

Dear Members and Friends of John Knox Presbyterian Church,

Lent is a special opportunity. It is when we do a “spring cleaning” of our hearts and souls. During Lent we renew our commitment to God, reflect on our lives and respond to Jesus’ call for us to love and forgive one another.

This booklet, brought to you by the Spiritual Growth Committee and produced in the church office, is meant to guide your devotions during Lent with “local” stories of the signs of God’s love all around us. I hope you will find time to read, pray and reflect on the pages within and consider your response to the Author of all life.

You are invited to join us at JKPC for worship, classes, meals and fellowship during Lent or anytime. Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is a privilege to be your pastor and join with you on the journey of faith. May you be blessed with seeing how much God loves you and may you then love one another.

- Tom MacMillan
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**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8**

February 17, 2010

Teach me thy way, Oh Lord; I will walk in Thy truth. Psalm 86:11

For most of us, a vehicle is an essential part of our daily lives. And in order to navigate the roadways, we need road signs. We could also see these signs as navigational tools for our spiritual lives.

STOP and think before you act or speak. Your words and actions will have an effect on more people than you realize. Pray.

Use CAUTION when making decisions that will have a direct bearing on those you love. Pray for perspective.

The road ahead will be WINDING and have many UPS and DOWNS. Pray for guidance.

YIELD to the will of God. It may not be your choice, but it is the right one. Pray for strength.

When you feel sure that you are following God's leading, NO PARKING OR STOPPING. Pray for perseverance.

ONE WAY—God's way.

The next time you see a road sign, think about how its message could be a beacon in your spiritual life. And pray diligently.

Almighty and Ever present Father, teach us to see and follow the simple signs of Your will in our everyday lives. AMEN.

February 18, 2010

Signs of God's Love – as written by the Psalmist and revealed through the Heavens

In 2007 my sons and I spent a week canoeing on the French River in Ontario, Canada. We were with our Boy Scout Troop on a weeklong high adventure expedition through one of Canada's most picturesque canoe tracts. One night I left my tent to walk out to the river's edge to view the stars. To my amazement, the Milky Way galaxy was in full view, like I've never seen it before. It was a very defined band of cloudy white 'mist' traversing the sky. What an amazing sight! More amazing was to think that the band of star 'mist' I was viewing was but one of the many bands of star clusters that make up the spiral swirl of a galaxy. Within each band alone, there are billions of stars and stellar 'dust' wrought by the amazing work of our God.

Have you ever stood outside on a warm summer day and thought about what it would be like to stand in that very same place on a bitterly cold winter day? We are taught in school that the earth tilts (actually 23.45°) on its axis at varying times during its year-long journey around the sun, causing the northern & southern hemispheres of the earth to receive varying intensities of the sun's light (and heat). When the northern hemisphere is tilted toward the sun, we have summer and when it's tilted away, we have winter. The earth's tilting drives the growing seasons for the basics of life - our food supply, plants & animals and the like - things we must have to survive. In God's handiwork, he made it so that for half the journey around the sun, each hemisphere gets a favorable 'tilt' toward the sun to help grow food & provide extra light. One hemisphere 'basks' in the sun, while the other 'chills' in the cool – then it's reversed.

For those of us who live in the more temperate regions of the hemisphere, we are witnesses to the gradual shifting of the tilt, which manifests itself in the breathtaking beauty of fall colors and freshness of spring flowers blooming. Indeed, our Father's hand is that of a master craftsman and an artist!

I'm awestruck to think that we live in such a finely tuned (and fragile) solar system that only a few degrees of difference in the earth's tilt would mean the difference between burning up or freezing to death! In creating the heavens and the earth, God has given us a place to live that

February 18, 2010

is 'just right' with respect to the conditions needed to support and sustain life. Regularly we hear about the discovery of new solar systems and planets within our own galaxy. Without exception, we hear that the conditions are either incredibly cold or hot, or that they lack atmosphere or necessities to sustain life as we know it. The message we are hearing from space is that our planet is special, like no other we know! But then, haven't the scriptures been telling us this for thousands of years?

As I have become more attuned to what scientific discovery has contributed to our understanding of the physical world, I see more than ever that God's love for us is revealed by the awesome wonder of His creation. He created our universe and the planet on which we live. He provides for all of our needs and as if that weren't enough, He loves us so much that he delegates to us ruling over the work of His hands! The Psalmist knew this so well in writing in Psalm 8:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet

A micromanager God is not! For He has delegated much to us, out of His unwavering love for His creation. What an awesome responsibility that God has entrusted us with, but what love He has for us to entrust us with so much!

Soli Deo Gloria,
Bruce Knowlton

February 19, 2010

The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! Lamentations 3:22

I recently spent time with an elderly neighbor as he began to grieve for his just-departed wife of over sixty years. He was expressing the deepest of feelings as he spoke of the intense love he had for her. I thought to myself what a beautiful “Sign of Love.” This man articulated with the greatest degree of conviction that he could “release” her now to his faithful Lord who he knows loves her as much or more than he. Seeing God’s hand at work in this painful “earthly parting,” I reflected on just how much more than we humans can measure, does our Heavenly Father love us! I could see that my friend felt he had his wonderful wife here for many years, but God has her for an eternity and the true joy and peace he has is that he will one day be joined with them in heaven. With this faith he will live out his earthly life. God’s greatest gift of His love was that of His son Jesus. May we never forget that “Sign of Love” and His promises of eternal life!

Margaret Knestrick

February 20, 2010

What is Love?

One of the best ways to define or understand love is to look at the evidence of love around us.

We see God giving us His only begotten Son to hang in agony on a cross.

We see a retired pastor still visiting hospitals, still preparing meals for others, still singing God's praises and still loving his neighbor as himself.

We see the Christian brother bringing meals several times a week as a family faces a losing battle with cancer.

We see the wife or husband faithfully caring for a spouse who can no longer recognize them.

We see dedicated committee members doing the work of the lord day in and day out.

We see faithful woman and men preparing meals for a memorial service or feeding children on a Thursday night.

We see the homeless finding shelter in a church and congregation.

We see a little girl running to jump into the arms of loving adults on a Sunday morning.

We see coffee and goodies ready on a Sunday morning.

We see a sanctuary with banners, flowers, bread and juice.

We see youth dancing to the glory of God.

We see teachers and mentors sharing God's word.

We see the people of God being His hands and feet.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35

Lord, help us to be your disciples and to love one another.

Frank Sanders

February 21, 2010

Temptation

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against the stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. **Luke 4:1-13**

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, give birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.

James 1: 12-16

February 22, 2010

My mother-in-law, Mildred Ward, turned 102 in December. She is a woman of great faith and spends a great deal of time in prayer each morning, just talking to Jesus to get her day started. For several months before her 102nd birthday, she would wake up, realize that she was still alive and would then ask the Lord why she was still here. She told Him she was tired, that she had lived long enough and just wanted to leave the bonds of this world and go on to her reward in heaven. She would ask God each day: “Isn’t there any room for me in heaven with you? Why won’t you take me home?” She always shed tears after her prayers.

One morning after she had prayed, she opened her eyes and, through her tears, she saw a light above the dresser in the corner of her room. Within that light there was an outline of a face. A voice came out of the light and said to her: “Mildred, your time has not yet come.” Since that day, she doesn’t question why God has kept her here for so long. She knows that He has something yet for her to do. Even at 102 years of age, Mildred is a work in progress!

