

Saint John A.M.E. Church
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Lenten Journeys

From the Heart



Lenten Meditations 2011

Saint John

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Birmingham, Alabama



Message from the Pastor

The warmer temperatures, budding flowers, and longer days are an indication that the seasons are changing. We are grateful for spring and the promise of new life that this season holds. We are also grateful for the new season into which our church is moving, the season of Lent.

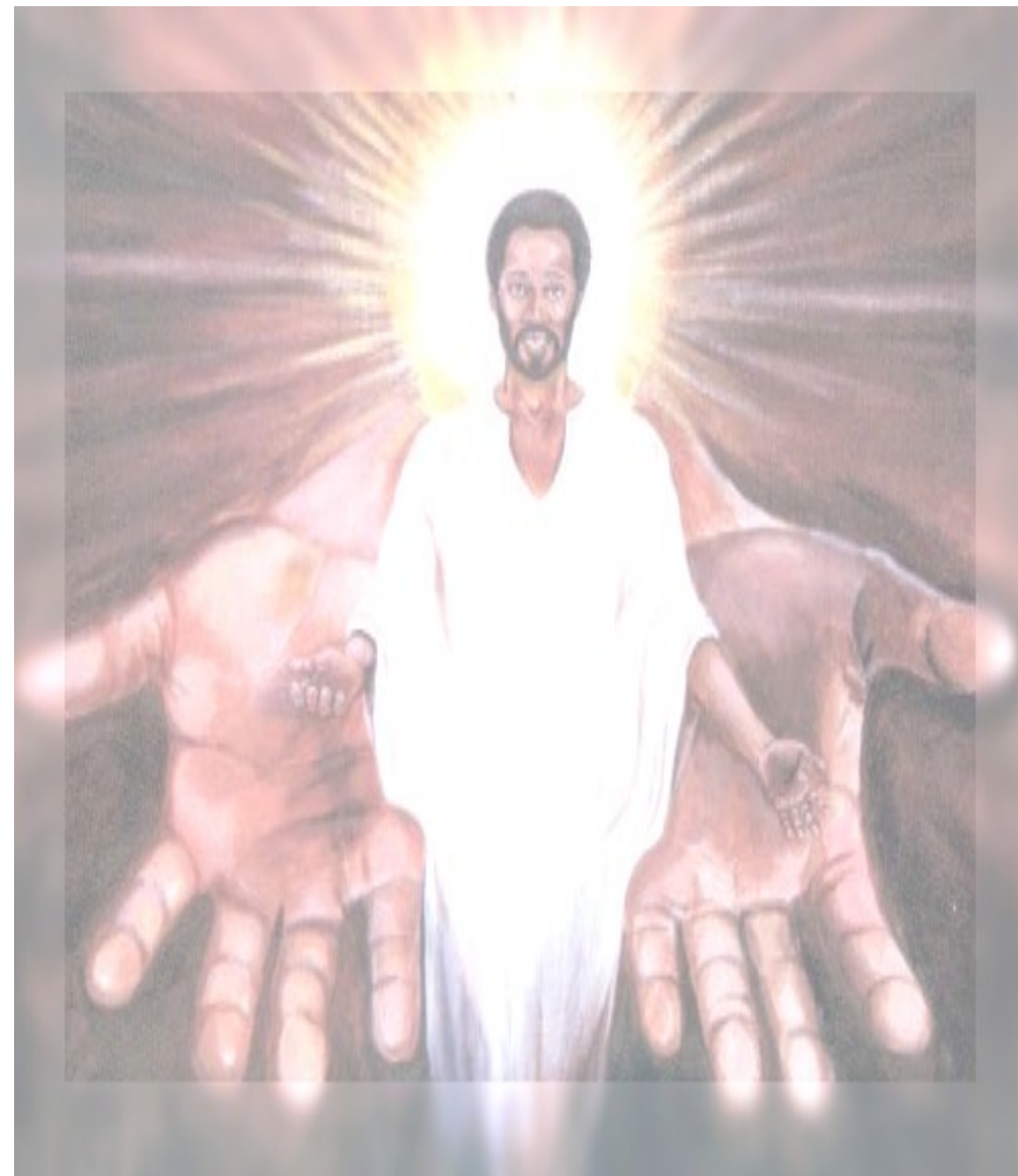
Lent is a time of prayer, meditation and reflection which prepares us for suffering, sacrifice and ultimate resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Lent, believers often fast as an act of sacrifice and penitence. Here at Saint John I am asking our members to do **two things**, 1) To **ABSTAIN** or fast from one food item, activity, habit, or addiction, and 2) To **ACCEPT** or take on an additional responsibility which i.e.; increased bible study or prayer time, increased giving, and or additional services provided to a family member, friend, or neighbor in need.

By abstaining from something and accepting an additional responsibility, we will be better able to conceptualize the tremendous gift of love and devotion that God gave to us in Jesus Christ. Moreover, through fasting and prayer, we become better acquainted with God's will for our lives, our congregation and our community.

In your hands you hold our Lenten Meditation Journal which provides scriptures, prayers and reflections for each of the forty days of Lent. The meditations have been contributed by members of this great congregation. I am grateful for Sister Camilla Avery, Sister Francesca Roscoe, Sister Tanya Morris all of the contributors, and the entire committee which has worked tirelessly to create this finished product. It is my prayer, that this journal will be more than words printed on paper, but rather a means of growing closer to Jesus Christ, who died that we might live.

Mashod Evans

Rev. Mashod A. Evans, Sr., Pastor



Resurrection Sunday

April 24, 2011

Scripture: *John 11:24-26* Martha saith unto him (Christ), I know that he (Lazarus) shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Today is an amazing day – Resurrection Sunday! Even though we especially remember Christ's resurrection once a year, we should celebrate weekly. He has done so much for us, so we should take every opportunity to celebrate our Risen Savior.

Also, it is the happiest day in the whole year, because it is the day when "Christ has been sacrificed." Christmas, too, is a joyous feast, but whereas Christmas is sweet, this day resounds with an unmistakable note of triumph; it is joy for the triumph of Christ for His victory. We rejoice over the fact that our faith is not in vain, that our hope is not founded on a dead man, but on a living one, the Living One par excellent. He made the ultimate sacrifice and died for our sins, so we may also have a real share in His Resurrection.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein"

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we bless You, we praise Your Holy Name. For only You could do it, save human kind from a world of sin, so that we may not perish, but also partake in the promise of everlasting life. Thank you for Your ultimate sacrifice.*

Sis. Camilla Sanders-Avery, Steward

The Season of Lent

Lent originated in the fourth century of the church, the season of Lent spans 40 weekdays beginning on Ash Wednesday and climaxing during Holy Week with Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding Saturday before Easter. Originally, Lent was the time of preparation of those who were to be baptized, a time of concentrated study and prayer before their baptism at the Easter Vigil, the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord early on Easter Sunday. But since these new members were to be received into a living community of Faith, the entire community was called to preparation. Also, this was the time when those who had been separated from the Church would prepare to rejoin the community.

Today, Lent is marked by a time of prayer and preparation to celebrate Easter. Since Sundays celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays that occur during Lent are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent, and are referred to as the Sundays in Lent. The number 40 is connected with many biblical events, but especially with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for His ministry by facing the temptations that could lead him to abandon his mission and calling Christians today use this period of time for introspection, self examination, and repentance.

