot, in order to bypass a red light. My wife said: “I don’t think this is a good idea.” Well, neither did a North Olmsted Police Officer.

He borrowed my drivers license and walked back to his cruiser. I turned to Chris: “Hey, I think I know that officer.” That was confirmed when he returned my license, sharing four final words ... words that have been burned into my mind ever since: “Shame on you, Reverend.”

As we drove away without a traffic ticket I explained that this officer had been the Lay Director of a spiritual weekend at St. Brendan’s Catholic Church. At the end of the weekend, as we were saying good-bye and thank-you, I had shaken the officer’s hand. Then, a final thought he shared with me: “Reverend, if there is ever anything I can do for you, please let me know.” I had a need all right, and he answered me with forgiveness. That kindness changed my attitude about crossing corner parking lots!

The blessing of forgiveness reminds us of God’s desire to forgive and change our lives for the better! We know that God forgives again and again. But would that be an acceptable reason to knowingly sin or to willfully break His commandments? God is very patient, as the Scripture tells us, but don’t reject His Son, the ultimate forgiver!

**April 5, 2012**

## **THE THIRD SYMBOL**

Today is Maundy Thursday, so named because of Christ's "mandate" that we do this in remembrance of him. And we usually associate two symbols with this special day...the bread and the cup. If however we read John's account of the Last Supper, we see that there is a third symbol...a towel.

When we look at the story we realize that there are few incidents in the gospels which so clearly reveal the character of Jesus and show his love. Luke's account of the Last Supper tells us that the disciples were involved in a dispute as to who was the greatest. But they also had another concern.

The roads in Palestine were little more than dust, with a bit of manure thrown in. Therefore inside the door of every home was a large water pot where the lowliest servant would wash the feet of every guest. This was a basic necessity. But in this upper room there were no servants to do this menial task. And certainly after their fussing about position and prestige no one of the disciples was willing to humble himself to wash the feet of the others.

But into that awkwardness came Jesus. Jesus was willing to do what no one of them was willing to do...and he began one by one to wash those dirty, smelly feet.

And using the third symbol, the towel, he taught them and us, saying in effect, "I am giving you an example of how you ought to behave towards one another." And so, even as we have been blessed, we are to bless one another.

**April 6, 2012**

My very first hour of seminary I met two new friends. Joanie, Lorilee and I formed a small study group, meeting just off campus in Lorilee's apartment. As I walked into her home I saw this quote carved into her stone mantelpiece, *Dreams, long dwelt on, mount to prayers, prayers wrought in faith, come true.* It was one more confirmation to me of God's amazing work in my life, that He had brought me to this place and that He is holding my hand, guiding me through what sometimes seems like very murky waters.

From the moment I became a new creation in Christ I began to seek Him with all my heart. I could not get enough of God, so intense was my love for Him right from the start. I would think about Jesus driving in my car, missing exits as I drove to appointments and places. Sometimes I wondered what it would be like to spend everyday learning about Jesus, like seminary students do. I wondered what it would be like to go to a place where I could learn about God, worship Him and be with other people who were like me for the whole of each day. I would daydream about this, never thinking for a single moment this could be even a remote possibility. There were so many factors in my life that would make this an absolute *impossibility*. But it was a nice daydream, never-the-less. I never dared to share it with anyone because it was too ridiculous. But God knows our hearts, He hears dreams long dwelt on, prayers wrought in faith. He is a God of impossibilities.

Here I am now, a student at Ashland Theological Seminary. I must admit, the reality of seminary is not quite like my dreams. What this reality has shown me though is my absolute need for Jesus in every aspect and moment of my life and I know without hesitation that, *"The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."*  
~Lamentations 3:4-5

Debbie Federico

# April 7, 2012

## Lenten Devotion: for Holy Week Saturday

Bruce Steinetz, January 2012

### Title: Saturday: Blessed??

Scripture: Isaiah 53: 4-12; Hebrews 1: 1-4

We find ourselves observing Saturday of Holy Week. The scriptures are silent on what Jesus' Apostles were doing on that particular day. We know it was their formal day of worship, Sabbath. But it is probably fair to say that they were not worshiping in the Temple. Why you may ask? Well we know that when Jesus appeared in their midst on Sunday in the upper room, John (20: 9) states that the door was locked for fear of the Jews. On this Saturday, the Apostles were probably agonizing over how Jesus had been humiliated before Herod and in Pontius Pilate's court, completely disfigured in the scourging, spit-upon, forced to carry the cross to the point of collapse (probably due to the blood loss from his brutalization), and hung on the cross till death. This Saturday the Apostles were probably experiencing thoughts ranging from horror witnessing Jesus' treatment, confusion (how could God let this happen), abject fear thinking that they were next, and sadness that they had lost their best friend – probably the most influential person in their lives. They were probably strategizing how they were going to escape from Jerusalem and the Chief Priests -- alive. Peter might have been thinking what a failure this whole "Jesus-thing" had been: after all, wasn't the Messiah supposed to come in glory and save Israel??