It isn’t easy to remember that God is always in charge. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us: **“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”**

Barbara Ward

February 23, 2010

Hurricane Katrina Mission Project – One Year Later

One of the good things about going on a mission trip to the same place, for consecutive years, is you can see how things have changed, year-over-year. In the case of the Hurricane Katrina Relief work, which our church has participated in with 3 different trips, there is much to witness regarding God's love and in seeing the 'fruit' that it has yielded for the people Mississippi's Gulf coast.

As the mission team from John Knox arrived in Gulfport, MS on Sunday afternoon, Feb. 22, 2009, I noticed a town full of life and humanity! It was a bright, warm & sunny day. There was lots of traffic, many new buildings and businesses, and most remarkable, the town was very clean. One would not have known that 4 years ago, these same streets were the scenes of utter destruction and despair, because its people had lost much and faced a lengthy test of their strength and will to rebuild. God's love for his people, as manifest by those whom God had called to be His 'hands & feet' was clearly evident that day.

Four plus years after the hurricane, examples of God's amazing love are everywhere. In particular, I noticed it from the vantage point of the residents we helped last year and the faithful members of Westminster Presbyterian, who hosted us while we worked that week. So much had been accomplished in the past 4 years! In the coastal Mississippi area, over 700 homes had been built by the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), 3,600+ homes gutted & repaired, and over 41,000 people had traveled to the areas to serve as God's 'hands & feet' in this effort. We were among the 13,000 volunteers that Westminster Church alone had hosted over the past 4 years while the work was being done. The Church, its members and the Site Manager, Lyn Lanier and Mission Facilitator Martha Lee McGahan-Bohn, have been living signs of God's love. These 2 people, among many others, remind me of what it must have been like for the disciples, Simon & Andrew, to drop their fishing nets and follow Jesus in his ministry. Four years ago, these people stopped what they were doing and 'followed Jesus.'

February 23, 2010

One of our projects was to work on a house for a woman whose story was so sad. Yet out of that despair, I witnessed God's love. The woman and her 3 kids were living in a FEMA trailer, after her home was destroyed by the storm surge. Shortly after moving into the trailer, it caught fire from an electrical short. Her oldest son dragged the 2 other kids out of the burning trailer, which burned completely to the ground. What the hurricane didn't destroy a month earlier, the trailer fire finished off, leaving her family with only the clothes on their backs.

Complications with funding for the house had dragged out the process for over 2 years! The local PDA office, at the urging of our Site Manager Lyn Lanier, had set a goal to get this woman's home finished and dedicated the next month. In spite of the work our group performed, hanging closet doors & installing the flooring, significant work remained with only 3 weeks to go before the dedication. After returning to Cleveland, we learned that by the grace of God, this goal was achieved and the woman moved into the house upon its dedication, March 22, 2009.

During this trip, we paid a visit to one of the homes we worked on last year. Again, I saw signs of God's love in one of these homes. When we left the house last year, the drywall had been 'mudded' but very little else had been done on the inside. What we saw on our visit 1 year later was a finished house that was occupied by a couple that had lovingly made it their home. God's love resonated through that couple as they showed us around the entire house, and were so gracious and kind to us on our visit. I was reminded that God's kingdom is built here on earth, one life at a time.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Bruce Knowlton

February 24, 2010

SIGNS OF LOVE

In Galatians 5:13-14 we are directed that “by love we serve one another, for all the law is fulfilled in one word. Even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” As Christians we should go one step further, loving and serving all our fellow men, even strangers whom we do not know.

Some years ago, a friend related a story of an incident involving a friend of his. The man was driving along the Ohio Turnpike and came upon a disabled vehicle, with a driver and passenger, along the side of the road. He stopped to offer help with whatever the problem was, and soon the occupants of the vehicle were on their way. The “Good Samaritan” had forgotten about this, and in a few days a large package was delivered to his home. Upon opening the box, he was surprised to find a portable TV set accompanied by a note indicating much appreciation, acknowledging his kindness and concern in their time of need. The note was signed – Perry Como. At the time of his help, he did not recognize the individual as being the singer Perry Como.

This to me represents an example of serving “Angels unaware,” with true Christian love toward those who are not always our neighbors.

Read Bible References: John 13:34-35
 II Corinthians 5:14

Herb Erskine

February 25, 2010

Signs of Love

A smile.

Tears. A

Hug. A

Visit. A

Phone call.

The gift of time. Being present during times of sorrow.

Forgiveness. Compassion. Listening. Being patient.

Sharing what you have. Being understanding. Family.

A silly card

on a bad day.

Grandparents.

Doing some-
thing you don't

like to be with
someone you do.

Mission work.

Offering a helping

Hand. Laughter.

Flowers. Puppies.

Babies. Friends.

Prayer. The cross.

These are all signs of love.

Connie Smith

February 26, 2010

It was May 2, 2009. It was an ordinary day. We were ordinary people doing things when we got word that my son Brandon had fallen and was in the hospital with a brain injury. Our lives were changed forever. Where was God? Where is He now and what is His plan? Those are age-old questions that we will never have the answers to, but the signs of God's love are everywhere. He is working through the thousands of people that have reached out to Brandon and are praying for him, some of whom have never met him. Yet, through their faith they know there is power in prayer. A friend of mine who I worked with years ago told me she had drifted away from God. She said she just didn't feel Him anymore and on the day she heard about Brandon, she went into church and looking up at the alter, felt his love stronger than ever. Sometimes it takes the shock of a tragedy to see the signs of God's love that we have forgotten to notice. Don't get me wrong, I still have days that I question why and where and how, and wonder what if, but I know that is just my human side as a mother talking.

I have a saying on my wall that says, "Faith . . . is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light." I look at that saying every day and know it is true.

I know it is God's love that gets me up each morning and takes me where I'm supposed to be, and it is God's love that will carry us through. The signs are everywhere.

Let us all live in such a way that those who know us but don't know God's love will come to know God's love because they know us.

Linda Roache

February 27, 2010

And now abideth faith, hope, charity these three; but the greatest of these is charity. 1 Corinthians 13:13

Nobody but Jesus could ever be called King of Love. He loved, He showed love, and He lived love. Out of love He forgave the sinful woman when all others wanted her condemned. Out of love He healed the sick and drove demons from the possessed. He gave a new commandment saying, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another". (John 13:34)

As most of you know, 2009 was a very difficult year for me health wise. It was very easy to become discouraged with hospitals, doctors, meds and etc. I received over 100 get well, thinking of you and birthday cards. The bulk of these cards were from my John Knox family. Signs of love were very evident. It was like having a spiritual GPS. They were there when I truly needed them.

I witnessed the same love last week when I went home to be with my sister and later attend her funeral. The love that was shown my family was overwhelming. Food came in by what seemed like tons. The Church ladies cooked a home-cooked meal to be served after the service. Love was everywhere you looked.

Love builds, embraces and sustains. This is all possible because of the love of our Heavenly Father.

Most gracious Heavenly Father, help us to love as you love, and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Amen

Jean Ormston

February 28, 2010

Rejection

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall. **Psalm 27**

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?” But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Luke 4:1-13

March 1, 2010

I have been thinking about signs of love and signs of God's love. Many things came to mind; a couple holding hands, a parent and child, the beauty of nature, but for me one thing clearly stood out, my dad. No doubt every father loves their children, but I don't know if every child feels perfect in their father's eyes, as I always have.