The color used in the sanctuary for most of Lent is purple, red violet, or dark violet. These colors symbolize both the pain and suffering leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the suffering of humanity and the world under sin. But purple is also the color of royalty, and so anticipates through the suffering and death of Jesus the coming resurrection and hope of newness that will be celebrated in the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Lent has traditionally been marked by penitential prayer, fasting, and giving. Some churches today still observe a rigid schedule of fasting on certain days during Lent, especially the giving up of meat, alcohol, sweets, and other types of food. Other traditions do not place as great an emphasis on fasting, but focus on charitable deeds, especially helping those in physical need with food and clothing, or simply the giving of money to charities. Most Christian churches that observe Lent at all focus on it as a time of prayer, especially penance, repenting for failures and sin as a way to focus on the need for God's grace. It is really a preparation to celebrate God's marvelous redemption at Easter, and the resurrected life that we live, and hope for, as Christians.

Sis. Tanya Morris, Christian Education Director

Prayer

March 10, 2011

Scripture: *Matthew 7 7-8 NIV “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receive; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

Prayer is a privilege, an opportunity to talk with God. As we pray consistently, we affirm the existence of God in our lives. We build faith as we see God’s hand do His mighty work on our behalf just because we ask. Pray with expectancy! God is available always and in all ways.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank you for your many blessings. As we prepare our hearts, minds and our spirits during this Lenten season, it is by the power of prayer that we seek your face. Have your way oh Lord! Have your way. Lead and direct us in the way that you would have us to go. I am grateful to you for time in prayer. Strengthen our prayer lives this Lenten season. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Sis. Leslie Evans, First Lady of St. John

Holy Saturday

April 23, 2011

Holy Saturday is the name given to the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Some Christians recognize this day as the seventh day of Holy Week, the day on which Jesus “rested” from His work of providing salvation for the world. Holy Saturday is the day Jesus remained in the tomb where He had been buried following His crucifixion (Matthew 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53-54; John 19:39-42). If a church body celebrates Holy Saturday, it is traditionally done by observing a day of somber reflection, contemplating the world of darkness that would exist without the hope of Christ’s resurrection.

The only biblical reference to what happened on the Saturday in between Jesus’ death and resurrection is found in Matthew 27:62-66. After sundown on Saturday – the end of the Sabbath – the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pontius Pilate and asked that a guard be placed at Jesus’ tomb to prevent His disciples from removing the body. They remembered Jesus saying that He would rise again in three days (John 2:19-21) and wanted to do everything they could to prevent that. We know from the succeeding accounts that the Roman guards were inadequate to prevent the resurrection and those who returned to the tomb Sunday morning found it empty. The Lord had risen.

Prayer:

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Sis. Francesca M. Roscoe

Good Friday

April 22, 2011

Scripture: *Luke 23: 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth [2] until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. 47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. 48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. 49 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

As a course, I teach Animation and students must learn to write a story. Although it sounds simple, it can be difficult. I generally start with the basics: Students must learn that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning introduces the setting and the characters; the middle is the pivotal point in the story and tests the protagonist (everything at the beginning brings us this point), and the end is the resolution or the conclusion in the story. To help students comprehend it better, I explain how life is a story and how good stories contain pivotal points.

Everything in the life of the people of God since their creation has pointed to this moment. From the first promise to Eve as mankind was banished from the Garden of Eden, from David blessing Jerusalem as the city of God, to Nehemiah saving it for the future Messiah to walk in; everything has pointed to this one decisive moment.

Picture Jesus hanging on the cross in the dusty heat of the afternoon sun, at this moment the story takes a turn. Everything that came before led up to this moment and everything that has happened afterward is the result of it.

For close to two thousand years, humanity has looked back on the one they have pierced. As Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23, it is sin that has placed him there, nailed him to that barren tree, and we are all sinners, each and every one of us. The GOOD news on GOOD Friday is for those who are sinners. It is for you and it is for me. It is of repentance and forgiveness, of judgment and grace, and it is declared by a God who has become a human being. The Bible tells us that God cares, not because he has a sense of moral obligation or feels a sentimental pity, but that he knows.

Out of one horrific act, we are saved by God's grace.

Prayer: Heavenly Father we thank you for the gift of Your precious Son and for having mercy on us all. We thank You for the sacrifice made manifest through Your Son, Jesus Christ, that we may have a home in heaven.

Sis. Camilla Sanders-Avery

A Unity of Service

March 9, 2011

Scripture: *Ephesians 4:3 (NIV) "Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."*

Doctrinal rigidity cannot heal us. Our beliefs, or at least our interpretation of our beliefs, have always been imperfect, for the church is not only a society of forgiven sinners, it is also a society of diluted sinners. The first men, who followed Jesus followed through faith, not knowing very clearly who he was, just trusting His word. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Everything that they came to believe about him they learned in fellowship with him. Even at the cross and after the resurrection there were times when the apostles disagreed (that is Peter and Paul).

Their real faith came through action. Theirs was a unity of services. Our unity will be restored as we put down our prideful pretention to omniscience and personal adequacy.

PRAYER: Our Father, grant that through love of thee and love of one another we may always be masters of our gifts and our achievements and mastered by none of them, to the end that we might serve thee in the unity of Spirit supremely. Amen.

*Rt. Rev. James L. Davis, Servant Bishop
9th Episcopal District*

Finding our Way to the Holiest Place

March 11, 2011

Scripture: Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”*

We could divide the command to “pray without ceasing” into five categories:

- Adoration
- Thanksgiving
- Confession
- Petition
- Intercession

If bishops and pastors across America were to call a “Solemn Assembly” today, a call to prayer would necessarily be first on the agenda.

“Pray without ceasing” sounds relatively simple. But try it. See how Satan comes on the scene and delays, distracts, disillusiones, and discourages. Wait ... prayer is for our benefit, designed to help us. But if we limit praying to getting things from God, then we are missing out on God’s richest blessings. We must begin at the beginning—with Adoration, for if we do not first offer the sacrifice of praise, we will fall flat on our faces with Thanksgiving, Confession, Petition, and Intercession.

Adoration

Harold Lindsell says:

“Adoration is the first and highest form of prayer. In its simplest and finest form it is the worship and praise of God by one of his children. It is ... the story of the restless heart which finds its rest in God.”

Here it is, the Divine Priority of Prayer:

- We stand in awe of the person of Christ, with no proof needed that God is who He says He is.
- Our prayer of Adoration is not prefaced with our wants and needs.
- We are entirely consumed by His presence.
- We are in love with our Savior and we tell Him so.
- We are, in the moment of Adoration, completely removed from life’s cares and obligations, our eyes turned *upon Jesus*.
- We give all Glory and Praise that is due Him. “... worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness” (Psalm 8:1).

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Maunday Thursday

April 21, 2011

Maundy Thursday, also known as “Holy Thursday” is the Thursday of Passion Week, one day before Good Friday (the Thursday before Easter). Maundy Thursday is the name given to the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, known as the Last Supper. Two important events are the focus of Maundy Thursday.

First, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and thereby instituted the Lord’s Supper, also called Communion (Luke 22:19-20). Some Christian churches observe a special Communion service on Maundy Thursday in memory of Jesus: Last Supper with His disciples. Second, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet as an act of humility and service, thereby setting an example that we should love and serve one another in humility (John 13: 3-17). Some Christian churches observe a foot-washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday to commemorate Jesus’ washing the feet of the disciples.

