

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



BRYN MAWR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

Last year, as we all began to quarantine, and we stumbled together to find new ways to be the church in this moment, I know we were grateful that we had our annual Lenten Devotional to continue our journey to Easter together even though we were apart. I saw a funny note last year on one of my social media pages with the caption, “This is the Lentiest Lent I have ever Lented.” I think we all had that experience of feeling like we were deep in the wilderness in 2020. I can hardly believe that we are still apart from one another for yet another Lent.

But again this year, we are able to be with one another in the wilderness of Lent, because of the remarkable reflections that have been written by our community, based on the writings of the Apostle Paul. The questions of the early Christian communities were just as often interpersonal struggles as they were theological struggles. Christianity as a faith was coming into its own, but these new Christians also were trying to figure out what it actually meant to be a Christian community with one another. The letters Paul wrote to the earliest churches give us some insight into their questions, their conflicts, and their daily practices.

As members of our community have reflected on portions of his letters to the churches in Rome, Corinth, Colossi and Philippi, we can hear echoes of the same questions that we have as a church and as people today: What does it mean to practice forgiveness? How can we value the diversity of our community and the diverse gifts that each person brings? How do we do all things with love in the face of the evil we encounter? How do we trust in the unbreakable love of God, and how do we orient all that we do to the glory of Christ Jesus?

We are especially delighted that members of our Third Grade Sunday School class have contributed to the devotions this year. While we were unable to have the exact same celebration this past fall when they received their Bibles, these students have spent the past several months in Zoom Sunday School classes becoming budding biblical scholars, and their insights into these epistles reflect the hard work they have been doing.

May the wisdom and the stories shared in this devotional be a helpful companion in these days of Lent. May we re-emerge from this crisis and these days of separation renewed not just in our faith but in our connections with one another.

In the Peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'R' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'a'.

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick,
Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 17

2 Corinthians 4:7-15

⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15

Thursday, February 18

As long as I can remember, I've been drawn to the literary genre titled "self-help." After mostly ignoring that I had a body during the first 30 years of my life, my "self-help" interest extended to include the physical health. Several years into the wellness world, a healthy lifestyle seemed to be the answer to all my ills. To this day, having a body is a source of pleasure for me. I am nourished by the physicality of yoga or walking in nature. I enjoy hugs and delicious food. Through mindfulness and positive psychology, suffering can be alleviated and personal goals can be reached. We have agency. Our bodies and individual personalities are a wonder. AND YET. We are mortal. Eventually an illness, a breakdown or a pandemic reminds us of this. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, our lives are put in this larger, eternal perspective. He writes describing us as clay pots, subject to all kinds of challenges in this life and carrying death in our bodies. We did not create ourselves. As the autonomic breath reminds us, we do not even sustain ourselves. These bodies will return to dust, and our individual personalities will only remain in the memories of loved ones who survive us. AND YET. We have this treasure inside of us. With all the challenges that we face we are never destroyed nor abandoned in this life. Our lives, in all their messiness, serve a purpose; we are connected with one another and forever united with our Creator. The response to this complicated, often conflicted human situation is faith. Not a static or passive faith, but one that gets stronger with use. Just as our muscles get stronger as we exercise more. We have agency. We are empowered.

Colleen Bertrand

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15

Friday, February 19

This powerful text from Corinthians demonstrates so clearly that whenever we face trial or tribulation in our lives, God is there – in so many different ways – God is there.

God encourages us when we are feeling uninspired and gives us the courage to continue following the passions in our lives. God comforts us when we are feeling neglected and soothes us through his gentle and constant presence in our lives. God supports us when we are at a crossroads and need to make a change in our lives. God challenges us when we make bad decisions and helps us find our way back to his abiding love and tender guidance.

Knowing that God is always there to help and support us is indeed extraordinary and something to be grateful for. But it is so easy to take this constant support we receive from God for granted. I think of friendships that are unable to survive the various stages of our lives and the emotional support needed to recover losing someone important to you. Even though someone can seem so important at one point in our lives, they can suddenly become mundane or even toxic later in life. But God withstands our changes, inside and out, and remains by our side during our lifelong faith journey.

God is calm. God is patient. God is kind. God is accepting. God is forgiving.

I am grateful God welcomes me with open arms – and I am grateful to continue on my journey with this God. Amen.

Edward Landin-Senn

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-15

Saturday, February 20

When I was seven years old, my family took a trip to Mackinac Island in northern Michigan. The island is only accessible by ferry and does not allow any cars, so we rented bikes and rode around alongside old horses and carriages. Being the youngest, I was put on the back of a tandem bike with my stepdad, Greg. It was made for adults, so I could barely reach the pedals. Greg pushed us up hills and swung us around curves while I tapped on the pedals from time to time, pointing out interesting sites along the way and proudly cheering as we passed my mom while riding up a hill. I laugh about that day now, recognizing how I benefitted from the borrowed strength and knowing I ultimately had nothing to do with the mobility of our biking adventure.

In the life of faith, we benefit from a strength and power beyond our own in ways that feel impossible -- being afflicted but not crushed, not understanding but not despairing. Paul connects the hardest parts of life to the heartbeat of our faith, and to a God who does for us what we're incapable of doing ourselves. Paul says that we believe, and so we speak, because we know that suffering and humiliation and death are not all there is. We know that resurrection follows, and that God saves us in ways that we cannot save ourselves.

During Lent, we the Church get the opportunity to take a close look at the darkest parts of ourselves and our human experiences. We show up and get on the bike, willing to participate, but ultimately God meets us there with a power beyond our own to carry us through the journey. Through it all, we get to be witnesses to God's power in our lives. Thanks be to God.

Amy Ballard

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT - FEBRUARY 21

Romans 8:18-30

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

ROMANS 8:18-30

Monday, February 22

Growing up, I never felt like I was very “good” at prayer. Even now, as an ordained PCUSA pastor, I still don’t think I’m very “good” at prayer, at least not in the way I always wanted to be. I’ll hear Pastor Rachel pray these gorgeous prayers at the drop of a hat — with poetic language, theological depth and profound meaning. Whereas when I pray, it’s more like jumping in on a conversation that’s already in progress. I used to feel pretty self-conscious about it, but as I’ve matured, I keep returning to Romans 8:26.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

As a kid, I understood that I was too much -- too loud, too big, too goofy. I lived in emotional extremes and thought something had to be wrong with me. No one could ever understand me, nor would they want to (for my enneagram folks, I’m a classic 4). I deeply resonated with the idea of this keening of the Spirit, communicating in sounds and emotions too profound for words.