I remember, as a child, times when my father would discipline me. Usually a critical error would result in me being grounded, the ultimate punishment. I would be so angry at the loss of my freedom that I would sometimes say cruel and hurtful things to my dad. I am not certain that he ever heard any of those words. Not because I did not say them out loud, I did, but my dad would just refuse to acknowledge such behavior. My dad would go about the evening with life as usual, while I would go to bed mad.

My anger would keep me awake and slowly I would feel responsibility for my own behavior, then guilt and remorse for the things that I had said to my dad. In a poor attempt to preserve a small amount of pride, I would crawl next to my dad's bedroom door late at night and whisper "I'm sorry, dad." That was a moment that my dad never missed, not even once. My whisper would be followed by my dad's voice saying "what, baby, did you need something?" Every time, yes, every single time, I found myself at my dad's bedroom door late at night, he was sitting in bed reading his bible, and perhaps waiting for his child to return.

In my teen years, one of my friends gave my dad a nickname that she still uses today, Saint Frank. My dad simply does what is right, as defined in scripture, and he always has. I could not imagine a greater sign of love and a greater sign of God's love than my dad's love.

Cindy Busch

March 2, 2010

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

I first heard the call of God in an Alabama accent. Fred Lamar was my campus chaplain. Tall and lanky, white hair even back then; he was a Methodist minister with his heart bent to the voice of the Shepherd. A veteran many times over of international mission trips, civil rights marches and life-changing conversations with college students; Fred breathed love. When he talked about Jesus his eyes welled up. When he spoke of helping the poor a fire burned. When he preached on forgiveness, he looked at you like you were the only one in the room. He was a giant to me. One day I walked into the campus ministry office as a confused freshman. I walked out with a plan to go to Peru for the month of January and build houses. Fred loved worship. He invited students into the tiny chapel where we heard the Word, ate the bread and drank communion wine (he kindly finished off the chalice). He edited my first sermon and made me preach it. He moved me into ministry any way he could manage- Missouri, Florida, the Philippines, Indiana, Princeton Seminary. He performed our marriage and counseled us on love. Every time I step into the pulpit wearing a Guatemala stole Fred gave me, I think of bread and wine, building houses, speaking forgiveness and practicing peace. In January Fred laid down his burdens and went home to Jesus. He was a sign of love to me and many other college students at DePauw University.

Lord, help me to love with boldness and compassion today.

Jessie MacMillan

March 3, 2010

From the seeds that grow roses in our backyard garden, to the loving embrace my mother bestows on me every night before I go to sleep, God is everywhere. He is my hope, my faith, my guidance, my love. He is everything in me and around me. He is the crisp fall smell that relieves you after smelling the tainted stench of pollution. He is the loving family who cares for you. God is everywhere.

There is one example, one horrible yet magnificent story that I can relay about how our Lord saved one of the most precious things in my life. My older sister, my best friend, was sick, in pain and dangerous surgery was the only answer. Every night I prayed for her, every night I cried. I begged our dear Lord, "Father, please protect her. Please watch over her..."

I prayed for her recovery, begged God to help her- to watch over her until she was alright. In my mind I didn't know if she ever would be. Time seemed to go in slow motion. I couldn't focus in school; I never wanted to spend time with my friends. God was the only person in my life I really wanted to speak to. And he came through.

Weeks later, I got the news she was coming home. She was alright, fully healed besides a metal bar lodged in her chest. This minor setback, however, didn't stop me from thanking my Lord in relief, thanking Him for all He did for her – for my parents – for me.

Today she is back to her bossy wonderful self and I would never change anything about her. She is my gift, the only gift He ever needs to give me. He saved her and I will always bow down to Him and thank Him for that. I can never even hope to repay Him.

So before you doubt our Lord, walk outside. Look at the sky, the grass, the birds. Then turn and look to your family -- your spouse, your parents, or in my case, your sibling. And you'll see Him there, standing beside them, His hands on their shoulders, always protecting them.

Shelly Koski

March 4, 2010

Read Romans 5:1-8

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

I have known those words and believed them since I was young. What a blessing to know there is someone who cares and watches over us. Through the years I have found rest and peace in spite of many trials and tribulations. He has offered me new beginnings when I was lost. What great signs of love I have received.

Because he loves us, he is always waiting to welcome us into his presence, accepting us no matter how we are. What a wonderfully loving, patient Father is our God. Isn't it awesome to realize he loves us just as we are?

God pursues us to participate in this love relationship because it is the foundation of life. This love is everlasting, unchanging, and forever. We can each consider ourselves a loved person, not because of our circumstances or situations but simply because God loves us perfectly, totally and eternally. He keeps pouring this love into our hearts and gives us the Holy Spirit, who not only transforms our thinking, but makes God's love real.

So when times get tough I close my eyes and return to that quiet place I knew long ago. “My child, I care about you. I love you unconditionally. Trust me. I love you.”

Susan Beck

March 5, 2010

Love Made Visible

When I was in high school and college...just a few years ago...I attended a number of youth work camps sponsored by the United Presbyterian Church of North America, the denomination I grew up in. Work camps were a new idea back then and several were held each summer for a week or two each. I attended work camps in Idaho, Michigan, Tennessee, New York, Colorado, Vermont and other places. In fact, I believe I attended more camps than anyone else in those early days.

The overall theme of those events was "Love Made Visible". One of the brochures still in my files from almost 60 years ago refers to "The thrill of working for nothing...where Work, Worship, Study and Fellowship are blended together into a practical demonstration of Christian love made visible..."

And it was true. As Christians we talk a lot about loving one another, and that's important. But when we put our love into action, that's even better. As one work camper quoted in the brochure put it, "Here at work camp I found the difference between talking about Christianity and doing something about it." John Knox Presbyterian Church has caught that vision. We have sent both youth and adults to places such as Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and all over the United States. And this is not just once-in-a-while...this happens several times every year. We continue to hear from the participants that their lives will never be the same again.

I am honored to be a part of a church that knows the value of "Love Made Visible." Let us support such signs of love with our prayers, our gifts, and perhaps even our participation!

Al Hart

March 6, 2010

Infant baptism is a sacrament of the Presbyterian Church, and the importance of that ceremony evokes an attitude of quiet awe. A child of Christ-believing parents is welcomed into the family of God in this ceremony.

It is quiet time until our beloved Pastor Tom takes the child from its father's hands and carries him or her down the entire length of the center aisle proclaiming: "Look at your family! They are welcoming you this morning and will love you forever!" Often, Tom selects a special person sitting on the aisle and places the baby carefully in those hands for a moment. Yes, we are all a part of a blessed spiritual family!

Without a doubt, one of the highlights of this family-welcoming comes when Tom brings the baby to the Chancel Choir. We can admire him close-up! That's the moment we vocalize our joy: "Ah....." We are close to God's beautiful creation, and the channels are open for love to flow.

At a recent baptism, the six month old boy fell asleep during the opening minutes of worship and remained that way throughout the baptismal ceremony. Even Tom did not waken him when he deposited three generous handfuls of water on his head ("In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...")

However, something happened earlier in the service that caught my eye and touched my heart. The family had its back to the choir while facing Tom and answering the important questions prior to baptism. A brother, perhaps 5 years old, stood between his mother and father, and they had joined hands as a family does when it stands together at an important moment. Then I noticed a little movement. The 5- year-old was reaching as high as he could, in order to touch the baby's hand. He had to stand on his tip-toes, but he did it! And in that moment, I felt that love was there and would be there in countless years to come.