The word “Maundy” is derived from the Latin word for “command”. The “Maundy” in Maundy Thursday refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper, that they should love and serve one another. It is a good thing to remember the Last Supper and Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. It is a good thing to remember the Lord’s example of humility.

Prayer:

Holy God, you give us this meal of bread and wine in which we celebrate your great compassion. Grant that we may work with you to fulfill our prayers, and to love and serve others as Christ has loved us. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Redeemer who is alive with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sis. Francesca M. Roscoe

Holy Wednesday

April 20, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 26:14-16 ¹⁴ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests ¹⁵ and asked, "How much will you pay me to betray Jesus to you?" And they gave him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

The Sanhedrin was gathered together and it decided to kill Jesus. In the meantime, Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. Here he was anointed on the head by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, with very expensive perfume. Some of the disciples were indignant about this; the oil could have been sold to support the poor. Judas went to the Sanhedrin and offered them his support in exchange for money. From this moment on Judas was looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus. Yes, it was the betrayal of Jesus by one of the men that had walked with Him for three years that set in motion the events that led to His crucifixion. Being God in the flesh, Jesus knew that Judas would eventually betray Him. Jesus didn't curse Judas; He accepted Judas' betrayal as God's will so He could accomplish the greater work of redeeming us for God.

As Christians, we are often caught off guard by the betrayal of someone close to us. God has given us free will and sometimes the exercise of that free will causes pain. When we are betrayed by someone, we must do as Jesus did; forgive the person, give the pain to God, and trust that God will use that betrayal, pain for our good (Romans 8:28). This process will not be easy, but it will release you from the burden and allow you to live the life God has for you.

Prayer: God, I thank you for your son Jesus Christ and what He did for me. Please help me to forgive those who have betrayed me and release it to you so I can enjoy the abundant life you have for me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Bro. Charley Morris, Class Leader

Strength

March 12, 2011

SONG: "ONE Day at a Time, Sweet Jesus" by Cristy Lane

....."One day at a time, sweet Jesus,
That's all I'm asking from you
just give me the strength to do everyday
what I have to do...."

SCRIPTURE: *Philippians 4:13 NIV* "I can do all things through Him(Christ) who gives me the strength."

Can you imagine for a moment that you are sitting on death row in the twilight years of your life? Can you even imagine what your thoughts would be as an innocent person awaiting to be executed? Would you be angry at God? Would you play the blame game? Would your thoughts be on family and friends or your last meal? Would you be able to say like Paul that no matter what your circumstances, you have learned to be content? Yes, you are Not complacent, but content, because you know that it is Jesus WHO holds your past, present, and future.

This single word best describes Paul in the New Testament. Paul's mind and spirit were NOT incarcerated. Paul understood and believed that Christ would give him strength in proportion to overcome or endure the challenges for that day. Do you remember how Paul asked to be healed of the "thorn in his side" (2 Corinthians 12:7). God did not heal Paul; rather God's strength was manifested in Paul's weakness. God works in and through our frailties and adversities for His glory.

Therefore, as we go through this Lenten season of repentance, renewal, restoration, sacrifice, and reexamination of our lives and our relationship with Jesus Christ, let us also be mindful that nothing is too hard for God. Without Christ we can do nothing, BUT with Christ as we can do all things.

PRAYER: Gracious God, thank you for this teachable moment. Thank You for helping us to refocus our lives during this Lenten season by knowing that you are our STRENGTH and without Your help, we can do nothing. In the powerful name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.

Rev. Dorothy Patrick, Ministerial Staff

Grace

March 13, 2011

Scripture: Hebrews 13:13:25 Grace be with all of you.

There is no place that is beyond God's Love

As part of our heart God's creation, I am blessed with the gift of grace. Grace is bestowed upon me unconditionally, without my needing to earn it or prove I deserve it. Like the father rushing to meet his returning prodigal son, God meets me when I seek the kingdom. Moreover, grace is active in me even when I am not consciously seeking, for there is no place in mind or heart that is beyond God's love.

Grace is visible in my life when the consequences of a mistake are gentler than they might have been. Grace is tangible when I feel blessed beyond all imagining. Love wells up within my heart until I feel the full impact of God's presence.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your gift of grace. I know I am always in your loving care. Amen.

Rev. Xavier Beasley, Ministerial Staff

Holy Tuesday

April 19, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 21:12-17 "And He said to them, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves."

We as Christians should not handicap others from worshipping God because of how they dress their physical makeup or who they are. If we do then we become like the tax collectors who handicapped people from worshipping God in a spiritual community setting. Since Jesus was in the Healing Ministry, the church should be about Spiritual healing of the people and helping those who are in spiritual and physical need.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for being such a loving Father through your Son Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit help us to humble our heart before an almighty God so that we will be a fit of service to others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Bro. J. P. Lewis

Monday of Holy Week

April 18, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 16:15-16 “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”
16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

At an opportune time Jesus tests his disciples with a crucial question: Who do men say that I am and who do you say that I am? He was widely recognized in Israel as a mighty man of God, even being compared with the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. Peter exclaimed that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. No person could have revealed this to Peter; only God. Jesus then grants Peter authority to govern the church that Jesus would build, a church that no powers would overcome.

Interestingly, Peter's name in both Aramaic and Greek means “rock”. When we call someone a ‘rock’, we mean that they are strong. It is a complement. To call someone a “rock” is one of the greatest of compliments. Through faith Peter grasped who Jesus truly was. He was the first apostle to recognize Jesus as the Anointed One (Messiah and Christ) and the only begotten Son of God.

Faith in Jesus Christ makes us strong, like rock. Daily, the Lord Jesus tests each of us personally with the same question: Who do you say that I am? Is our faith strong? Are we like Peter?

Prayer: Lord, I believe that you are Christ, the Son of the living God. Dear God help us to increase our faith. Help to make me and others more like Peter. Make our faith strong like Peter's and give us the boldness to speak out and up and let others know you personally as Lord and Savior. Amen.

Sis. Camilla Sanders-Avery, Steward

Prosperity

March 14, 2011

Scripture: **Philippians 4:19 (NIV)** “And my God will meet all of your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

In this scripture, Paul is telling the Philippians that there is joy in giving, and that their giving to others pleases God. Because God is pleased with people who give, it pleases God to give to his children—just as a father loves to give to his children when his children are giving children. As children of God, God wants to see us prosper. To prosper doesn't necessarily mean that God is going to give us everything we want or everything our hearts desire. Oftentimes, as children of God, we expect God to bless us with lots of money, high paying jobs, expensive homes, expensive cars, name brand clothing and so on. God has promised us that He will supply all of our needs—not all of our wants. God blesses us in the manner in which He sees fit. God can bless us with good health, the courage to face a terminal illness, the strength to overcome the untimely death of a loved one, a voice to sing, or God may bless us with something we don't necessarily want, or feel, like we need at the present moment. We may not get each and every thing we ask God for, but God gives us what He wants us to have when He wants us to have it. We should be thankful and grateful for God's giving because God gives to us for a reason—that reason is prosperity. God wants us to take and use what He has given to complete the task he has given us. We are to prosper and witness to others who are not yet believers. Our prosperity can be used to draw others to the kingdom of God. This is the one thing God wants most—to grow his kingdom here on earth! If we trust in God, eventually everything will change and we will be able to enjoy the real prosperity—A seat in the Kingdom (a heavenly home).