While I doubt I’ll ever be able to whip out a beautiful prayer at a moment’s notice, I’ve concluded that that’s okay. The Spirit of God, residing in me, living in you, intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. There are times in life when words fail. In those moments, I try to trust the Spirit. I try to trust that our gift of presence with one another communicates more than words ever could and that the Spirit always conveys that which we can’t speak.

The Rev. Leigh DeVries

ROMANS 8:18-30

Tuesday, February 23

This section of Paul's letter to the Romans is a wonderful reminder, that even in our darkest times, God has blessed us with the hope of a glorious future. I don't see this hope as just wishful thinking, but rather, a hope born of faith that God keeps his promises. We can believe there will be, one day indeed, a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells and where there will be no more sickness or mourning or death.

We have hope, even if we are being persecuted, even if our bodies are sick or dying, even if our earth is disintegrating. We have hope for ongoing life, for freedom from the bondage of death and decay. The foundation of this hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. In Adam all died, in Christ all shall be made alive.

We have hope that we shall bear the image of the man of heaven even though we have borne the image of the man of the dust. The foundation of this hope is the power of the Spirit. The Spirit helps us in our weakness to conform to the image of Christ. The Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God. The Spirit leads us. The Spirit marks us as belonging to God.

We have hope that we are all children of God. The Son and the Spirit within us cry out, "Abba, Father."

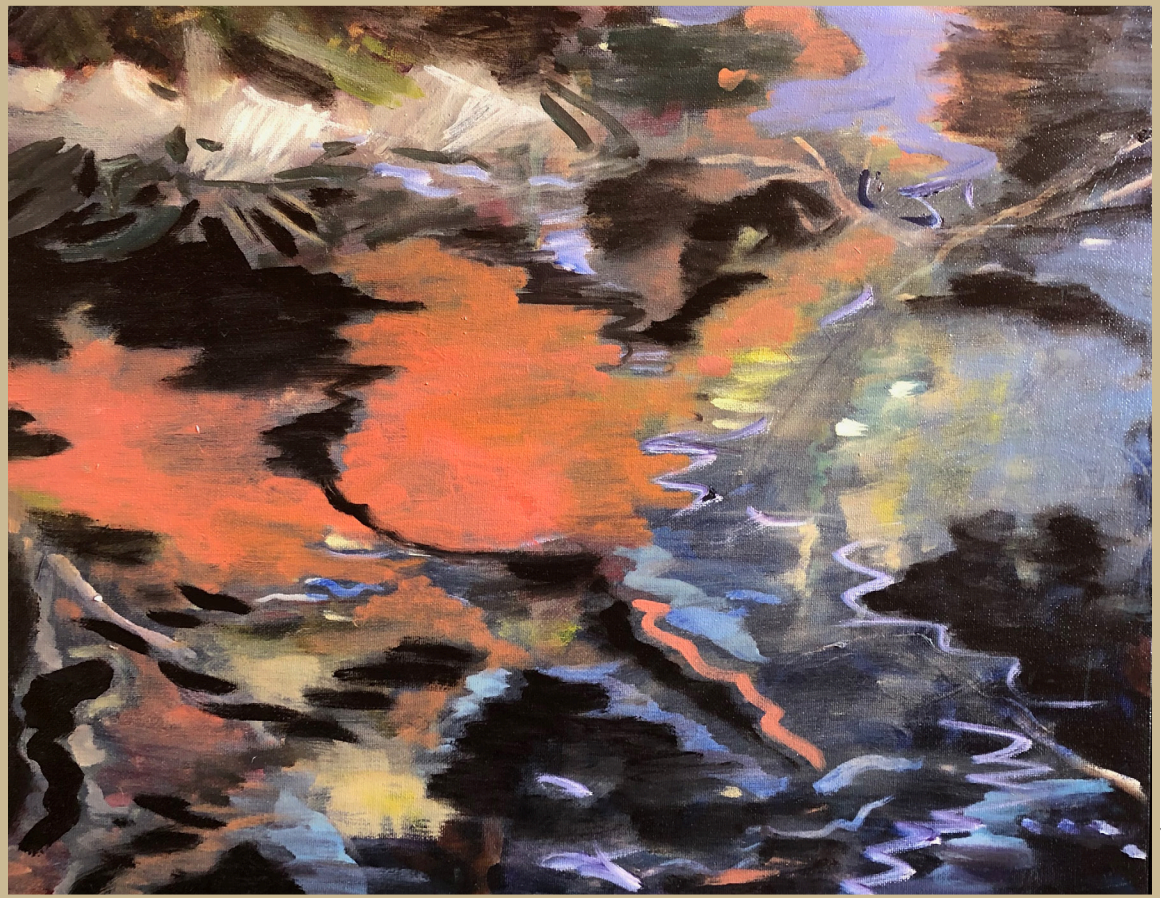
How can we ever thank our heavenly Father enough for saving us for a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and his grace which he gave to us before time began.

To God be all blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and praise.

Judy Frazier

ROMANS 8:18-30

Wednesday, February 24



© Mary French

ROMANS 8:18-30

Thursday, February 25

One thing that has always intrigued me about this passage is the idea of creation's "bondage to decay." Imagine stepping into a wood. What do you see? Living trees flourishing their leaves, yes, but also perhaps a dead tree, black and rotting, leaning at an angle or lying on the forest floor. Perhaps you smell the scent of the dead leaves rotting and replenishing the earth. As you slowly walk, you hear the crunch of your feet crushing whatever is on the ground, hastening the process of decay. We know that death and decay are part of the natural cycle, bringing new life by replenishing the ground. So what sense does it make to say that creation is "in bondage" to decay?

The Greeks thought of "decay" or "destruction" as the condition of earthly things, in contrast to the gods in heaven, who were "undying" or "incorruptible." Some schools of Greek philosophy and religion believed that the soul also was immortal and could be released to enjoy the eternal life of the gods.

In contrast, Judaism and its offspring, Christianity, involve nature and the body in the drama of eternity. The ideal of a renewal of creation that brings about change in the natural order is found in the prophecy of Isaiah which has the lion converting to vegetarianism and becoming best of friends with the lamb (11:6-7). Nature, with its predators and prey, its cycle of death and rebirth, is not seen as being in its ideal state, just as human beings are not in their ideal state. In the idealized future humans will stop preying on one another and stop being subjected to death and decay, just as the animals and plants will.

Such beliefs give us the ability to imagine things being different than they are. Imagining how things could be different opens us to the possibility of acting to bring about change. How can we nurture life in the face of the reality of death? How can we nurture peace in the face of the reality of conflict and violence? How can we nurture expectant joy in the face of the reality of transience?