LGB

March 7, 2010

Beating Burnout

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord. **Psalm 27:1-6**

March 8, 2010

Thanksgiving at Procop House

Procop House is a former convent that operates as a housing facility for men coming out of homelessness and on the long journey back to independent living. Opened in 2005, over 90 men have lived there for various periods of time while they get their lives together – materially, financially, and spiritually.

In 2008, Tony Flauto brought some friends and family down to Procop House to prepare and serve a Thanksgiving Dinner that was simply remarkable in so many ways - lots of good food, many “friends,” hungry residents and lots of love – going both ways! Tony did it again this past year, but there were notable differences.

For one, there were several board members in attendance where there had been none in 2008. This demonstrated to me that we have an increasingly committed board of directors who realize that our is about making and fostering life-long relationships and is about the love one finds in a family – a family of faith. Secondly, this past year there were more volunteers. Gracious hospitality and abundant love were in great supply!

Lastly, many more alumni were present – men who had successfully moved out of Procop House. Word had gotten out about the event (and the good food!) and they were proud enough of their experience at Procop House to not only return, but to bring their family members as well. In fact, Janeil brought his children and his grandchildren!

In all, we had over 55 people in attendance. We all sat at tables arranged in a big horseshoe and praised the Lord, ate heartedly, sang songs, and loved one another unconditionally – just like the family of faith that we are. Now, that is truly heaven-sent!

Thanks to all and let’s do it again in 2010!

Jeff Nichol

March 9, 2010

The Final Priority

by Charles R. Swindoll

Somebody copied the following paraphrase a 30-year veteran missionary. With her husband, she was on her way to another tour of duty at Khartoum, Sudan. No one knows who authored it, but it captures the essence of the greatest essay on love ever written.

“If I have the language ever so perfectly and speak like a pundit, and have not the love that grips the heart, I am nothing. If I have decorations and diplomas and am proficient in up-to-date methods and have not the touch of understanding love, I am nothing. . .

If I am able to worst my opponents in argument so as to make fools of them, and have not the wooing note, I am nothing. If I have all faith and great ideals and magnificent plans and wonderful visions, and have not the love that sweats and bleeds and weeps and prays and pleads, I am nothing.

If I can heal all manner of sickness and disease, but wound hearts and hurt feelings for want of love that is kind, I am nothing. If I write books and publish articles that set the world agape and fail to transcribe the word of the cross in the language of love, I am nothing. Worse, I may be competent, busy, fussy, punctilious, and well-equipped, but like the church at Laodicea---nauseating to Christ.”

How about you and me committing ourselves to a life like this, a life that amounts to something rather than nothing. Each new day God brings our way is a fresh opportunity.

vaya con Dios

Bob Hughes

March 10, 2010

Love Is Everywhere

I see love everywhere and every day. As I look out on our congregation on Sunday mornings, I see faces of people who love one another and love this church so much. I had the privilege of reading a biography of a former member of our church whom I became acquainted with at Bradley Bay Assisted Living. It told of her life, her family, her relationships with other people, and her love of John Knox. Jean did so much to nurture and educate the youth (and I'm sure the adults as well) of our church and it was a joy for me to read her story. As I read the article, I thought of all the members sitting in the pews who have done so much and given so much time, energy, finances, and love to our church. I would so enjoy knowing all their stories as well. For some of them it is now a time for them to enjoy the fruits of their labor. For some it may be a time in their life (no matter what their age) to get involved or get involved again. Through my work with the Nominating Committee, I have seen this happen and what a blessing it is for not only that person, but for me to be able to give them an opportunity to serve once again. I thank God for all the wonderful people at John Knox and all that they do and have done in love to make this such a special church. For many just their presence is a gift.

Prayer: Dear God, I thank you for those that minister to our church in many ways. Their love for you is shown in so many ways – they must know how much you love each and everyone of them.

Jan Hart

March 11, 2010

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Matthew 5:4**

In my front yard, I have a weeping cherry tree. Today its sticks are bare and not much to look at. But I cherish that tree as it is one of the most authentic signs of love I've ever received.

A group of friends gave it to me after my mother's death in late April 2009. The tree was at my house when I arrived home from the week away. The stress and sadness of that week of arrangements and grief melted away when I pulled into my driveway and saw a big tree with an even bigger root ball wrapped in burlap propped against my front steps. I had to laugh.

"We were doing puzzles in the living room with the girls and a woman opened the door, told us she was leaving a tree for you and left," my mother-in-law reported. "Later she came back with a card, but we lost the card."

So I still don't know all the women involved with the tree but I can guess. Remembering the whole story makes me smile and feel deeply loved. Months later, I asked for a list so I could send thank-you-notes but was told it wasn't necessary and nobody could really remember everyone involved anyway.

Wow. Friends thought of me in my time of need, prayed for me, grieved with me and then bought me a tree. What a remarkably appropriate sign of love for me, a nature lover. My guess is that it was several of the hyper-busy women I know who carved space out of their overscheduled lives to buy me a tree.

I was blessed in my mourning with a weeping cherry tree. It is a truly comforting sign of love.

Megan Malone

March 12, 2010

My husband's aunt, Aunt Judy, was an independent person who lived on the coast. She was into cross stitching and had her own business. Indeed, that was a portion of her business; she sold counted cross stitch patterns of Victorian houses of her own design. Aunt Judy was not really "close" to me or even my generation. She had traveled much. I have not. She was a hippie in the 60's. I was born in the 60's. She was artistic and painted pictures of thatched cottages in England and painted watercolors in France.

I was surprised when for no apparent reason Aunt Judy gave me (and two of my sister-in-laws) a gold embroidery needle. Such a gift must have cost her much. It was a sign of her love and generosity that until that moment I really didn't know existed; well at least towards me. Good manners demanded acceptance in a note of thanks, probably best if written on one of her note cards that she designed.

I know of another extravagant gift...a gift that cost the Father much: The gift of salvation in faith through Jesus the Christ whereby Jesus willingly suffered and died for our sakes. Such an intimate and personal gift demands acceptance. It's not enough to know who He is and it's more than just bad manners to not acknowledge the gift. If I hadn't sent a note to Aunt Judy, she would have thought that I didn't want or appreciate her expensive gift. How much more do we need to acknowledge, share and eternally give thanks for the ultimate gift of life in Christ Jesus!

Heavenly Father, thank you for your sacrifice of love; help us to be truly grateful for that gift. Come into our hearts and mold us to your will. In the name of the one who gave Himself for us. Amen

Lisa Kurak

March 13, 2010

God's Love

God's love can be seen in many places. God is all loving and all powerful and oftentimes determines the outcome of events in our lives. God's love can create miracles or simply guide us through our days. God's love was strongly present two weeks ago when the tragic earthquake in Haiti struck, killing many people.

You may wonder how God's love could have possibly shown through the dark shadows and rubble that currently cover Haiti- given the fact that thousands of people died, but in a situation like this, it is important to remember that God always displays love and compassion for the human condition.

An expectant-mother died during the Haitian earthquake, however through the love and graces of God, her son was brought into this world despite his unlikely chance of survival. God showed his love by protecting this infant child and allowing doctors to safely deliver this infant so that he can, one day, begin life the way God would intend.

God's love and compassion can be seen everyday -- it is always there, whether we look for it or not. God's love can create miracles or simply guide us through our days- but whatever the outcome, it is important to recognize the presence of God's love in our daily lives.