Prayer: Father God, thank you for all you have done in our lives. We thank you God for where we are right now. We thank You for every good and perfect gift You have bestowed upon us. We ask dear God that we take our gifts and utilize them in a manner which is pleasing to you. We thank You for the prosperity You have blessed us with. We ask God that we not be selfish in not sharing our prosperity which You have blessed us with. We ask God that You enable us to share with others and they to will be blessed with prosperity beyond their beliefs and measure. We ask these blessings in the matchless name of Your son and with our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. AMEN.

Rev. Ken Jones, Ministerial Staff

Praise

March 15, 2011

Scripture: *Psalms 40:3 “And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.” (KJV)*

The most common theme that runs through the Bible from beginning to end is “Praise the Lord”. In fact, as Christians, we are commanded to do so. As I grow in spiritual faith, I have come to understand why praise is so important. When we acknowledge the mighty works of God and His goodness we can’t help but praise His Holy name. It’s just natural. But praise not only glorifies and pleases God; it also helps bring us closer to Christ and delivers others. Yes, praise is a powerful thing.

When we praise the Lord, we are focused on Him and placed in His abiding presence. We forget about our problems and woes. Our faith is increased and our countenance changes. Individuals who witness this are blessed as well. Their faith is increased.

So as you go about your day, remember to give God praise. It will glorify God and witness to others. You’ll be surprised! Before you know it, you’ll have a smile on your face and a song in your heart. Others will wonder why and seek to have the joy that you have discovered.

Prayer: Lord, we give you praise today for our many blessings, those that we have received and others that we have not yet received. We ask that you give us a greater spirit of praise so that we may be a blessing to others and increase God’s kingdom. May our praise help us to grow greater in faith, strength, and love. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen

Sis. Camilla Sanders-Avery, Steward

Virtue

April 17, 2011

Scripture: *2Peter 1:5-8 And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.*

And to knowledge temperance; and temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we face the struggles of daily life, often filled with disappointments, heartaches and sadness, we may find ourselves looking for easy fixes or the easy way out. But as Christians we must remember to meet the obstacles head on with moral excellence, uprightness and goodness. We must keep our virtue in all our actions and not these forces to make us shrink from doing what is right and good be we are faced with difficulty.

Prayer : I need to be forgiven Lord so many times a day. So often do I stumble and fall, be merciful I pray. And help me be not critical when others faults I see, for so many times my Lord, these same faults are in me. Amen

Sis. Emma Allen, Steward

Consistency

April 16, 2011

Scripture: James 1:3-4 “Be assured and understand that the trial and providing of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness (consistency) and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness (consistency) and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfectly and fully developed, lacking in nothing.”

As Christians we are commanded by God to be consistent in prayer, study, and meditation. Through this practice we become closer to God and learn His divine plan and will for our lives. He then sets us in the right path and places our feet on solid ground. In Him there is no failure, only victory

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for being consistent in our lives. Through Your steadfast grace and mercy we are sustained. May you never leave us or forsake us. This is our fervent prayer. Amen.

Sis. Camilla Sanders-Avery, Steward

Joy

March 16, 2011

Joy is defined as something that gives us happiness. It can be brought by a number of events, situations, and circumstances that may occur during the course of our lives.

For those that trust the Lord, there is a joy that is based on more than the events, situations, and circumstances that happens in our lives. This joy is based on the fact that God has provided for the forgiveness of sin and restored relationship with God through Jesus. Thus providing the opportunity for a close, personal relationship with the Lord. As followers of Christ, we have been provided with a very special joy. Once there was a conversation between two siblings regarding the passing of their parents. One of the things brought out in this conversation was that there was not the emotion of fear. When the first monumental figure in their lives passed, they existed an uncertainty about “tomorrow”. When that second monumental figure passed, they remembered the “yesterdays” and took comfort in the fact that, as followers in Christ, we are in the Lord’s care, and He, as always, will take care of “tomorrow”

In the 6th chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul describes the experience of a hardship he was enduring as being “sorrowful yet always rejoicing”. Because of blessing bestowed upon them, the siblings were considered, “unique and very special”. They had sources of strength and power that allowed them to face “tomorrow”. They knew the God that did and had proved time and time again that he will take care of them, provided them a very special kind of joy. A joy provided just for those that know the Lord.

As followers of Christ, we should accept this “Joy” as a blessing and use it as a source of comfort when life’s events, situations and circumstances bring sorrow and discomfort. Even in the unstable and unpredictable world in which we live we have the joy of knowing that regardless... We are in the Lord’s care.

One song writer uses Unspeakable.....Soul –saving...He called it, “God’s Great Joy” as an attempt to describe it. But does even this fully describe it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We thank you for all the joy that life may bring about we are especially thankful for the that can only be provided by You. We pray that we will show our joy to others so that they may come to know you and experience it. AMEN.

Bro. Egbert Thomas, Trustee

Consistency

March 17, 2011

Scripture: *2 Timothy 3:14-17* ¹⁴ **But you must continue** with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you. ¹⁵ *Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁶ *Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character,* ¹⁷ *so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.*

The above referenced scripture states that **“YOU MUST CONTINUE”**. In our daily Christian life we must continue the things in which we have learned and not give up, in other words we must be committed. We as Christians must not be—in one day, out the next — up one day, or down the next; but stay the course and endure the assignment which has been given you.

Also, we need to be consistent in our daily Christian Life; without consistency there will be no success. But to be consistent you must be committed. We must be consistent and committed in our:

1. **Faith** – We must be consistent and committed in our faith, by believing and trusting in God on a daily basis.
2. **Word** – We must be consistent and committed in our reading of the word on a daily basis by setting a specific time and place to read and meditate on the word of God.
3. **Prayer** – We must be consistent and committed in our prayer life. Continue to thank God and continue to ask Him for strength to do His will.
4. **Praise** – We must be consistent and committed in our praise, simply because we love him and thank him daily for all that he has blessed us with and continues to bless us with.
5. **Love** – We must be consistent and committed in our love for others. The bible says to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
6. **Witnessing** – We must be consistent and committed in our witnessing. Continue to share the Gospel with others.
7. **Practice** – We must be consistent and committed in practicing what we have learned by putting it into action. “When you Learn Teach”

Prayer: Dear God we ask you today to help us to be committed and consistent in our Faith, Word, Prayer, Praise, Love, Witnessing and Practice in our daily lives so it is revealed to others in both our actions and our words. And by being consistent in our Christian life we have the potential of making believers of those around us.

Sis. Tanya Morris, Director of Christian Education

Appreciate

April 15, 2011

The definition of appreciate as stated by Webster is” recognize with gratitude; be grateful”. I have been filled with the response of the world to help uplift Haiti and the Haitian people.

I watched CNN specials that generated millions of dollars of donations, and I am aware there are many, many people and organizations that are gathering donations worldwide. There are so many needs for the people of Haiti.

People can argue, disagree, and bicker, but we are indeed all connected. When a brother or sister have fallen...we reach out our hand to uplift our fallen brother or sister. Who are our brother’s keepers? We are our brother’s keeper, which is why we should appreciate the wonders, goodness, and blessings of God.

This is what the writer Carlye said about appreciation “one of the Godlike things in this world is the veneration done to human worth by the hearts of men”. For that we should appreciate God’s wonders, his mercy, and his blessings.

Bro. Gary Evans, Steward

Unity

April 14, 2011

Scripture: Psalm 133:1 “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity...”

As noted in the Book of Psalm, the psalmist David was a man after God’s own heart, David loved unity among people. (Unity/Oneness - to be (or become) one; join, unite together; to be harmonious, with one accord, with one mind, like minded.)