Joshua Yoder

ROMANS 8:18-30

Friday, February 26

Groaning is one of the most honest prayers I know how to offer. It rises from a place where words are absent, and it conveys a truth beyond any phrase. To groan is to confess that the world holds more mysteries than I will understand: mysteries of joy, sorrow, and everything in-between. Groaning says, “help,” “wow,” and “why” all at once.

I remember groaning the first time I sat at the bedside of a loved one who was dying. I was in my early 20s, uncertain of what to say or do. My friend was unconscious, breathing deeply but unable to move or speak. Amidst the silence and sorrow, my soul groaned to God, “Why,” “help,” “please!” A few years later I remember groaning during a visit back to my hometown. I stood on the shoreline looking across the Chesapeake Bay as the sun set into the western horizon. It was an scene I witnessed countless times as a child but was only now truly seeing. From the depths of my being came a groan which said, “Wow” and “Thanks.”

Over the past year, I have groaned as the pandemic has persisted. Amidst my sorrow and frustration, I have sought God through groans that I could not translate to verbal prayers. The Spirit has helped me speak to God amidst my weakness, conveying the deepest concerns of my heart. In the process, I have been sustained by hope. I know we serve a God who searches our hearts and minds, desiring our good.

As we begin this Lenten journey, I am buoyed by the hope that God hears our groans, understands our hearts, and pursues our good, even when we cannot articulate it ourselves.

The Rev. Brian K. Ballard

ROMANS 8:18-30

Saturday, February 27

Considering Romans Chapter 8, from beginning to end, is one of the most beloved chapters in the whole of scripture. The apostle Paul resisted the teachings of the followers of Jesus. Then he had an experience and he paid attention. It took years to make the transition to the new ideas. But he kept at it and we are the beneficiaries of suffering in body, mind and spirit.

Suffering is a part of every life. Some seem to have too much and some not enough. While our very large souls are bound into these very small bodies, it is helpful to remember the bigger picture. Not that the pain will magically go away but it can be helpful to remember we all share the pain of existence and bondage to decay.

We can hope into the future for our certain redemption. And in the present we are not alone. We always have the Spirit of the Christ within ready, willing and able to help, if we are willing to listen and follow the advice we receive. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy.

When we have a self-centered attitude, things don't always work out the way we want. But when we are working according to God's purposes of love, light and life, things seem to have a way of working out for the best. This is not a rational process. To say yes or no to this claim is not really possible or necessary.

But it is something that can be experienced. And experience is the best teacher. So stay alert, stand aside and watch your life go before your eyes. Think and feel deeply. It has happened to so many. It can happen to you too. Why wait?

The Rev. Dr. Paul MacMurray

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT - FEBRUARY 28

Romans 8:31-39

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:31-39

Monday, March 1

We are still deep into the pandemic as I meditate on these words: *Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* I hope and pray that by the time we are reading these Lenten devotions, we will be emerging as spring flowers begin to peek up from the ground, slowly unfolding into the beauty of being a community starting to gather again.

I trust we will take with us some good things we learned from our extended pandemic season of isolation. One thing that has surprised me is how intimate a conversation over Zoom can become – talking not just person to person, but home to home, noticing plants and books, pets and paintings behind our conversation partners. While I will always prefer incarnate, in-person community, I delighted in how Zoom allowed us into one another's lives in delightfully surprising ways.

In one such small and intimate group discussion last fall I found myself admitting that the older I have grown, the smaller my canon has become. What I mean is that while I delight in the whole beautiful, complicated and surprisingly rich texture of the Bible, I can stake my faith on just a handful of affirmations.

Leading among them is this one: *Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* No earthly powers. No supernatural phenomenon. No past thing I still regret. No future thing to be feared. Nothing that happens in life. Not even death. Nothing, nothing at all can separate us from God's love that has been uniquely revealed to us in Jesus Christ. I carry these words in my head and in my heart as the central core of what I believe and am exceedingly grateful for them.

The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet

ROMANS 8:31-39

Tuesday, March 2

We will have tribulations in our lives; Jesus says so. Sometimes, for reasons that are painfully real, we feel that we are in an unending storm. God does not shield us from misfortune or heartache; opposition and suffering are not unexpected regardless of who we are or where we live. Paul reminds us, however, that God is with us in these times of trouble.

No matter how great the difficulties we face, we can always hold on to this truth: Nothing can separate us from the love of God. “In all these things we are more than conquerors.” What a thought! We are greater even than the one who conquers a people or a nation, even while we are in the midst of the storms of life, not because of our pluck or our talents, but because the storms cannot destroy faith and God’s love for us.

“Neither death....” The immeasurable pain of loss can sometimes seem too great to bear, but God gives us the strength to get through.

“Nor things present....” God still cares for us during a horrendous pandemic, so we can wait in hope for days of well-being.

“Nor depth....” When we are down or troubled from a personal disappointment or challenge at work, God remains with us.

We will encounter seasons of affliction and distress. But if in our darkest hours we hold fast to God’s love, and if we go through our trials with Christ, our hardships become a catalyst for exaltation. “If God is for us, who is against us?”

Stephen McConnell

ROMANS 8:31-39

Wednesday, March 3



© Linda Walters

ROMANS 8:31-39

Thursday, March 4

Jesus is always with you. You shouldn't doubt that Jesus will protect you. Jesus would never tell us that he doesn't want to be with us, because he doesn't like this place anymore. He will never say that he doesn't want to be with us because we have a different skin color or because our hair is different. The things that keep people apart from one another won't keep Jesus apart from us. God doesn't get bored with us, but maybe God sometimes gets frustrated with us. But God is still with us no matter what. God is always forgiving us. Even if you make a mistake, no matter how big, God will always forgive you.

Knowing that God is always there for you and will protect you keeps us happy as Jesus' disciples. We know that even if something bad happens, Jesus will always have our back and be there for us. Maybe if someone in your family passed away you would be sad and feel angry, and you might be worried that God left you, and you would be frustrated with God. But God will never leave us.

God is not against us, but he is there for all of us no matter what, even if you do something huge! This is the same kind of love that I experience in my family. I know that no matter what, my parents will always love and forgive me. And I know that I will always try to practice this same kind of love and forgiveness with my sister.

Jesus told a parable about a lost sheep. There was once a man who lost his sheep and he went back to get him even though he was in a dark forest, and it is just like what Jesus would do for us. He wouldn't be afraid to go into the forest for us. It reminds us that Jesus doesn't have any fear. Not even a scary forest could separate us from the love of God.

Maggie Reynolds, BMPC Third Grader

ROMANS 8:31-39

Friday, March 5

Any time I am called upon to share the news of the death of a member of our congregation in worship on a Sunday morning, I turn to these verses from Paul to remind us all that even though our friend, our family member, our fellow church member has died, that God's connection to them and love for them has not been broken. Even though we have been separated from them, death will not separate them from God.