Andrew Knowlton

March 14, 2010

SIGNS OF LOVE

I don't have to go too far to see the Signs of Love...It's abundantly available right here at JKC.

With a leader like Tom MacMillan who delivers sermons, telling the multitude of stories in the Bible like you are actually in the moment and touching and affecting us to our cores; to the members who are always there for each other. That is Love at work.

Tom, your sermons have touched me in every possible way one can imagine . . . from the tears that have traced my eyes to the laughter and smile on my lips; I commend you and thank you from the bottom of my heart. I don't think I am alone in this judgment of your talent- you are truly blessed. The love you show is uncanny. The combination of you and Jesse is a dream come true- last but not least Al is yet another amazing addition.

Thank you for being the teacher that you all are, with the love, devotion and compassion that you all demonstrate.

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 3:16-19

Afsaneh Pantani

March 15, 2010

For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever and His faithfulness continues to each generation. Psalm 100:5

Shortly before Christmas I was looking at a stack sympathy cards from last Christmas time when my dad passed away. If there were ever “signs of love,” they were these cards and messages, many of them from members of the John Knox congregation.

Not long after looking at these cards, my mom told me she received a letter from the Kemper House in Olmsted Falls, where my dad stayed the last months of his life. The letter said he is still remembered fondly and talked about at the Kemper House.

Yes, even in times of sadness, especially at Christmas time, we could see many signs of love from those who knew my dad. It was such an inspiration to hear the number of people who knew and took care of him in his final days and how much they loved him.

We always said my dad’s first love was baseball, a game played so well at the Minor League level. But I think a more important love he had was a love of people that was returned in people’s love of him. As I look back through the years, I remember the numerous occasions that my dad took an interest in me and always gave his help and encouragement. It was help that I must admit I not always accepted with open arms, but still appreciated.

So, it is great to know that even in times of sadness, that we can see many signs of love. The Lord gives us many signs of love, if we would open our eyes and see it.

Prayer—Dear Lord, thank you for showing us the signs of love, even in times when we are sad and mourning the loss of a loved one. Help us to open our eyes and see the signs of love you show us every day.

Bill Stewart

March 16, 2010

Love your neighbor as yourself. Galatians 5:13-14

I have a loving neighbor, Linda, who is always giving me a hug or sharing her cookies or sending over some soup or special dessert that she has made. In turn, I look after her cat when she goes to visit her daughters.

Then there are my other neighbors, Tom and Isabel King, who always bring me things from Scotland. They are from Glasgow. They know my Dad was from Stevenston, Ayrshire, Scotland. He was born there and came to this country at the age of 22. In turn, they give me their love.

Then there are the members of the John Knox Congregation who give me their love. The choir, the Bible study, my faith-at-work group, and the John Knox Presbyterian Women's Board. Then on Mondays and Fridays, I walk with Kay Mellott and Jean Leavell at the Great Northern Mall. We meet many John Knox members at the mall.

Then there is my "All Ohio Chapter of 99s" who are great friends. These women pilots and I fly to many airports throughout the state. For one who is an only child, I have many friends and I feel the warmth of their love. May God bless ou with that love!

Sylvia Sears

March 17, 2010

Dear Friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:7-8

There are signs of love everywhere at John Knox Church! There are the obvious signs – you can't enter the sanctuary and find a seat on a Sunday morning without being greeted by someone offering you a genuine smile or a hug. Everyone is encouraged to join a Faith-at-Work group where you are quickly enveloped in the love of your small group. There are the Bible study groups and prayer groups that build strong bonds of love within their members. There is also a tremendous outreach program where love is shown to those in need within our city, our country, and throughout the world.

But one of my favorite signs of love is the Stephen Ministry program. Stephen Ministry is a distinctively Christian ministry in which we provide quality one-to-one care to meet the needs of people experiencing a wide range of circumstances or crises. Not only have I been blessed with the love of the fellow Stephen Ministers, but also, I have been blessed with the most incredible care receivers! God's never-ending sign of love, the Holy Spirit, was present during our meetings, allowing me to show love to each of my care receivers. It was easy to reach out to each with a sincere love, respect, care and understanding of their needs. The Holy Spirit was there for each lady as she found the courage and strength to face and conquer her fears. And, God's sign of love fell upon me throughout these caring relationships. His Spirit filled me, instructed me, and nurtured me – what a joyous feeling!

Peggy Vegh

March 18, 2010

Each morning when I awake, I have an instant sign of love through the morning hug Wayne gives me and through the happy greeting our dog Sandy gives me.

Not long after the day has begun and I start to get involved in all of those things that make my live so busy, I forget about those signs of love which were extended to me earlier. Those signs just flee from me if I don't make a conscious effort to hang onto them. I really have to work at keeping them close to my heart and mind. Most of the time I can keep the memory of those signs fresh by meditating, by reading my Bible and by letting God be in charge each day. I try to do this before I get involved in the day's activities.

That time spent in the early morning also helps me recognize all of the signs of love extended to me during the day by friends and loved ones and helps me extend my signs of love to them instead of keeping them in my heart and mind.

Each day I ask God to give me the love and wisdom to see and to give the signs of love where ever I go.

Myra Hamilton

March 19, 2010

Miguel and Rosalba

A group of us from NE Ohio had the privilege of partnering with Miguel and Rosalba to build a Habitat Home in Guatemala last year. Miguel would leave his home early (3am) to pick coffee and return in the afternoon and help build the home where his sister and her family would be living. Habitat is structured around “sweat equity” so Miguel was putting in the time for his sister while she sold tacos. Maura’s husband was working “up north.”

Sign of Love #1: Miguel’s afternoons were a real “labor of love.” He already lives in a Habitat house that he built and does not need to put in anymore “ayuda mutual.” Most of us have the image of Central Americans practicing the afternoon siesta and if anyone deserved a rest it was this hard working young man. But without missing a beat he would pick up concrete “bloques” and keep the work progressing on his sister’s home. He has a wonderful smile and thanked us profusely for helping with his sister’s home.

Sign of Love #2: Miguel’s wife Rosalba looked forward to our arrival each day for more “EEENglish lessons” as we worked. I always have a microcassette recorder to play back the voices of the children who gather around. Rosalba would giggle proudly listening to herself pronouncing the new words with childlike delight. Miguel would lean over from the scaffolding, smile broadly and praise Rosalba for her “Eeenglish” so I asked him to say a few words into the recorder and he shyly sang a love song to her that I still have on tape. Miguel’s life is filled with challenges and se backs but he loves his family and expresses that through his hard work and sweet song.

Lord, help us to be more childlike in our love for You and for your people, never missing an opportunity to express that love no matter how tired we may be. Amen

Cathy Nichols

March 20, 2010

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Isaiah 60:1

I have the privilege of working with a wonderful family who needs help as they struggle to raise their child with a life-long developmental disability. We worked together on issues with a lot of success and I was so pleased at the progress they made. There were still personal struggles, to be sure, but God was surely blessing our work together.

Then one day I got a phone call. The mom had taken an over-dose. Somehow, those personal struggles were just too overwhelming, the pit was too dark and deep for her to see the light. In my job I often see people in so much pain, that at times I find it hard to understand why God allows such incredible suffering.

Over time, the mom improved and the family struggled together to come back from this devastating episode and the emotions and conditions that brought them to that point. One day in my office, while preparing to go to their home for a visit with the mom, I had an overwhelming feeling from the Lord to share my faith with her somehow, perhaps by praying with her. I had never done anything like this and since this was my job, I could *not* imagine doing it now! God was in the process of teaching me a lot about trusting Him. I was afraid, all right, but I wanted to obey Him, so He made it easy for me!