In God's sight, unity or togetherness among His people is good, and it pleases Him. When we as Christians are joined together we receive the benefits of the goodness and pleasantness unity produces. That is why we should always strive for unity. When we join with other believers in worship and praise, we enrich their lives in the same way that they enrich ours.

In Matthew 18:20 – Jesus said “Wherever two or more are gathered together in His name, He is there also.” The Power of unity comes when God's people have all things in common—the same beliefs and desires working toward a common goal.

As I reflect on the word Unity, I am reminded how Richard Allen and others united in their decision to leave St. George Methodist Episcopal Church and start this great Zion of ours, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. By them joining together they demonstrated the Power of Unity – the same beliefs and desires working toward a common goal, to worship in an environment of love.

Prayer: Dear God we pray that you continue to unite this congregation and the African Methodist Episcopal Church together so that we may enrich the lives of those in our congregation and those in our community to demonstrate the Power of Unity through God’s love. Amen.

Sis. Tanya Morris, Christian Education Director

Hope

March 18, 2011

Scripture: Romans 8:24 “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?”

Hope is a desire accompanied by an expectation. It is a constant expectation of an unseen reality. The Bible defines hope as “belief that God will accomplish what He promised.” (Ps. 71:5; Eph. 2:12) If we are expecting something unseen, we wait with perseverance; that is, we are willing to endure the present because of what we expect in the future. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, God has given believers a new spiritual life that enables us to live in a different dimension. We have a living hope which gives us confidence that continues throughout eternity. (1 Peter 1:3) Because of our hope in His power, “when we are troubled, we are not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; we are persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;” (2 Cor. 4: 8-9) As believers, we will face trials, and sometimes see no way out. But, we must remember that God controls trials and uses them to strengthen His people. We are saved by faith, but our hope is in the return of Christ in all His glory and our deliverance from our sinful nature God is so good, and by raising Jesus from the dead, He has given us new life and a hope that lives on.

Prayer: O God our help in ages past, You are our hope for years to come. We ask You to guide us and shelter us from the storms of life. You are our strength for today and our hope for tomorrow. Lord, we thank You for loving us and allowing us to take our burdens to the foot of the cross and leave them there. God, we know that You have already won the battle for the faithful, and as long as we have faith, we hope. Lord, we give You praise, honor, and glory. Amen

Sis. Norma J. Smith, Trustee

Comfort

March 19, 2011

Scripture: *Psalms 119: 48-51 “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: Yea thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.*

Comfort is giving strength and hope. We all have goals in life but we sometimes fall short and we don't take kindly to falling short of our goals. We need comfort doing these times in our life. God is an excellent choice when times are hard or easy. We all should be thankful to God the Father, Christ the Son. Lord we pray that You will give us the strength everyday to be more of what You would have us to be. The Father has given us and outline to follow, the written word of God the Father. There is comfort in the Bible, read it and get closer to God the Father through Christ the Son.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father we thank You for being Yourself all the time. We thank You for all the blessings. We thank You for the good times and the not so good times, Lord we pray for world peace. Touch the world's leaders so they can all be on one accord. Lord I pray that everyone will make an effort to know you better and serve you forever. Amen

Mr. Franklin Debardenlaben, Steward

Wisdom

April 13, 2011

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 10:10

Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed.

A dull ax will get the job done; you're just going to have to work harder. Sharpening the blade will make the job a lot easier. Many of us have heard the expression, "work smart not hard". Relying solely on human wisdom in our daily life is like using a dull ax to chop wood. We can do it, but it's going to be hard. Seeking and following God's in daily life will make our lives easier. Now this doesn't mean that we will not have problems, but it does mean that God will help avoid some problems and get us through the ones we do experience.

Think back over your life on the times you followed God's wisdom. Did it ever lead you down the wrong path? Were you better for following God's wisdom? As humans, we aren't always going to make the right choice, but that's where grace and mercy come in to give us another chance. As we follow Godly wisdom, it will allow God to use us for His purpose and His glory. As Proverbs 3:5-6 says, Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for what you are doing in my life. Forgive me for the times I lean on my wisdom instead of Yours. Help me to seek your wisdom and lean not on my understanding. Amen

Bro. Charlie Morris, Class Leader

Steadfast

April 12, 2011

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:57-58 “But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

Lord it is our prayer that we press toward the vision as you reveal it to us that we may bring others (souls) to You through the sharing of the gospel and the living of our lives. Through this may others are drawn to You. It is also our prayers that while we sometimes get weary and even lose sight of our purpose that we remember, You have promised that our continued faith and works are not in vain. We have victory in You.

Bro. Zachery Beasley, Trustee

Suffering

March 20, 2011

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:12 “If we suffer, we should also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us.”

The cause of suffering can come in many forms, it could be the death of a love one, failure in our business, sickness, betrayal, disappointment in our private lives, etc.

Sometimes when we experience hardship, such as a loss of a love one, sickness, betrayal, or disappointment in our personal lives, we often question God as to why this happen to us. Why? Why did you allow this sickness to invade my body? Why did you allow my child to die? Why me? By asking the question of God, we are also doubting the wisdom and power of God.

We must always remember, that God gave us his only begotten son, who suffered under Pontius Pilate and paid the ultimate price for our salvation. As Christians we must be constant and steadfast in prayer and faith. Having faith and truly believing in the word of our Lord and Savior will sustain us through the hard times. Remember, God will not put on us any more than we can bear.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for this day, for another chance to represent you in some fashion or form, to let the know of your blessing. I pray that at the end of this day that by my action, some word, or deed that I have given some aid or comfort to some person in need of prayer. I thank you for being there and not forsaken me during the dark period of my life. I thank you for giving me the strength and courage to move forward, even when things seemed hopeless. Thank you Lord for our Pastor and our place of worship known as St. John A.M.E. I pray that we will become better servants with your continued blessing. This prayer, I pray to you in Jesus name. Amen

Mr. Curtis McCaslin, Trustee

Temple

March 21, 2011

Scripture:: 1 *Corinthian 3: 16, 17* “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*”

No man can of himself cast out the evil that has taken possession of the heart. But He will not force an entrance, He comes not into the heart as to the temple of old, but he says behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him. Rev. 3:20.

His presence will cleanse and sanctify the soul so that it may be a holy temple unto the Lord and habitation of God through the spirit. Eph. 2:21-22

Prayer: So often we do not pray in certain situations. From our standpoint the outlook is hopeless, but nothing is impossible through God.

Bro.. King Kindred, Trustee

Guidance

April 11, 2011

Hymn: "Lead Me, Guide Me Along the Way"

Scripture: Proverbs 3:6 “*In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.*”

Radical situations that bring about change are seemingly constant and ever increasing. Some are inevitable, surprising and shocking. Substance abuse of different kinds, unruly children, racial tensions as we grow more diverse, disbelief in the institution of marriage, random violence, discontentment in churches, to name a few, all seem to escalate.

The economic situation of our nation plus the unrest of many nations leave our leaders in the home, school, church, nation and the world perplexed as to effective directions.

The bible teaches that Jesus left us God's example of guidance to follow in overcoming the many adversities of life. God's way is a sure way. Call on Him! (Psalm 32:8)

Prayer: Almighty God, Heavenly Father, we, thy children humbly bow seeking thy guidance throughout this and every day. As we struggle to make our way through the many uncertainties of life, hold us by the hand and keep us forever in thy path. Guide us safely, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen

Sis. Deloris Burgess

Power

April 10, 2011

Scripture: *Luke 9:1-2* When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

God gave the disciples power to drive out demons and to cure diseases. In an every day life situation, in corporate America and other countries, corporate leaders have the power to make decisions that have both good and adverse effects on people as well as on the environment. Some of our leaders overlook the fact that God has all power and with him all things are possible.