But the more I sit with these verses, the more I am reminded that death is the least of our worries. There are so many things that we experience in life that don't just have the potential to separate us from God, but more often than not to separate us from one another.

I like to think there are people in my life that no matter the trial we endure, the hardships we bring upon one another, that nothing can break the love I have for them. But to be perfectly honest, I am not sure that I am actually capable of a completely unbreakable love.

I have all the skills almost perfected when it comes to bendable love. I can forgive hurt feelings, harsh words, inconsiderate behavior. I can make room in my heart for people to change and grow and renew relationships that have fallen on hard times. But I know for sure there are potentially things that my human heart cannot forgive, that there are limits on the grace I can muster, and that I am in the end imperfect.

That is the significance of Paul's assurance. This passage isn't really about life and death; it is about all the things that come with living as a disciple of Jesus Christ in this world that can put at risk our confidence in God's love for us. The things that make us feel alone, misunderstood and forgotten. Maybe even all the things that make practicing a bendable love with the world sometimes mean that we ourselves can be broken by the world.

But in the end and in our end, we know that throughout it all, God's love cannot break, and we, through that unbreakable love, are restored.

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick

ROMANS 8:31-39

Saturday, March 6

If God is for us, who is against us? In today's world, sometimes it feels like our neighbors are against us. And yet we also know that we are to love our neighbors, and that Christ himself can appear in the person of those around us. I think it also is important to note that the text does not say, "if God is for me," but "if God is for us." All of us, and all of humanity.

We ask "who is to condemn" and yet that too is all of us. We look around us and we judge. While we might feel that as God's elect, we should be exempt from judgment, we fail to see that our neighbors are also God's elect. Remembering that Paul is writing to the Gentile Romans helps us understand that God has elected all of humanity as God's people.

In this season of pandemic where we are isolated from one another and from our church, it could be easy to think that perhaps there is something that can separate us from the love of God. I find it very easy to just drop into the life of faith to watch the weekly service, and then go right back into the rest of my life, leaving faith behind. If we truly understand that nothing in life can separate us from God's love, this moment provides a reminder that we are called to live our faith, not just inside the church, but in every facet of our life. Just as we might be needing to feel God's love, so too are our neighbors and those we meet. We are called to share that love and be that love, each of us and all of us. When we do, we may discover that we are raised to new life. Yes, that, too, is for all of us.

Rob Mygatt

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 7

Romans 12:9-21

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ROMANS 12:9-21

Monday, March 8

Love and hate appear in the opening of this passage. How can we be called to two such contradictory emotions? We should have seen this coming when the chapter opened with another contradiction: a call to transform ourselves – to become a “living sacrifice” to embody the will of God. We must lose what we hold onto in order to gain life.

One of the most difficult reversals of our natural tendencies is the admonition to forgive. We get comfortable in our wounds, but in doing so we imprison ourselves in a dark world. But there are actions we can take to free ourselves from the burden of hate that swallows our soul.

I have always thought that one of the worst situations to endure would be to be incarcerated for a crime that you did not commit. Yet we see the example of men who have finally been exonerated and emerge without vengeance, ready to move forward in their life, free from a burden of hate. Likewise, many people who have lost a loved one to crime struggle with the idea of forgiveness. Some have found that if they do forgive the perpetrator, they have not just given something to that person, but they have given themselves the gift of freedom from the hatred that has taken over their life. As Charles Nipp, whose 76-year old mother was murdered, said, “That choice to forgive is a daily thing. I have to forgive every day or I lose it.”

Christ’s last words on the cross were to ask God to forgive the people who crucified him. Each week we repeat the call asking God to forgive our trespasses, to live life forward as we have forgiven others’ trespasses.

Phoebe Sheftel

ROMANS 12:9-21

Tuesday, March 9

If your mother was like mine, you grew up with a lot of sayings like, “Mind your own P’s and Q’s,” and, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all,” and, “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill!” One of my mom’s best ones was, “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well.” She used dozens of maxims like these to instill specific behaviors in me. It was a good way to try to make life smoother for me and to make me a better *person*. Those oft-repeated reminders have stayed with me for my entire life, and they have served me well.

Paul’s list of do’s and don’ts for the Romans is a different kind of instruction. His inventory of dozens of actions is a checklist for the making of a better *Christian*. To me, it is not a behavioral correction plan, but a blueprint for a lifelong journey with Christ. Every action taken to make life better for others also lifts one into a spiritual realm, with joy in the doing because it is done in harmony with Christ. Some of Paul’s admonitions are easy to follow, such as being attentive to the needs of others. But other challenges seem almost impossible to carry out. How do you hate evil but love the evil person who is lying, cheating or stealing? How do you get the nerve to even speak to a declared enemy, let alone feed him?

Paul tells us how: with hope, patience, and having faith that all can be accomplished with love. If Jesus is the Living Word, then we need to pray for His help in choosing the right path to take. We need to use His powerful love to address the hard issues in our lives. It is this connection to Jesus that makes all the difference in Paul’s charges to every Christian, for it is in bringing Jesus into our actions that we practice being true followers of the Word. And although we may never come close to the perfection we seek, Mom always said, “*Practice makes perfect.*”

Clare Mackie

ROMANS 12:9-21

Wednesday, March 10



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ROMANS 12:9-21

Thursday, March 11

Although Paul uses many long and sometimes complicated words, Romans 12 tells us how to be Christians. It would be interesting to know what Paul thought was the most important rule listed in Romans 12, or if there were parts that he cut out while writing that chapter. Except for the part about putting coals on people's heads, nothing in the list is very surprising, but all parts are important. These instructions are both for people in the past and are true for us in 2021. For instance, imagine someone is celebrating their 10th birthday, but you are not invited to the party; or a friend wins the gold medal, and you only win the silver. Romans 12 tells us that we celebrate with them, even though it might be hard. It tells us to care for others and help those who are struggling. It commands us to be a friend to those who might not be as popular as others. Some people might avoid doing that, but as Christians we should care for them. During this pandemic it can be hard to do some of these things because we are apart.

The passage even tells us to help our enemies. I think this passage reminds me that if God were here, God would be the first to feed any enemies (though God probably doesn't have very many, if any enemies).