Fast forward to late this past summer - this same family wanted to have their son baptized. They realized a full immersion baptism, as is the custom in their church, (yes, the mom is now going to church!), was not an option. Instead she chose a special "blessing" and together we developed a plan. For my part I would create a

March 20, 2010

“social story” to help the boy understand and prepare for what would happen at his big event with God.

Eventually the day of special blessing came and it was aptly named because it was not only a special blessing being given to the boy, but a special blessing given to all who witnessed it that day. The pastor spoke of baptism and its meaning and explained to the congregation what was about to take place. She called the boy and his family forward. We all held our breath as the boy came up, then ran back, then slowly moved back to the front of the church to sit in the first pew. His family came to sit on both sides of him.

I was given the great honor of being asked to sit with the family. I'm sure it was the greatest honor I have ever received in my career, because what I saw that morning was lives being changed forever; I saw God's glory being shone in human lives; and I saw God's amazing love for us. I had a front row seat to God's wondrous, redemptive work.

I realized then, that *we* are God's glory here on earth when we put our trust in Him and allow Him to take control and transform our lives. This is the power of His love for us.

I continue to work with this family and to be touched in personal ways by this experience. I continue to see first-hand how they are moving forward in God's love and care, putting their trust and faith in the only One who could ever save them and has always loved them.

The witness of lives transformed by God – this is His glory, His holy work. And He has allowed *me* to see it and even gives me the great privilege to participate in it. Amazing love! How could I ever love Him enough for all that He has given me?

Debbie Federico

March 21, 2010

Forgiveness

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

I am He
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins. **Isaiah 43:18-19, 25**

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that
everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have
eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn
the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.
John 3:16-17

March 22, 2010

God's love is everywhere! I know that I frequently walk through my days oblivious to this fact. It is so easy to get wrapped up in our day-to-day lives that we forget to look for the signs of His love for us. I must consciously remind myself that having the opportunity to get out of bed and go to a job that helps to support those I love is a gift rather than an unwelcome obligation. Doing household chores feels like punishment when, in fact, it should be a reminder of the many things with which my family and I have been blessed. Experiencing the tragedies of life should serve as a reminder that we were never promised that life would be easy, but that God would always be present, a fact that is incredibly difficult to remember when we feel that our hearts are being broken by events that we can't understand.

It's so much easier to see God's love in the BIG events in our lives. Over the past several years, our family has celebrated many milestones – my parents' 50th wedding anniversary, the high school graduations of two of our children, the celebration of our son's Eagle Scout accomplishment, and the recent engagement of our daughter. We look forward to our own 25th wedding anniversary in 2010 with an awareness that many marriages don't survive to see such celebrations. While we don't anticipate tragedies and sadness, they are sure to visit our lives; my hope is to remember God's love in the midst of them.

I believe that the incredible contrasts we experience throughout our lives offer us the opportunity to be grateful for all that God's love has to offer in the big events as well as those so small that they are likely to go unnoticed.

Laurie Knowlton

March 23, 2010

Signs of God's Love

You really don't have to go far, or look far, to witness God's love. This morning, whilst we were having breakfast in a restaurant, three very young children ran up to their grandma and greeted her with a big "hello" and kisses all round. Then when grandpa came in, the same scenario. There was obviously a lot of love in this family. It gave ME a warm, fuzzy feeling. Our grandchildren -- 12 and 14 -- always greet us with a hug and a kiss and are not afraid to show their love; at their age, this is quite precious. When we leave them it's the same ritual plus "I love you."

When we receive and give, "thinking of you" cards, this is a sign of love via the mail. We certainly had love in abundance when I had a bout with cancer - cards, prayers, visits, food and a ton of prayers. No wonder that I got well and am still chugging along 13 years later. Bill also had a lot of love and caring with prayers, visits and cards during his recent surgery.

Our quilters make beautiful quilts for cancer survivors and we pray over them every Thursday and tell recipients that they are made with love and prayer. I'm sure God has His hand in the beautiful flowers that bloom and the songs the birds sing, and pets who show their love and attachment to their owners.

Anyone who comes on Sundays for worship instantly sees and feels the love that goes on with the congregation. Handshakes, and hugs and kisses abound. If you know anyone who is short of love, invite them to John Knox. There's plenty of love to go around!

In Christ's Name,
Shirley Kasay

Dear Lord: I thank you so much for all the love and caring You bestow on me and many others. I pray that everyone is open to your love. It is the BEST medicine, and it's free! Amen.

March 24, 2010

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease, where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge it will pass away...and now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:8, 13

I'm a bad girl gone good. There, I said it.

As a teen, I decided that I needed attention. The best way to grab the eyes and ears of everyone around me was to do things that weren't always acceptable. I climbed out my bedroom window. I played the music too loud. I followed the wrong crowd. I shamefully stole from people who trusted me. I cheated my way through assignments. I experimented. I tested others' patience. I fell to temptation. My self-worth was nonexistent.

I now realize that the signs of God's love along the way made a pathway to where I am today: wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend. God's love has held the door open when it should have slammed shut over and over again. He trusts me with a beautiful family who hold me lovingly even through difficulty and challenge. His love gives me strength even when I feel I have none. His love comforts me when I feel uncertain.

It's now His attention that I seek. His love has taken me through the terrible teens, and guides me each day as I raise my family. His love is the center of my marriage. His love shows me the way.

Thank you, God, for your unconditional love.

Sally Schwartz

March 25, 2010

One of my memories from childhood is all the times my parents took my brothers and me to the zoo. We had a membership, so we would go quite often especially in the summer time.

By the time I was about eleven years old the zoo was no longer fun for me. When my brothers wanted to go my parents had to drag me every step of the way. However, the zoo has recently become more meaningful to me. A few years ago, I went to the Brookfield Zoo in Brookfield, Illinois for the first time in about seven years. Visiting all the animals from all around the world it finally hit me: God is awesome! I could not get over how all of the animals He has created are so different, beautiful, and even weird. Sometimes I wonder what the Lord was thinking when He created certain animals.

Take for example the giraffe. Why did he make them so awkward? Enormous necks, small heads, skinny and knobby knees, and, purple tongues! Why *purple*? Although I am sure a zoologist could explain some of the questions as to why the giraffe is the way that it is, I still am awed by the God that created it all. Now, going to the zoo not only is fun but it also serves a certain devotional purpose. When I am at the zoo looking at God's creation, the beautiful, the amazing, *and* the strange, I can sense the love the Lord has for me and for all of his children.

While our God is one we cannot see, I think He is clever in making His presence known. By leaving His people all kinds of animals, plants, oceans, trees, and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, I know that the Lord loves us more than I can possibly comprehend.

Claire Knowlton

March 26, 2010

Sign of Love

The worst year of my life was in 1979. In one year, my parents died, I went through a painful divorce, my child was molested by a man in my former church, and I was hooked on diet, depression, and sleeping pills and having frequent panic attacks.

I wasn't sure there was a God and if there was, I was sure he hated me. My friend took me to a Catholic charismatic mass. At communion I prayed, "Please, if there is in fact a God and you don't want me to commit suicide and take my child with me (I had no family left) then send me a sign. After mass a strange looking man with a 20" x 30" picture in his hands walked up to me and said, "God told me to bring this picture to church and when I saw you – God told me to give it to you." The picture was of Jesus knocking at a door with no handle on the outside. Only the person on the inside could open the door to let Jesus in. Was this the sign?