But then comes Easter Morning and God's abundant Blessings on all of us come into focus: God's promises are true (though the Apostle's could not yet see it on Saturday), Jesus is raised from and crushes death, Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb that takes away our sin allowing us to be held blameless, Jesus is the bridge allowing us to dwell in God's holy presence for eternity, to weep and suffer no more. We are truly blessed.

### Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, as we ponder what your Son and his Apostles endured through this Holy Week some 2000 year ago, we thank you for the Blessing of having the perspective that Jesus' death was not in vain: that through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross our sins are forgiven and we have eternal salvation in Thy Kingdom. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen

## April 8, 2012 – Easter Sunday

The sun was setting on the day that changed the world forever. For Jews, evening was the beginning of the next day. The last supper the beginning of the day of crucifixion, the burial before evening on the second day, night falling on Saturday and by dawn, on the third day, Jesus was risen. The Gospel of John tells us that though they had experienced a miracle, the friends of Jesus were afraid of their fellow Jews and found themselves hiding behind locked doors. The fourth day had begun, yet despite the defeat of death and sin by the mighty act of God, nothing had yet changed in their behavior and I can't imagine they felt "blessed". A blessed person does not hide, nor cower behind his own fears. Yet there they are.

Jesus, who has already been to hell and back for their recalcitrant souls, is not dissuaded from entering. "Peace be with you." How nice if he would have stopped there. Just give me your peace Lord, and that will be enough. Finally I will feel blessed! But no, there is more, and in this more, they move from being friends of Jesus to disciples. Showing his wounds, Jesus adds ..."**as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.**"

Every day is our "fourth day", one day at a time. How shall we live as wounded and blessed, gathered in and sent out?

*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy upon me.  
Alleluia!*

Jessie MacMillan

## **LENTEN NIGHTS 2012**

Our annual Lenten Night series will begin on Wednesday, February 29 and run for five weeks. Dinner is at 5:30 for a small fee and classes begin at 6:30 and end at 7:45. Child care will be available and plans are being made for Lenten learning experiences for all children up through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. High school students are welcome to join adult classes or help with the younger kids. Join us as we celebrate Lent in our new space with our church family! Sign up on the Spiritual Growth bulletin board or the table in the Gallery by February 22.

### **The Hole in Our Gospel**

What if followers of Christ looked beyond church walls and worked together in addressing the needs in our world? What if we not only knew the statistics about poverty, hunger, and injustice but cared enough to act? What if we embraced the whole gospel of loving our God and loving our neighbors?

What if you signed up for this class and found yourself a part of making this vision a reality?

Text: *What does God Expect of Us? The Hole in our Gospel: The answer that changed my life might just change the world*, by Richard Stearns, President, World Vision U.S.

Presenter: Rev. Dr. Tom MacMillan

### **24 Hours That Changed the World:**

Walk with Jesus on his final day.

Sit beside him at the Last Supper.

Pray with him in Gethsemane.

Follow him to the cross.

Desert him. Deny him.

Experience the resurrection.

Video segments filmed in the Holy Land will be shown weekly.

Each class is designed to enable you to experience and understand the significance of Jesus' suffering and death in a way you never have before.

Text: *24 Hours That Changed the World*, by Adam Hamilton

Presenter: Jan Hart

## **Successful Aging or How to Live Your Life Abundantly Whatever Your Age**

There is much written about aging - how to age gracefully; how to enjoy your golden years; healthy aging – the list goes on and on. Join us for a series of classes that will address some of those choices. Experts in the fields of health insurance; lifestyle and living options; advanced directives; end of life choices and funeral planning will provide helpful information for individuals seeking answers for themselves as well as for those who function as caregivers for a loved one. Guest Speakers each session. Full description of each session with speakers listed is available at the Spiritual Growth Table in the Gallery. Coordinators: Gordon Blasius, Cathy Nichols and Connie Smith.

## **Sticky Faith**

If you're a parent of kids of any age, you've probably wondered a lot about your children's faith. How is their faith shaping their life? What will happen to their faith when they leave home? Most parents would give anything to anchor their children with a vibrant faith that 'sticks' and continues to mature into adulthood. Join us as we interact with Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum (video-based study) which will kick off discussion for our sessions and will aim to explore strategies and practical ideas to help parents encourage their children's spiritual growth, enabling them to develop a faith that sticks. To learn more check out <http://stickyfaith.org/parents>  
Facilitated by Rev. Susanne Bendoraitis

## **Exploring Theology Class**

We will be using a book by John R. Franke , “Barth for Armchair Theologians” as a way for disciples of Christ to more fully understand this important theologian, Karl Barth (1886-1968). If you are interested in this class, please obtain the book on your own (\$15 on Amazon.com) and come to the first class ready to discuss chapter 1.

Teacher: Rev. Jessie MacMillan