Prayer : God, we need your love and understanding to carry out your will. Help us to better understand your plan for our lives. Keep us on a straight path as we sometimes will stray. We ask for mercy in our daily lives. Amen

Bro. Lee Allen, President

Saint John AME Lay Organization

Fasting

March 22, 2011

Scripture: *Nehemiah 1:4(NIV)* When I heard these things I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

One important thing the Bible tells us to do is to think about God's word. Our thoughts determine our behavior and so what we think about is very important. That is why God wants us to think about his word, or meditate on it. Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the Christian disciplines. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. I am convinced that when God's people with biblical motives seek God's face with a broken, repentant and contrite Spirit. God's people will hear from heaven and healing will occur in our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world.

PRAYER: Father God I pray for wisdom and knowledge. I glorify your Holy name as I desire to be the kind of Christian that you would have me to be. I ask for your blessings on this congregation and this ministry. These blessings, I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen

Bro. Ray Oliver, Sr., Steward

Patience

March 23, 2011

Scripture: EPHESIANS 4:2 *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”*

Are you waiting for something you thought God should have delivered by now, satisfaction at work, healing from an illness, reconciliation with a friend, a new car, a needed vacation, a new job? The assurance we have from the Bible is that, in every case, in his own way, God’s promise was good.

If we believe the promise, then we wait, and wait patiently with love; it will not be vain. Take the promise with you every day.

PRAYER:

Dear father God, tune my heart so that I may be patient, help me to walk by faith where the light is dim; loving God, being calm and trust worthy, leaving everything to him.

Bro. Garry Evans: Steward

Peace

April 9, 2011

Peace is a term we use very casually and often, so much so that we have a universal gesture for it, the peace sign. We even talk about achieving World Peace and signing Peace Treaties. As African Americans our ancestors struggled and died for peace. However, Peace is something we all want and need, but often take for granted until we don’t have it or can’t find it. As Christians, we understand that the Lord grants us true peace and that we can pass this peaceful spirit on to others. Not the peace that some think of; being still and calm, with no problems or worries, but a sweet abiding peace in the face of a tumultuous storm. The Bible mentions it often and describes it as a state of mind that is civil, caring, sharing, and loving.

Let peace fly over with passion and patience like a dove that can be held onto so that we may make a positive change in our church, family, jobs, and country.

Bro. Leronza Harris, Trustee

Love

April 8, 2011

Scripture: (John 14:21) *He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*

THE BEATITUDES OF LOVE

Blessed are those who find love everywhere for they may be lonely.

Blessed are those who always give love, for they shall always have more love to give.

Blessed are those who bestow healing love, for they may be known as the physicians of the soul.

Blessed are those who love to put others first, for theirs is the kingdom of humility.

Blessed are those who love God first, and above all, for theirs is the kingdom of right relationship to God people and things.

Blessed are those who practice love in relation to all people at all times, for theirs is the kingdom of intimate kindness.

Blessed are those who plan to practice love always, for they shall live in the house of love and dwell in the city of God forever and ever.

(From "Forty Days of Love" by Thomas A Carruth)

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for your love. Let me always remember that You loved me so much You gave your life for me. May I be loving in return, not only with those who love me, but even with those who are hard to be around. Help me to reflect your love, finding joy in loving others as You love me.

Sis. Evelyn Patterson, Steward

Forgiveness

March 24, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 6:14-15

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you.

Forgiveness: It's For You...Not For Them

People often think the way to hurt the offender is to not forgive them for what they've done. However, the quickest way to get on the road of healing is to pardon, release and forgive what was done and the person who did it. When you don't, the person who pays greater price is you, not them.

PRAYER:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen

Bro. Robert Avery, Trustee

Faith

March 25, 2011

My uncle saw leafless trees in my neighborhood, but because his mind is clouded by Alzheimer's disease though the trees were dead. "They are not coming back, they need to be cut down", he repeated. Even though my exclamation that this is winter and trees are only leafless for this season, he continued to repeat that "they need to be cut down".

How often we see our circumstances with a mind clouded by past experience and disappointment. We may look at a friendship, a marriage, a family disagreement and say to ourselves, "cut it down". "It is hopeless". But God wants us to see with hope because of His presence and power. We can't bring life to these seemingly impossible situations, but He can.

God's promise to Abraham that he would have a son seemed to have expired with age. Sarah his wife was barren, and his own body was "dead" at the age of a hundred (Roman 4:19; Hebrew 11:11-12). Yet Abraham believed God "who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; became the father of many nations" (Roman 4: 17-18).

What leafless or lifeless situation do we see today? Don't believe everything your mind tells you about it. Instead, as God for eyes of faith that see with hope.

Prayer: Thank you, Heavenly Father, that faith is not an emotion that we need to work up inside of us.

Instead it is a gift that You gives to us as we commit ourselves to You. Help us to grow in Faith.

Amen.

Sis. Jimmie Green-Whitt, Steward

Reflection

April 7, 2011

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:4 "Who comforted us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves, are comforted by God."

God is our comforter. Just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, it is also through Christ that our comfort overflows. Many of us have experienced overwhelming pain and suffering. In our fragile state of grief we often begin to ask the question "Why Me", and why did this happen to me?

As Christians, we know that God comforts His people. "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you." Isaiah 66:

Let us all remember "When we are facing great disasters and challenges Let's look to God from Whence all our help cometh. Instead of questioning Gods wisdom (because of our trials and tribulations), let us utilize this opportunity to draw closer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in prayer and in service. As we remember these words of Scripture: 2nd Corinthians 1:4 "God comforts us in all our troubles——so that we may comfort others."

We are the servants and children of God. We are not in a position to question God's will. We must only question our own actions. A Personal Question: When we receive this comfort and mercy from our "Heavenly Father", which strengthened us during our time of trouble, did we share that strength with others?

Prayer:: Dear Heavenly Father, We come to you on bended knees asking for your mercy and guidance. You are our refuge, our ever-present help in times of trouble. As Christians, we know that each of us have a mission here on earth. We know that you have supplied us with the tools/gifts/talents which are to be used to fulfill our mission. Help us to become more spiritual so that we can adequately utilize our assets for the edification of your kingdom, to help others. When sorrow threatens our existence and stress becomes a challenge, please remind us that we're not alone. When there is a hurting heart help us to know and feel your presence and your message of love and caring. May we all grow stronger and wiser in the face of adversity. Let us continuously be reminded that God never gives up on his children. God is Love! God Remains Faithful Forever! Amen.

Sis. Claretha W. Finley, Trustee

Obedience

April 6, 2011

Scripture: *Luke 6:46 “Why do you call me, Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?”*
John 14:23 “If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching.”

Obedience to God is very important in our Christian growth. Obedience is expressing love to God, which is why His commandments are not burdensome to us. God summarizes all his commandments by giving us the commandment to love. The Bible reveals love to us, and it also reveals God to us. When we know God, we know love. This Lenten season, let us show love to our neighbor and obedience to God.