Dylan Kwasniewski, BMPC Third Grader

ROMANS 12:9-21

Friday, March 12

When reading this verse the outlining theme that I got from it was about love. For me the most important love in my life is the love of my family. During the pandemic, which began almost a year ago, that love has been even more important as we've spent a lot of time together. This year is my senior year in high school. When we went home last March, I began to think about my senior year and wondered if it could end the same way it did for the Class of 2020 - without a real graduation or prom. And so far that is how it's been. I spent a greater amount of time at home than in school this year. Though I am disappointed, it is not as bad as I thought it would have been. As I reflect on this year, I realize the love of my family has helped quell the disappointment of being home.

I have strengthened my relationship with my brother. Typically we would only walk to school together, but now I see him multiple times throughout the day, and we sometimes even spend our breaks together. My relationship with my parents has also heightened because I'm only one floor away from them while I'm in school. Another thing that has brought all of us closer is our family walks during lunch.

As I realize that I will be transitioning to college and living away from home this year, I am grateful to have this time together with my family.

Leo Cieri, Youth Deacon

ROMANS 12:9-21

Saturday, March 13

“His Name Was Paul”

Fifteen years ago, the church I served before coming to Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church reached out to commission me to compose an anthem in memory of a member who recently lost his battle with cancer. My immediate response was one of surprise. This member had, for much of my five years as the church’s music director, mostly complained about my work! From his perspective, the organ was always too loud, the choir’s repertoire was either too easy or too difficult, and my hymn playing too fast (and always too loud). As a 20-something, I’m certain that I didn’t handle his criticisms very well!

At that time, I doubt I would have been very receptive to Paul’s words: “Bless those who persecute you.... Do not curse them.... Live in harmony.... Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... Overcome evil with good.” Ah, *Paul’s* letter to the Romans - a veritable guide to how we should love, even with those we find hard to love. Paul’s words are wonderful, but how could I actually *live* them?

I will confess that the piece I composed took far longer than it should have. I struggled with how to overcome my negative feelings for this man who (it seemed to me) lived just to torment me! Ultimately, I found the answer in both Paul’s words and in the Psalms, particularly passages like, “You who have made me see many troubles and calamities, will revive me again.” “My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you.” With pen and manuscript paper in hand and armed with Romans and the Psalter, I slowly realized that this man whom I had viewed as my tormenter had actually been trying to help me with his “advice.” My tormenter’s name was Paul... “A Song of Hope” is for him.

Jeff Brillhart

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 14

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Monday, March 15

It's a wonderful metaphor, isn't it? Paul wants us to think of our life in community as working in concert with others in the way the parts of a human body do. No member is more important than others; no member should be neglected, either. As the eye has its function, and the ear has another, we are to appreciate the talents and gifts of our neighbors, irrespective of their station.

What a countercultural message! Just think how much the world stratifies people. It was the same in Paul's time as in ours! So can this message work? Do I believe it? Do I live it?

Another metaphor comes to mind. Our son plays in an orchestra. He plays the cello and plays it well. But he does not play the trumpet, not the harp, not even the flute. He does not have to. The whole point of the orchestra is that each member contributes their talent and listens to each other so that all can create great music together. No member should overpower any other. All are important: the cello as much as the horn.

Every orchestra needs a composer. So, who is the composer in Paul's mind? Christ. We are the body of Christ. When we make great music, or build a great church, we do this because we honor God, the ultimate builder and composer, who gave us our talents in the first place!

If we forget that, and only honor the world, we are like musicians who don't watch the conductor. We just listen to our neighbor and soon the music falls apart. We have to keep our eye on our conductor and composer, who has created us all equally worthy. If we believe that, Paul's message makes all the sense in the world.