A week later at Christ the King Church in North Olmsted (where a friend told me to go to be prayed for) the pastor started and stopped the beginning of the sermon 3 times. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit is telling me there is a lady here who is suicidal and needs to learn how to commit her life to Jesus Christ in order to have peace in her life." I knew it was me! I followed his instructions. I told Jesus, "I give you total control of my life – my child – my money – my house (which I was desperately trying to keep) – my lifestyle – everything. I asked forgiveness for my sins and totally committed myself to Jesus. A peace came over me instantly and I physically felt all burdens lift off my shoulders. I felt so happy and my life changed dramatically. I could feel Jesus was constantly with me and loved me and was on my side and not against me.

In a couple days, during which time I was devouring the New Testament and Psalms, I woke up and felt Jesus say, "Take no more pills." I never had a minute of withdrawal and I was free of the horrible addiction. I still live in my home which I was sure I would lose.

You just can't out give God.

Ruth Hau

March 27, 2010

A Widow's Love

She was a young widow, caring for five children and working three jobs, but she was managing to pay the bills and keep her family together. This struggling widow had one more major problem. It was the middle of winter in the early 1960s and she needed a new furnace. What was she going to do? She had no savings, no extra money and no credit line.

Her 14-year old son had a paper route and had saved up some money. She really had no option but to ask him for the money. So she asked him for \$500. He was willing to lend her the money, but he wondered if his mom could ever repay him. After all, it was everything he had saved, and he had his heart set on that money for a college education. She assured him that she would repay him, but the reality was that trying to care for five children and paying a mortgage was demanding every penny she had and she wasn't sure she could ever repay him, but she knew she had to try. Gradually, over the next year she somehow repaid him every penny she had borrowed.

By now you may be wondering who this widow was. Well, it was my mom and she really did repay every penny to me. I can't imagine how she did it or how a mom could have expressed more love and devotion to her family and to me, than she did, and at a more difficult time in her life. She was widowed at the age of 29 and left with almost no income when dad died. She managed to raise all of us and is doing quite well at the tender age of 80.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for so many blessings and for a mother's love that inspires us to express the love that you've taught us to give. Amen.

Greg Danchuk

March 28, 2010

Signs of His Love

As a young child I was blessed to have parents and grandparents who taught me to appreciate nature. My grandfather taught me to love the sunrise, the smell of new grass, the warmth of the sun on a summer day and the sounds and smells of autumn leaves. We experienced all this and more as we walked the mile and half to our favorite fishing lake. It was only later that I understood that all of this was a gift from God to his people. It also gave me a measure of “wanderlust” as an adult, wanting to experience all the sights and sounds of His wonderful world. As a result, this past summer I planned a dream trip across these United States, traveling alone, and seeing the many wonders it had to offer. I took my time, with no schedule to adhere to. I became excited and shared my plans with friends and surprisingly they expressed fear and concern. I began to respond, “I have a good car, cell phone, GPS and the Good Lord, what more do I need?” People said, “I guess so” or “Okay”, but didn’t share my enthusiasm.

As I prepared for the trip, I remembered Psalm 56:4, “God, whose word I praise, in God I trust: I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” As I traveled across 14 states, 4500 miles over 5 weeks, never once was I afraid. One neat outcome of restating my philosophy about the car, cell, GPS and the Good Lord to people across the states were the numbers who responded with “Praise the Lord” or “What else do we need?” We would then enter into a conversation about what the Lord had done for each of us and I was sent on my way with a “God Bless.” I remember being deep in a canyon in New Mexico at 7:30 in the morning. The red rock was glowing, the green trees brilliant against the backdrop of blue sky and I did not see another person or car for more than an hour. I briefly thought about what I would do if I had trouble, but I had no fear. I was singing “How Great Thou Art” at the top of my lungs with no concern of offending anyone and thinking about Psalm 118:24 – “This is the day the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.” God has a sense of humor also, for during the rendition a freak hail storm came with nickel size hail in the midst of the sun and blue sky. I saw signs of his love for us in this world through fresh eyes – the sunrises, sunsets, waterfalls, animals, wildflowers, mountains, snow in July and geological wonderlands such as the Badlands. I enjoyed every minute and every mile and knew He was with me. I am truly blessed.

Lillian Predota

March 29, 2010

Signs of God's Love

Signs of God's love surround me
as I go from day to day.
I look at the smile on someone's face
and hear kind words they say.

Signs of God's love surround me
in the goodness that I see.
A helping hand, a friend who calls
to say hello to me.

Signs of God's love surround me
in my pictures from the past.
The memories of my loved ones
I know will always last.

Signs of God's love surround me
as I watch the students learn.
Their looks of wonder, eyes aglow
while waiting for their turn.

Signs of God's love surround me
as I see my granddaughter's face.
Her little smile, her bright blue eyes
put me in a heavenly place.

Signs of God's love surround me
as I come to church to pray.
The warmth and friendship from John Knox
seems to always come my way.

Signs of God's love surround me
as I feel God's presence near.
There's a calm and self assurance
that there is no need to fear.

Signs of God's love surround me
in the wonders that I see.
The beauty found in nature
All laid out for you and me.

Gretchen Russell

March 30, 2010

The Road of Life

At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president, I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him.

But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life was like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring -- the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on!

Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!" I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure, and when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. I gained love, peace, acceptance and joy - gifts to take on my journey, My Lord's and mine. And we were off again.

He said, "Give the gifts away. They're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but he knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ. And when I'm sure I just can't do it anymore, He just smiles and says..."Pedal."

Author Unknown
Submitted by Janet Wilson

March 31, 2010

And a little child shall lead them. Isaiah 11:6

Last November, a dear friend lay dying after an 11-year battle with leukemia. He'd weathered numerous chemo treatments, multiple transfusions and even a bone marrow transplant, but his body was now rejecting the transplant and there was nothing more the doctors could do for him. His children called in Hospice and brought him home, where he could be surrounded and cared for by the people who loved him the most.

The following day, I stopped over with lunch and offered to sit with him while his daughter caught a much-needed nap, his daughter-in-law hopped in the shower and his son and son-in-law finished raking up the leaves. What an honor to be so lovingly accepted into this family at a time of such personal pain and anguish! And then there was Cailey.

Cailey is the 9-year-old granddaughter of my friend. While all of us adults in the house were struggling with the impending loss of this dear and precious man, Cailey simply accepted the situation and determined to help out wherever she could. She would lovingly offer a water-soaked sponge to quench her grandfather's parched lips one minute, then (after telling him she loved him and assuring him she would be right back), she'd run outside to check on her little sister and cousin. True to her word, after 5 or 10 minutes, back she'd come to hold Grandpa's hand, tell him how much she loved him or hum a happy tune to him. She was a picture of love! She trusted completely that, even in this moment, God would take care of her Grandpa just as He had always taken care of her.