Bro. Donald Billups, Church School Superintendent

Worship

March 26, 2011

Although worshipping is something we all do, it is something I rarely thought about. Merriam-Webster defines worship (v.) as, “to regard with great or extravagant respect, honor or devotion.” Well, with that definition clearly set out, I was ready to write or so I thought. The words flowed onto the page with what I thought about worship, and how I worshipped on Sundays and during the week. When I re-read what I had written, something in my heart stopped me from sending it on for publication. I prayed for days seeking what God meant as His definition of worship and what HE intended worship to be. This Meditation is written in hopes that it will help all of us worship God in the way that it is acceptable to our Lord. The Bible clearly teaches us to humble ourselves. James 4:6 states, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” Our worship to God should be an humble and reverent action.

Worshipping God in spirit means that it MUST be done for the heart. True worship is God-centered. Worshipping God in truth means that it must be done according as God has specified in the Bible. John 4:23-24 states, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit and they that worship him MUST worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Merriam-Webster defines “must” as an obligation, a requirement, a necessity, a certainty, and something that must be done”. Must is not optional. In Spirit and in truth is the only way to acceptably worship God. King David was a phenomenal example of all of us in regards to worshipping God. He had a pure and grateful heart towards God and worshipped Him with the entirety of his being. David was a man after God’s own heart, because he truly glorified God in his heart! When we worship God we develop such traits as forgiveness, tenderness, justice, righteousness, purity, kindness, and love. All of this is preparing us for eternal life in heaven. Our prayers, our giving, our singing, participating in communion and even serving others are all offered to God as part of our worship. Worship is not limited to one act, but is done properly when the heart and attitude of the person is in the right place. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 sums everything up, “What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love the Lord and His statutes.” This is what God requires of us, both in our obedience and worship of Him. Worship is to glorify and exalt God; to show our loyalty and admiration to our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Lord, when I look to You, I sense the great love You have for me and Your people. I look to You today—The Lord of Hosts—and I bow my head. I realize that God is and awesome God and I glorify your Holy Name. Dear Lord, I ask You to allow me to be receptive to Your ears, see with Your eyes and think with Your mind. It is to You Dear Lord, that I give you all the honor and glory! I come to you today Holy Father as I worship You in spirit and truth on this day, because this day is indeed all about You. Amen

Sis. Bea Tatum, Steward

HEALING...Restored, Rejoice!

March 27, 2011

Scripture: "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Habakkuk 3:18

To be healed can mean to set right, mend or simply to restore. It was for the purpose of restoring mankind unto God that Christ came, suffered, bled, and died on the Cross of Calvary for our redemption.

Most people want to have a mountain top experience, but few of us want to go through the valley. Our valley lows equip us, teach us to focus on and trust God, and allow us to see God at work in our lives. We learn the most about God in our valley experiences. In short, our valleys can be part of our refining process.

In 2001, my mother went into the hospital to have what typically was a simple, one-day procedure, but she developed complications from it. We prayed steadfastly for her healing ... but she died anyway. In the aftermath, her Pastor reminded me of the fact that we had prayed for complete and absolute healing. *Have you ever experienced God at work in ways that contradict your expectations?* As I ponder that today, I realize that absolute healing requires faith and trust in Almighty God and belief that whatever the outcome is ... God is still omnipotent, always with us, always watching over us, always loving us, and will always heal our hearts and restore our joy!

Healing may not always be restoring of physical health in the natural realm, but all forms of brokenness in our lives can be mended ... mental, spiritual, or relational ... in our weakness, God is strong. During times of uncertainty and hurt, I am reminded of one of my favorite songs, "*what do you do when you've done all you can and it seems that it's never enough, what do you do when ... You just stand and watch the Lord see you through!*"

Prayer:

Lord God, we thank you for your goodness, mercy, and grace unto us. You are indeed our Jehovah Jireh ... our provider, Jehovah Nissi ... Lord you reign in victory, Jehovah Shalom ... you're our Prince of Peace ... Lord we worship you, just because of who you are. Lord, teach us to always trust you, and to not focus on what we see, but to stand on the promises of your Word. In the Almighty name of Jesus we pray.

Closing Thought:

I must tell Jesus, all of my troubles, He is a kind compassionate friend. If I but ask Him, he will deliver – make of my troubles, quickly an end. With the strength of faith, the power of prayer, and the promise of heaven that through God all things are possible and all hurts are healed, we can triumphantly declare that, the joy of the Lord is truly our strength!

Sis. Doris R. Hardy, Trustee

Fellowship

April 5, 2011

Scripture: Psalm 28:7

When I think of fellowship there are two types that come in mind: Fellowship with my fellow man and fellowship with God. When I arrive at Sunday morning worship service I feel a common bond with my church family here at St. John, especially during fellowship time when we meet and greet each other after a week or more of being apart from the house of worship. But on a regular basis I have a closer fellowship with God daily when I pray and meditate on His word. He is the one who gives me the strength and the continued guidance that I need to make it through the rough and trying times in my life.

Prayer: Dear God I thank you for the continued fellowship with my church family and the fellowship that we have together on a daily basis which give me the strength I need to do your will. Amen

Sis. Frances Clopton, Trustee

Protected

April 4, 2011

Scripture: Job: 1-10

As we prepare daily for our jobs and other duties, let us meditate and give thanks to God for all he has done and will continue to do for those who call on His holy and righteous name. We give thanks to him for sending his angels to protect us as we go about our way; no matter how dangerous, or not. We will thank Him for keeping us safe and sound. (Psalm 91:11)

Each and every day as we commute in our cars, let us thank him for traveling grace, protection from quick lane changes, poor road conditions, and texting hostile drivers. In addition, let's thank Him for his mercy, for our biological family, as well as our pastor, and church family.

Life has its challenges, but with God's help all things are possible. We can conquer anything. Let's rejoice in the Lord, for He is good and faithful to those believe.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come giving thanks for the hedges of protection you place around us as we walk in your presence in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Bro. Rodney Davidson, Northwest Conference Lay President

Authority

March 28, 2011

Scripture: Hebrews 13:17 *“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”*

I have learned through the years that in order for one to be a good leader – someone in authority- we first have to be a good follower. In other words, before we can exercise authority, we first have to learn to practice submission. As we know, God's desire for us is to increase and succeed, but this does not happen automatically. We must move through a period of submission and then to authority before being promoted to the one who is in the seat of authority.

This is evidenced throughout the Bible. If we look at Simon Peter and the centurion, each was not only blessed because of their obedience to the authority over them, they were also promoted. Peter was instructed by Jesus to let down his net and because of his obedience to authority when Peter raised the net out of the water it was full of fish. Peter later became one of God's greatest instruments of evangelism. Additionally, the centurion received praise from God because he understood submission and authority and because of his understanding, the request for Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant was granted.

The Bible is clear in Hebrews 13:17 regarding disobedience and rebellion to authority. However, through God's grace and mercy we can practice submission. We must always remember that the rewards of submitting to authority are great, both here on earth and in heaven.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us learn to practice submission. Help us understand that we must move through a period of submission before we are promoted to a seat of authority. Guide us in this journey. Give us the strength to walk in faith - knowing that the rewards on earth and in heaven are great if we only obey your word. AMEN

Sis. Cheryl Cephus-Vickers, Steward

New Life

March 29, 2011

Scripture: *Corinthians 4:18* “We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

The perfect life of God within renews me day by day.

The energy of God renews the earth after fire, earthquakes or floods. New life pushes up through the ash, the debris and the mud. In the same way, God in me renews and heals me no matter what the appearance or experience.