Klaus Volpert

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

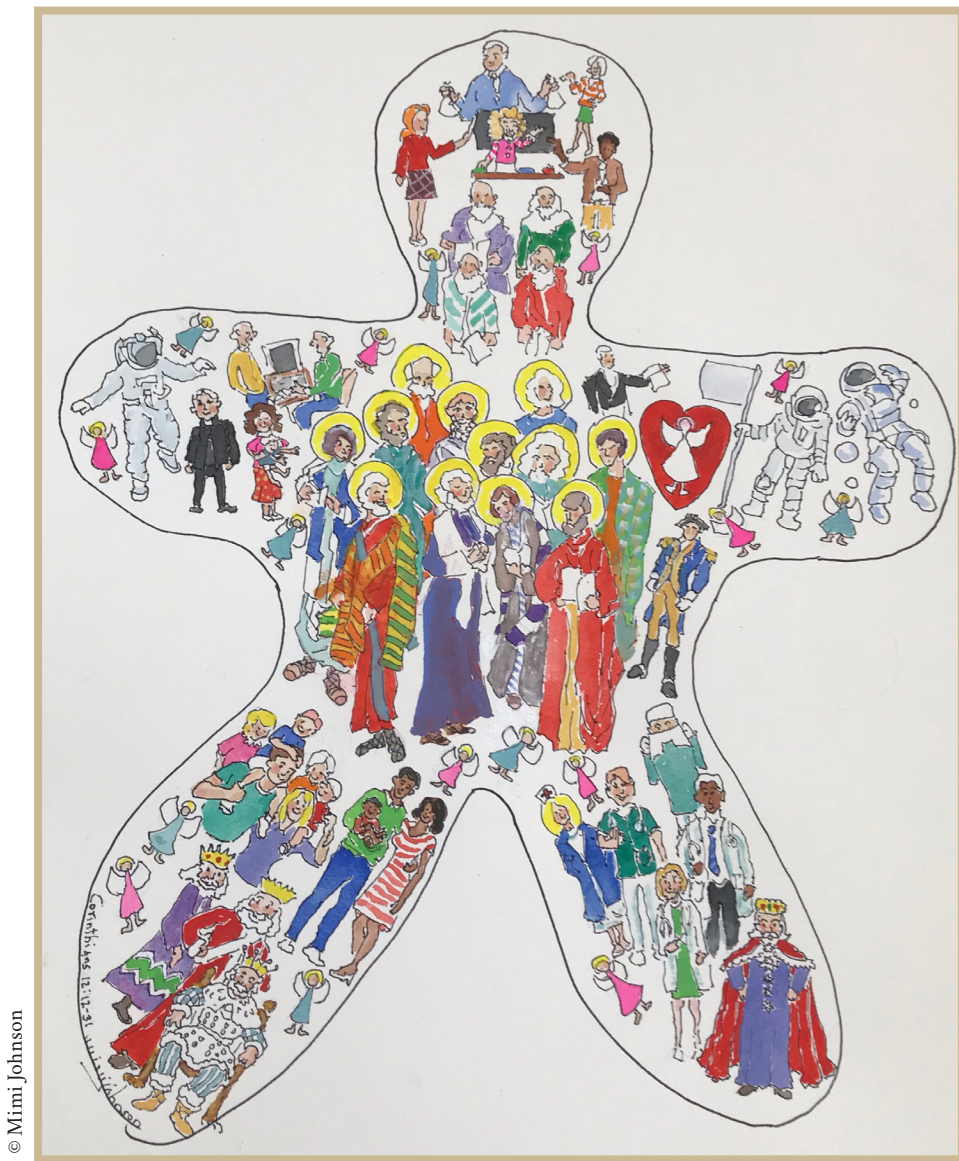
Tuesday, March 16

In Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul uses the human body as a metaphor for the church, and the parts of the body to represent each of us and the individual gifts that God has bestowed upon us. Reading this passage makes me think about what has made the church special in my life, from the church I grew up in in upstate New York to Bryn Mawr Presbyterian, a place of worship I've called home for the past couple years. For much of my 20s and 30s, I stopped regularly attending church. During this time, my mom would frequently ask me if I was still singing? "Chris, have you found somewhere to sing?" And for years, I thought she was living in the past, trying to get me to relive the glory days of my high school years when I sang in school choirs and performed in musicals. Eventually, I grew to understand that she was asking me if I was sharing my gifts. This is one of the things that brought me back to the church, the feeling that I had a gift - a love for music, a gift given to me by God, and that a church is somewhere where I can give thanks for the gift of music and fellowship, and where I can share this gift with others. For years I had thought, I'm just one voice. Surely, it cannot be missed. In retrospect, how wrong I was! I feel that we can never be reminded enough of this message - that we all have something to share. This what I think of when singing from the hymnal every Sunday, all of us together, from the tone-deaf to the classically-trained. Each voice more necessary than the next in the singing of God's music.

Chris Cobb

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Wednesday, March 17



One Body, Many Members (Corinthians 12:22-31)

The organs are apostles, mouth is prophets, brain is teachers, toes are kings, fingers are astronauts, legs and arms are other teachers leaders healers, and angels are blood (from heart to capillaries).

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Thursday, March 18

The main idea of this passage is that everyone is important. I think Paul describes this in a very interesting way by having the different parts of the body talk to each other.

You should never tell other people that they are not important because you think that *in your personal opinion* that you might be better than them. You should always say, “I have some good parts of who I am, and you have good parts of who you are, and we can all work together.” God made us to be different and made us to work together.

You should treat someone how you want others to treat you. Anyone who thinks that they are better than anyone else is wrong; they are not better, just different. You are very important. You might be able to do things that I can’t do, and so we need each other.

When one part of the body is hurt, the other parts of the body will help it. We do this as a church. Sometimes even in Sunday School, if someone is having a hard time, it is important to help them pay attention or participate in class together.

God knows that he needs us to be the church and to share the Good News with the whole world. Everyone in the world who believes and every church all over the world is a part of the Body of Christ. Without any of these people or without one of these churches, it wouldn’t work. We have to help each other along the way. If we try to do this all alone no one will be there if we need help or get hurt.

Everyone in the world should be with each other in Christ. Everyone who is in Christ is called to spread the Good News.

James Bertrand, BMPC Third Grader

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Friday, March 19

Seminary might be the last place you would expect to find a super-introvert with a deeply rooted fear of public speaking, but somehow, I found myself there anyway.

In my first year of seminary, I could not figure out what had possessed me to get my Master of Divinity – I could blame it on the Spirit, but after moving across the country for this degree, She seemed a pretty poor justification. By the end of my first year, it was clear that preaching was not my gift and that being a pastor – at least the traditional kind – was not an option. I spent the next year feeling frustrated and incompetent. I couldn't see how my skills were useful in ministry, especially while surrounded by others who had a clear calling and all the gifts I thought I needed.

Sometime around the end of my second year, though, a friend encouraged me to apply for a chaplaincy internship at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital. She was an incredibly gifted preacher who had worked there herself and found that chaplaincy was not in her wheelhouse, but she thought I might love it.

She was right; the first week of that internship was a revelation. What was meant to be a summer internship led to two years of working with folks suffering from personality disorders and schizophrenia, who were often experiencing crises of faith alongside crises of health. Working with my faithful, generous and thoughtful patients transformed my understanding of what it is to be a member of the body of Christ. Through them, I experienced how we “all suffer together...[and] all rejoice together” (1 Cor. 12:26) with our fellow members of the body, and by helping them work through their pain and recognize their own value to God and to the world, I recognized what I could contribute to the body of Christ as well.

Jennifer Herold

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Saturday, March 20

The strength of the Body of Christ is in the unity and diversity of all the body's members. What a timely topic, reaching back from Paul's Corinth to 2020's quest for and recognition of how much stronger our social fabric is when woven together in diversity.

Just as the human body needs all its separate body parts (such as the eyes, heart, feet, mind, ears and hands) to work together to suit the needs of the whole body, such are the individual members of a church congregation, serving the best needs of the Body of Christ in the world — the Church. Another analogy for the Body of Christ in our little universe might equate to the diversity in the body of BMPC's members: from choir members and Sunday School teachers, to Pastors and Youth, from Deacons, Elders and Trustees, to Mission and Outreach committees, together with Bible study groups and members at large. All separate groups play a vital role in the overall "administration" and successful operation of BMPC as a whole.

William Barclay, Scottish pastor and New Testament scholar, tells us that Paul speaks here of the role of "administrators (kuberneseis)" and that "the Greek is very interesting: It literally refers to the work of a pilot who steers the ship through the rocks and the shoals to harbor." (A very apropos reference to the busy maritime trade center that was Corinth). "Paul is referring to the people who carry out the administration of the church... which is a supremely essential work."¹

I feel the following body parts have essential duties for we Disciples of Christ:

- Arms - to reach out to those in need
- Legs - to go the extra mile
- Feet - for those disciples who work on the front lines of urgent need
- Hands - to reach out and touch our mission partners: Brothers and Sisters in Christ
- Eyes - to see the need in the world in which we live
- Ears - to hear and attend to those suffering in need
- Head - to ponder and discern the will of God
- Mouth - to speak truth and justice to those in power
- Heart - to have compassion for those less fortunate

Morris Kay

Footnote: ¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, Westminster John Knox Press, p.116

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 21

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

¹If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Monday, March 22

What do you want, a medal or a chest to pin it on? Growing up with four siblings, that admonishment was thrown with impunity whenever someone took credit for doing a common chore or simple act of service. For example, walking the dog without being asked, setting the dinner table, taking out the garbage, etc. It wasn't as much the idea that no good deed goes unpunished, but rather no good deed needs to be rewarded. Acts of kindness and service are done out of love not for self-aggrandizement. How often do we find ourselves even in our marriages doing the same thing? Look honey, I made the bed, washed dishes, folded laundry, helped the kids with their homework... On and on our self-proclaimed acts of service mount.