Dear Lord, Thank you for showing me the faith of a little child. Help me to always remember that you are at the helm of the ship, that you have a plan for each of us, and that you will always be there to help us reach the other shore. Amen

Peg Anderson

April 1, 2010

Roadside Memorial

Scripture: Luke 22: 26-56; Luke 23: v 1-12

It is a stretch of road you cover every day- some twists and turns and rocky embankments. But then in the distance up ahead you see something that catches your attention along the roadside; something out of the ordinary. As you get closer you see it wasn't something that fell off of a truck. You see it now for what it is: a bouquet of flowers, a wreath, and a cross. You are flooded with emotion as you realize what it is. You realize that in the not too distant past – someone has lost their life in a fatal accident. Was it an adult? Were children involved? Then you think about their families. Their loved ones, who are so stricken with grief, have decided to honor this place where someone's soul has left this earth. Even though they may be taking a risk by trespassing on someone else's property their need to show their love has led them to arrange this memorial as an outward expression of their love. Some who are reading this devotion may have experienced this grief either first-hand or through friends or family. Let us keep these families in our prayers during this Lenten season.

Honoring Jesus' Death

As we approach holy week, we ask how did those close to Jesus memorialize His death? The scripture for today gives us a glimpse of how those who loved Jesus honored his death on the cross. John- Jesus' disciple, Mary - mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and a few others were there at the foot of the cross mourning and wailing for Him. One of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus rebuked those mocking Jesus. Recognizing Jesus' divinity asked Jesus to remember him in His Kingdom. Jesus promised the criminal that "he would be with Jesus in paradise" later that day. We also know of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was on the Council of the Jews, but did not consent to the decision to put Jesus to death. Joseph took great risk himself by going boldly to Pilate asking permission to take Jesus' body from the cross. Joseph took

April 1, 2010

Jesus from the cross, wrapped His body in linen, and laid Him in a new tomb. Some scholars believe the tomb may have been Joseph's own. Early on the third day Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and the other Mary went to the tomb to complete the embalming process with spices they had prepared. When they reached the tomb they found the stone rolled away, but when they entered the tomb they did not find Jesus' body. Instead they were greeted by two men in clothes "gleaming like lightning." The bible records how they were trembling -- likely out of fear and confusion of what was happening. They had forgotten Jesus' promise that "he would be raised again from the dead on the third day." Of course as we know, Jesus did appear to Mary Magdalene fulfilling his promise to her, the disciples, and to us.

God's Love for Us (inspired by D.L. Moody):

After I became a father, I woke up to the realization of what it cost God to have his Son die for us on the cross. Oh, think of the love God must have for this world that he gave His only begotten Son to die for it. During this Lenten season let us remember Jesus' words "The Father himself loves you because you have loved me..." (John 16:27). If a man has loved Christ, God will set his love upon him.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we humbly ask for your presence and your comfort in the lives of those who have lost loved ones to tragic events. We also thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross taking away our sins as an amazing sign of your love for us. Help us to prepare our hearts and minds for the time when He comes again. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Bruce Steinetz

April 2, 2010

God has shown His love to our family this past year through Community Service Alliance, which operates Procop House. In November, 2008, a group of us from John Knox prepared a Thanksgiving meal that fed about 25 men from Pro-Cop.

Since then, we have prepared meals every other Thursday and enjoyed fellowship with these men. God has blessed all of us with some incredible relationships. Lydia and I met a man named Carl that shared his story with us. At the age of 15 Carl was in a gang, and one night a member of his gang stabbed a man. Because Carl witnessed this, he was an accessory to murder. He was tried as an adult and sentenced 15 years to life. Carl served 21 years and was released in 2009, at the age of 37.

The good news is while Carl was in the system, at the age of 18, he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He is spiritually gifted, and began to teach Bible classes in many prisons. Carl struggles with life after prison, and with some of the regular easy things that so many of us take for granted every day. But this young man has a strong faith, and continues to be hard-working, diligent and eager to learn. He has been a blessing to get to know, and we thank God for our friendship with him as well as the many other men at Procop House. They are so grateful when we cook and sit together with them to eat on Thursdays. This experience has been such a blessing to us, and it has been extremely gratifying to experience the changes in the men as they move toward their goal of moving out of Procop to live on their own.

This past November, we served approximately 60 people for the Thanksgiving dinner. Many brought their girlfriends, children, and family members.

Thank you Lord for Jeff Nichols, James Johnson (Community Coordinator), and all the men at Procop House.

Tony Flauto

April 3, 2010

My most inspirational example of God's love, and presence, was in my own mother.

Mom was strong willed, and very self disciplined as a young wife and mother. We were farm people, and hard working. But in her early thirties Mom was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and though the progression of that crippling and disabling disease was 10-15 years, it finally totally immobilized her to the degree of total helplessness, unable to move arms or legs, and only to turn her head.

My Dad cared for her, as well as cared for a small farm with milk cows, and held down a factory job as well. Certainly theirs was a shared hardship.

But their love and commitment to one another was beautiful. On their 44th wedding anniversary, she was propped and supported in her wheelchair to maintain upright. He sat down to read the paper and died.

Mom's courage, her concern for her children and grandchildren, and her desire to go on living always with pain, and now her loss, was amazing to me. I asked her how she could stand her hurt and pain, and she said "I just pray, and it makes it tolerable.

Though bedridden, Mom was my strength in my tragedy, and I pray that I can be to someone what Mom was for me.

Janet Wilson, Parish Nurse

April 4, 2010

LOVE

By :George Herbert (1593-1632)

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grown slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'

LENTEN CLASSES

All Classes will run **6:30-7:45 p.m. on Wed.** evenings following dinner (5:30) February 24, March 3, 10, 17 and 24. Blank sheets and an envelope for the completed form are on Spiritual Growth bulletin board outside office.

A: Bread for the Journey, taught by Kay Beavan

Based on Exploring the Way by Marjorie J. Thompson and Stephen D Bryant.

Come join me in a hands-on enlightening journey through several Devotional Practices. The goal is to co-operate with, touch, and enjoy, the Holy Spirit who has “pitched his tent” with us. We’ll engage in journaling, holy listening, lectio divina (experiencing Scripture), breath prayer, meditation, and the daily review.

B: Getting to Know Your Bible, taught by Tom MacMillan

Based on Biblical Literacy; The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know, by Timothy Beal

Shaped by the Word; The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation, by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

Without knowing core biblical stories, we cannot fully participate in the popular, political, and spiritual worlds that surround us.

Have you ever been told that you are the apple of someone's eye? Have you ever described a disastrous situation as the blind leading the blind or easily predicted the future by reading the writing on the wall? In our class we will consider Biblical stories that have most shaped history and our world and might now shape our lives.

C: Spirituality! Do I Have It? taught by Jan Hart

Based on Spirituality for Dummies by Sharon Janis.

During this 5-week course we will learn what it means to be spiritual, dispel some myths about spirituality, talk about different ways we are spiritual, learn from one another ways we can practice spirituality, and we'll even take a test (you don't have to study for it) to discover our spiritual type.

D: Themes of Celtic Christian Spirituality, taught by Tom O'Brien

This course will look at unique approaches that Celtic Christians took when expressing their faith in Christ. We will be exploring: the Isle of Saints and Scholars, Carmina Gaedelica: Prayer and Scripture, Anamcara: Community and Hospitality, The Oran Mor: Creativity and Worship, Wild Geese: Evangelism and Mission.

E: Journey to the Cross: A Lenten Class for Children and Youth, taught by Kyle DeWees, Justine Tinline, Jessie MacMillan and fabulous volunteers

Each week there will be Bible study, prayer stations and a fun experience to tie in the lessons learned (liturgical movement, pretzel making, etc.). The last week will be an interactive "Peter's Walk". Open to K- through 8th grade. Nursery and preschool class also offered.

**** Sr. High youth are welcome and encouraged to either attend adult classes or help with kids.**