Regardless of what happens in the outer world, there is an eternal, unchanging perfect life beyond the visible. As I calm my thoughts, release my fears, and open my heart to that perfect life, I open to the flow of healing that is always available.

Healing flows freely into my body and mind from the infinite Source of life. It cannot be limited or damaged by the physical world. This life is the truth of my being and through it I experience renewal.

Prayer: Dear heavenly father I ask that you would create in me a renewal of spirit, mind and body. Everything I do will include you. In Jesus name. Amen.

Sis. Evelyn A. Beasley, WMS President

Courage

April 3, 2011

Scripture: *Matthew 10:26 (NKJV).* “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

This Word is both a warning about bad things being revealed and encouragement that good things will be made known. Whenever I think of Lent, I wonder if I have the courage to maintain my commitment. Can I really give up something that I hold near and dear to me? Do I have the courage to make the commitment, or will I fail before I get started? Participating in the Daniel Fast prepared me to take on a spiritual discipline that took courage by eliminating foods of choice from my diet for 21 days. Rather than remembering how difficult the Daniel Fast was, I ask for courage to go where the Spirit is driving me. Where might that place be? I am asking Jesus to give me the courage not to yield to temptation. This road is not meant to be easy, but I will allow the Spirit to drive me to a place where I have no fear.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, grant me the gift of courage. Help me to overcome the desires of this world. At the same time, help me to broaden my vision beyond my own small world. Help me, Lord, to always see You at work in my life and in the lives of others. Bless me with courage because there is nothing covered that you will not reveal. Amen

Bro. Arthur Welch, Trustee

Purpose

April 2, 2011

The popular Christian author Rick Warren book *“The Purpose Driven Life “*, sold over 30 million copies because of a plan for good Christian living. In his book, Warren offers a 40-day personal spiritual journey and God's purpose for human life on earth. This journey consist of five (5) purposes that God prescribe for daily living and prosperity; included are: we were Planned for God's Pleasure (***Worship***), we were Formed for God's Family (***Fellowship***), we were Created to Become Like Christ (***Discipleship***), we were Shaped for Serving God (***Ministry***) and we were made for a Mission (***Mission***). Warren intended for the book to be read as a daily meditation on consecutive days. The chapters contains a personal application to help us understand our purpose in life, it speaks about our purpose not being about us, but what God's plan for us here on earth.

Similarly, the apostle Paul's ***Second Letter to Timothy (1:7-8)***; he urges Timothy to live out his purpose by not having a "spirit of timidity" and to "not be ashamed to testify about our Lord". This passage also teaches us as Christians that we must not have any fear in doing what God has charged us to do in life. We must have the confidence and courage to fulfill our purpose in life at any cost, knowing that Jesus have already paid the price for our sins. Christians must also be ambassadors for Christ and emulate Paul as he anticipated his end to life as found in ***Second Timothy 4:6-8***: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all of them that love his appearing."

A Prayer: Father God, I thank You for Paul and his encouragement for Christina living, you told us through Paul that if we died with you, we will also live with you; if we endure you, we will also reign with you and if we deny you, you will deny us; but most of all you told us that if we are faithless, you will remain faithful. Father we ask that You just give us the strength to remain forever faithful to you and your will, for it is Jesus name I pray. Amen

Bro. Freddie Thomas, Steward

Trust

March 30, 2011

LET GO AND LET GOD

Scripture: Jeremiah 17: 5-8 *“Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”* *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.”*

Learning to trust God fully is an all or nothing principle. If you want peace, happiness, joy, and fulfillment in life, you must completely let go and let God. As we plow through trials and tribulations on this earthly journey, we must hold fast to the Lord in our daily walk with God, refusing to surrender no matter how bad things may get. To any Christian who is struggling with fully trusting God, the bible tells us that God the Father and Jesus Christ are totally perfect, cannot be removed, and abides forever.

Prayer: O Gracious God, forgive us when we become so preoccupied with our problems and ourselves. Teach us Father that worrying is a waste of time, that it weighs us down, and is a mental burden. Thank you God for the assurance that Worry replaced by Prayer equals Trust. Amen

Remember, in order to walk on water, you've got to get out the boat.

Sis. Natalie Price, Steward

Fear

March 31, 2011

Scripture: Joshua 1:8-9 *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*”

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

In this scripture, the Lord speaks to Joshua. He is commanded to be of good courage, to meditate on the law, and to keep the commandments. God is preparing His people to enter Canaan. The first thing that God commanded Joshua to do is to resist the temptation to be in fear because God is aware that fear is a natural result of the attempting to do His will. He admonished Joshua to remember to: 1. Be strong, 2. Be of good courage 3. Be not afraid 4. Be not dismayed. He goes on to say that the way to do these things is to: 1. Remember that God is always with you 2. Remember to meditate on the Word of God 3. Do not neglect to keep the law.

These instructions should be applied to our daily lives. No matter how daunting a task may be, we can be sure that God is with us to see it through to the end. Being fearful is an unnecessary emotion, when we know that our God is good and faithful and willing and able to bring us to victory in every situation. As children of God, we have Our Father’s promise to be with us ALWAYS. Fear itself can be debilitating. Usually what we fear is fear, a tactic used by the enemy to keep us from trusting God and moving forward.

We must resist the enemy even when he comes in the form of fear. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” First we must submit ourselves to God and His Word and His Commandments. Then we have the power to resist the devil. To resist the devil is to be completely free of fear.

Let us move with confidence knowing that we have a God who is faithful to NEVER leave us and will cause us to triumph in every situation. 11Corinthians 2:14 says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” Always! Why should we fear if we know that we will win?

Prayer: Heavenly Father,

I repent for not believing your Word and for operating in fear and unbelief. I know that you command us to walk by faith and not by sight. I am aware that this is the only way that I can be pleasing to you. I commit to studying your Word and walking in the awareness of your goodness and faithfulness and love for me. I know that you did not give me a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. I thank you for power, for love and for a sound mind with which to successfully serve you. In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen

Sis. Lurlene Mencer, Steward

Sharing

April 1, 2011

Scripture: John 12:8 *“You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”*

When great tragedies happen in the world today, such as the catastrophe to the people of Haiti and even seeing the homeless people in our great City of Birmingham, God’s heart, as well as my own, goes out to the poor and the needy.

My first inclination is to give, give and give. When we donate to charity, when we give faithfully, we reap the joy of sharing.....and God pours out His blessing. “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.” (Proverbs 22:9 (NIV)) I have realized through the years that although my heart wants to give more than I have, I know that charity starts at home first and then spreads abroad. I am reminded of this in Exodus 12:4 (NIV), “If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb need in accordance with what each person will eat.” I know that I can’t help everyone in my life, but I have come to a realization of something that I can share with everyone. There is no limit to this method of sharing.

Evangelism - sharing my faith in Jesus with people who don’t know the Gospel – is at the core of the Christian faith. Each and every opportunity even if I can’t always do what I want on some levels, I know I can be a blessing to others by sharing my faith in Jesus Christ, my lord and Savior. Philippians 3:10 (NIV) sums it up best, “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” Do you actively and consciously share your faith with others?

Prayer: Oh God, my father - food in times of hunger and water in times of thirst, draw me closer to you so that I may boldly tell the Good News to those who are without hope may find hope, those who feel worthless may find their true worth, and those who are loveless may find in You, love. I humbly pray that you teach me a love that never ends. Amen

Bro. William (Red) Yarbrough, Trustee