In our text for the week, gifts are far more important than my childlike or marital contributions being met with scorn. You can speak in tongues, prophesy and understand all mysteries. You can sacrifice your body and worldly possessions. Yet without love, you're nothing but a clanging cymbal. But what about all the time I spend at church serving on boards, ushering, parking, teaching. Doesn't that make me special? Not without love. Do we serve out of obligation? To be recognized, or to truly offer our love? "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17), but works without love is meaningless.

With social media, it has become common to post items that promote oneself. Look at me! Look at me! See how wonderful I am. But no, I'm nothing more than a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. Better to take the advice as written in Matthew 23:12: "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Keith Brinks

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Tuesday, March 23

I first encountered 1 Corinthians 13 in a meaningful way in 1975 at summer church camp in the California Redwoods. I started going to our Lutheran church camp, Mt. Cross, when I was 11. The place was beautiful, with outdoor worship in a clearing of soaring redwoods and places of quiet contemplation. I had never experienced anything quite like it. When I came back home, I told my parents, “God lives there.”

We would play various games and do exercises during the day. One favorite was saying “Baby I love you, would you give me a smile?” - trying to get the other person to smile. It was never hard. But we would also read 1 Corinthians 13 to each other, filling in the other person’s name for the word “love.” Looking into another camper’s eyes saying, “Mark is patient and kind. Mark does not take offense. Mark bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things....” This exercise would often lead to hugs and tears, as we all came face to face with our woeful shortcomings from this impossible standard.

In the evenings, campers and counselors would pull out guitars and harmonicas (this was the 1970s after all) and sing all kinds of songs around the campfire. I can still feel and smell the redwood-scented air in the dark clearing, with the flickering glow of a roaring, warm campfire the only thing lighting the night. We would often start with silly camp songs but would always end with Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God. In between, we would often sing the (then contemporary, written in 1971) song by Ken Gullikson called Charity:

Love is patient and kind
Love is not envious
Not proud, but gentle and meek
Seeks not its own way
Love sings when Jesus prevails
Believes and endures all things
Love hopes and bears every wrong
And Love never fails.

It is still this melody I hear when I read these words or hear them spoken at weddings and Sunday services. I continue to fall short of this standard. If you filled in my name now for “love,” I would still bow my head in shame. But the words somehow remain comforting and inspiring. They call us to find and accept that holy place and peace we all strive for and can ultimately find only in God’s perfect love and grace.

MaryJeanette Dee

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Wednesday, March 24



© Valerie Craig

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Thursday, March 25

The most important part of the passage is at the beginning where Paul explains how important love is to everything that we do. Paul says that love is never ending. Even at the end Paul reminds them that the very greatest things we have is love. Love is greater than so many other good things that we have in our lives.

This passages tells us that if we want to follow God, we should love other people and have faith. We should not just love other people, but we should love God as well. The very best way to follow God is to be loving and to do loving actions. Sometimes love can be hard, but it is a very important part of our lives. If you love others, you might actually teach someone else how to love. This is what it means when Paul says that love never ends.

Sometimes it can be hard to hope. We can easily hope for good weather, but some bigger things can be hard to hope for, especially now during the pandemic. It can be easy to know what it means to be kind, but sometimes things like being patient can be hard to do all the time. But all of these things are connected to the ways that we love one another.

Paul says that he used to act like a child or to speak like a child. When you think about it, this is true, children and adults have different opinions and reactions to things. Maybe when Paul says that he puts an end to childish ways, he means that he became more serious or more mature. But sometimes kids are actually better at showing love to other people than adults are. And sometimes children are more creative than adults. So maybe as Christians it is also important to keep some of the things about being a child and the way that children think and love as a part of what it means to be faithful.

Lilah Brown, Tyler Noon, Ruth Conway, BMPC Third Graders

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Friday, March 26

Through my time growing up at BMPC, I am confident of the importance of genuine and divine love. This is what is claimed in Corinthians 1:1-13.

Right now, love is more important than ever. We have all gone through an arduous journey throughout this pandemic; we have lost loved ones and suffered through a polarizing election. Over the past few months, our nation has been in a state of turmoil, and we need to learn to love more as our God has taught us.

I wonder what our world would have been like if, from the beginning, Christians had taken more seriously the commandment to love all our neighbors, near and far, both friends and enemies. Imagine now if every disciple of Jesus transformed into a walking, talking and loving instrument of God's grace in the lives of all who crossed our paths.

When fully grasped and faithfully embraced, the scriptural assertion that God “so loved the world” as well as Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbors, including our enemies, is alone what will transform life on our beloved planet earth.

If our world is ever to experience lasting peace and harmony, we must as Presbyterians fully understand and faithfully endorse the truth that our God loves the world and calls us to do the same. If you have experienced God's love, you will want to dedicate your body, mind and spirit to reflect that love in all you say and do.

William Lautenbach, Youth Elder

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Saturday, March 27

As a minister, I've read these words from St. Paul so many times at weddings that offering it for this devotional could easily border on triteness. What else is there to say on faith, hope and love that hasn't been offered by countless sermons, books, Hallmark movies or wall decor from Hobby Lobby?

If I'm being honest, it's the last part of this scripture that has always captured me. Verse 12 reads, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face*. Yet I've always preferred the way the King James Bible says it: *For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face*. Does it matter whether it's glass or a mirror? Is the point the clouded nature of the vision or the reflective property of the object? Maybe it's both.

Maybe to see God's vision for the world is a call to see the world beyond ourselves and to see our own reflections. Maybe these translation options collectively remind us that to love God is to be both outwardly focused and introspective. We can't work for the restoration and reconciliation of creation without paying attention to how the divine love is calling us to individual renewal.

Even so, whether it's a mirror or a window pane, the view is still blurry. We won't get it all figured out this side of eternity. Which is a reminder to have more grace for ourselves and for others, who are also stumbling around half-blind most days.

Anyhow, in the end it's God's love in Christ that has the final say. So in the meantime may we see the world and ourselves, even with partial vision, with the kind of gracious love that has the power to transform and redeem.

The Rev. Franklyn C. Pottorff

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY - MARCH 28

Philippians 2:1-11

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Monday, March 29

Philippians 2:1-11 is such a fitting passage to read during the turmoil of our current times. We are facing worldwide crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a massive climate change, while our leaders have been mired down in political infighting that immobilizes the efforts necessary to protect the health and welfare of humanity. “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Perhaps these crises will help bring us to our senses. Rampant special interests and selfish interests are the source of our inaction and the enemy of us all, and the fear used by interest groups to control people for their own gain must be confronted.

Jesus embodied the simple truths that mankind can follow. Each one of us, as Christians, must learn and practice what those truths are, and have the courage to speak truth to power. We can no longer allow selfish interests to define our future, and, through our own silence, be complicit in destructive outcomes. As an example, in Philippians, Paul says Jesus “emptied himself, and took the form of a slave, being born of human likeness.” How fitting that this passage portrays Jesus as a slave, which calls to mind the systemic racism and racial injustice that still exists today because of special interests which have taken different forms over the past 400 years. To reveal the inequities of his time, Jesus “humbled himself and became obedient (to God) to the point of death – even death on a cross.”

We live in a complex world, but as Christians, we need to be steadfast in our values to support all human beings, not just those who are like us. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but, in humility, regard others as better than your selves.” Our collective futures, and those of generations to come, depend on it.

Trip O'Donnell

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Tuesday, March 30

Being a young person with faith is difficult, in more ways than one. For me particularly, faith always seemed like a competition, one that I've resented more than a few times in my life. I was shy growing up, my world revolving around a few select friends, most of whom were devoutly religious Christians. Though I was a Christian myself, I often felt out of place in their homes or in their churches because my religious upbringing was nowhere near the extent of theirs. For them, knowledge of the Bible and religious purity was a badge of honor, something that I lacked. I was made to feel like a convert project at times with my friends' parents inviting me over more than once for "playdates" that ended up being scripture readings.

As I progressed into middle school and high school, I began to befriend people who weren't religious at all – mostly Confucians, Hindus and Buddhists who practiced their religions quietly and without much regard to religious text. After struggling with the "right way" to be a Christian early on in my life, I found solace in these more passive ways to faith. I realized I didn't need to prove my religion to them, meaning I also did not need to prove it to myself.

My favorite line in Philippians 2:1-11 is "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves." This line stood out to me because we are often told to treat others as ourselves, not as better than ourselves. It is the Golden Rule, but tweaked just a little bit. To me, this line communicates respect. While treating everyone as we would like to be treated may work in many situations, we also have to keep in mind that our path is not everyone else's. If we regard someone as better than ourselves, we allow ourselves to realize that we can learn from others in ways we may not have imagined. Though my non-Christian friends don't share my religion, they've taught me more about faith than any Christian person has. What may have been the best way to God for some of my friends is not the best way for me, and that is just another part of faith. Our religious beliefs and texts are like roadmaps to an ending destination, but there is always more than one way to get there.

Katherine Hattersley, Youth Elder

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Wednesday, March 31



© Faith Sandstrom

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Thursday, April 1

The passage is trying to tell us to feel connected with Jesus, that we would share the same ideas and thoughts as Jesus. This means that we are supposed to be humble like Jesus and not try to do things for our own benefit or to get ahead for our own sake.

We should all remember that Jesus is the Son of God and that we are to bow before him just like a Prince. But even though he is so special, he gave all of that up to be just like us as human beings.

I think it is interesting that the passage describes Jesus as even taking the form of a slave. Why would Jesus want to be a slave? A slave is someone who is not treated well and who doesn't have any power. No one chooses to be a slave. I think that if someone who was a slave, either during the time when Paul wrote this letter or later, had heard this passage and heard that Jesus was willing to be a slave, I think it would be a message of freedom to them. It think it would describe their feelings to them. They would feel a sense of freedom because in a way Jesus is providing comfort to them. That Jesus was even willing to be just like them. He understands them and wants to be like them too.

I think God wants us to be kind to everyone around the world, to be humble and not selfish. This passage tells us that Jesus is both very important and also willing to be very humble. Jesus is encouraging us to be kind to the world and to spread joy.

Corinne Luba, BMPC Third Grader

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Friday, April 2

Philippians 2:1-11 is the only piece of scripture I memorized by accident. My middle school youth leader told us that Philippians could teach us both what we believe and how we should live. It was a book we should study! We came to know Philippians during retreats, lock-ins and mission trips. There was a tendency among the young women in my youth group to get into fights. Cruel words, jokes, and the like would be passed around until eventually we would all be called into one room to “discuss what was going on.” It became a ritual of sorts. We had to sit in a circle. Each person had to read Philippians 2:1-11 to the person on her right. As we read, we had to include the person’s name. “Rachel, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” We were supposed to look the other person in the eye as we read and as we listened; more often than not, it was hard enough just to say and hear those words. It only took a few times before we could stumble our way through the passage without having to read it. Eventually, we found ourselves quoting Philippians 2 to one another before the fight could really begin. Now some 20 years removed, the words come unbidden. Usually when I am frustrated, when I feel put-upon, or just simply fed up. I hear my friends’ middle school voices, unsteady, but present, reminding me of who I am and to whom I belong. *If there is encouragement, love, or hope in what we believe, then put aside your ambitions and look to those around you. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ who gave everything and whom we praise.* May these words rest and grow in you.

Loving God, may we be of one mind and one heart as we follow your Son. Amen.

The Rev. Rachel Pedersen

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Saturday, April 3

Ahhh, the joy of Christmas with gifts, carols, bright lights and gatherings that cut the darkness of winter and fill our hearts and heads. And in a quick blink later we run headlong into the 40 days of Lent, the big opposite. Forty days - why 40? Maybe because four is the symbol of earthly things (four seasons, four corners of the earth) or the big Bible symbolic 40s (Moses' 40 years, Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness). I saw the connection of Jesus spending 40 days of finding himself even after his highly witnessed baptism. He needed to know himself so he could stand up to the temptations of being human... even those seen in Holy Week. We must need at least that much time to reflect on who we are.

This passage from Philippians helped me understand. It opens prayerfully, asking to us make our joy (I read self) complete by looking at others' needs and behaviors and by observing our action steps. The scripture moves to Jesus being humble, even to the point of a horrible death. I wondered if I have "humble" on my busy pedestal?

Indeed, Jesus sets an example for us even during our busy lives made complex by an oppressive pandemic. Paul spoke loudly to me in verse five, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

Now, here I sit, in a glorious church, in a wealthy community, in a wonderful environment, in a progressive state and in a powerful country located on an ecologically fragile planet, plentifully replete with racism, violence, disease, overpopulation, political exploitation and poverty beyond imagination.

And, I hear and see those who complain about taking 40 days to slow down and look around themselves to find their opportunity to "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

So, since I have difficulty kneeling while on my pedestal, I choose to follow this Lenten gift time of reflection and preparation through prayer, fasting and sacrificial giving. The Lord is saying, get down, slow yourself and humbly pray.... I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, God's only son, our Lord....

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