

First United Church of Christ

Shelby, Ohio



LENT

2017 Devotional

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Wednesday March 1, 2017
 Ash Wednesday

John 13:34

A Different Kind of Lent.

Lent is upon us! Not familiar with the season of Lent? Lent is the season in the church calendar, starting on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday. During this season Christians are called to prepare their hearts and minds for Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. As believers we are called to preparation through prayers, repentance, giving, and self-denial.

When we attend worship on Ash Wednesday, palm ashes are imposed upon our foreheads and the minister quotes Genesis 3:19, "You are of dust, and to the dust you shall return." Although we are small and made of dust, we are filled with the spirit of a BIG God. I want to challenge you to do something BIG to celebrate the season! Whether you choose to give something up for the next 46 days or not, I want each and every one of you to ADD something to your life for these next 46 days. Whether it's an extra dollar in the offering plate, food for someone who is hungry, or visiting someone who is lonely get out and ADD something to your life in the upcoming days. We might be made of dust, but we are filled with the spirit of God!

Prayer:

Almighty God who formed me out of dust, although I am small help me to do BIG things during this season of Lent. In Jesus name. Amen!

Rev. James Robinson
Pastor- First UCC- Shelby, Ohio

1.

Sunday March 5, 2017
First Sunday of Lent

Proverbs 3:5-6

TRUST IN THE LORD

It starts with trust. It is a trust in an eternal, all-powerful, all wise, all-loving God. You must trust God with all your heart, which involves every fiber of your being - a complete, unshakable, deep, abiding trust.

LEAN NOT TO YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING

You should not to be self-reliant. You cannot pursue a course of action simply based on your own prideful understanding. It becomes trust in your self and takes away your trust in God, who ultimately knows what is best for you.

IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM

To receive God's guidance, you must acknowledge Him by turning over every area of your life to Him by giving Him access, control, command and involvement in your life.

HE WILL DIRECT YOUR PATH

Trusting God wholeheartedly gives your life a sense of purpose and priority. You then realize that trusting Him makes the way ahead more apparent.

These 2 verses are so important to my life that I stamped the words "Trust in the Lord..." on a simple silver bracelet that I wear 24/7. When my mind starts to spin in a never-ending cycle of worry or indecision, I repeat my mantra of "Trust in the Lord with all my heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will direct your path." (KJV). Slowly, slowly I start to replace my anxiety with a clearer, calmer frame of mind, which is now open to greater possibilities.

Lynn Reimer
-Member 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Based on calvarybaptistodessa.com and NIV version of the Life Application Bible

Second Sunday of Lent
Matthew 6:25-33

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his listeners not to worry about life, about food or drink, about body or clothing. We moderns might want to argue with Jesus. “Oh, Jesus, you just don’t understand. Life is infinitely more complicated for 21st Century Americans than it was for 1st Century Palestinians. I have a mortgage, a car payment, student loans, and utility bills. I have a history of cancer in my family. My boss is always riding my backside, and there’s a drug-house two doors down! And you’re telling me not to worry? Yeah, right.” Trust me, in the crowd gathered around Jesus, people were having similar thoughts. Someone on that hillside was likewise thinking, “Oh, Jesus, you just don’t understand.”

No, we’re the ones who don’t understand. We’re the ones who have created idols of ourselves. We rely solely upon our own knowledge and abilities and, therefore, deny the benevolence, the providence of a loving God. We have come to accept “God helps those who help themselves” as scripture – it is not – and refuse God’s undeserved grace. The venerable Heidelberg Catechism teaches that each of us is so well protected “that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head.” Sisters and brothers, that is good news indeed!

Prayer:

Great and glorious God, you have provided for all your children in all times and in all places. May we recognize that you surely provide for us. Amen.

Garland John Gates
Associate Member- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Third Sunday of Lent

Psalm 95:4-5, John 1:3, Job 12:7-10, Psalm 96:11-12, Psalm 104:24-25

Mountains, oceans, deserts, rivers, valleys, plains, wildlife. All made by God's hands. After He created all of these beautiful, wonderful things, it was still not enough, so he created humankind.

As we get caught up in everyday life, we sometimes forget to appreciate the majesty of nature. We forget that we are the stewards of our Earth. Our minds are on material "things" and we forget that we are responsible to learn from, listen to, to receive from, and preserve the world.

In the words of Susan Polis Schulz, "Each of us is responsible to do our part in order to help preserve our beautiful world- the waterfalls, the oceans, the mountains, the large gray boulders, the large green farms, the fluffy pink clouds, the sunrise and sunset, ladybugs, rainbows, dew, hummingbirds, butterflies, dandelions. We need to remember that we are here but a short time and that everyday should count for something and that every day we should be thankful for all the natural beauty. The world is a wonderful place, and we are so lucky to be a part of it.

Prayer:

Let us give thanks for the world around us. Thanks for all the creatures, stones and plants. Let us learn their lessons, seek their truths, so that their path might be ours and we might live in harmony, a better life. – Hawaiian Indigenous Prayer

Stephanie Morris
Pianist & Choir Director- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Forth Sunday of Lent
John 11:9-10.

JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Many of us know the story of Lazarus. When Mary thought he was dead, she went to Jesus, and Jesus came to Lazarus and raised him from the dead. This story could certainly serve as a precursor to the Resurrection story that will be celebrated in a few short weeks.

Jesus gave us a lesson we should all heed, and it's so simple and sensible. We do not stumble as often in the daylight because we can see clearly, but in the darkness of night we are more apt to stumble because there is no light.

Where is the light in each of us? If we know that Jesus is the Light of the World, why are we so reluctant to embrace him sometimes? It is so natural to follow the light and avoid the darkness, and it is so fitting that we BE the light for others. By our example and devotion to Jesus, we can be seen as people to follow.

Following the Light is not always easy, but it is so rewarding. To follow Jesus and to do His will is something we must all reflect on. Yes, we often stumble, because we are human beings, but we can make our goal to avoid those stumbles and deal with them in the Light of Christ when they occur. If we trust in Jesus and his Light, we will be richly rewarded.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father,

You are the Light of World, showing us the way to live and to love you. Help us as we make our way on the path through Lent until that glorious Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the promises Jesus has made to each of us. AMEN.

Phil Pearson
Organist- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Matthew 5:3-10

Twelve Rules for Happiness

1. Live a simple life. Avoid self-seeking and selfishness.
2. Spend less than you earn. Avoid extravagance.
3. Think constructively. Train yourself to think clearly and accurately.
4. Cultivate a yielding disposition. Try to see the other person's point of view.
5. Be grateful. Begin the day with gratitude for your opportunities and blessings.
6. Rule your moods. Cultivate a mental attitude of peace and good will.
7. Give generously. There is no greater joy in life than to render happiness to others by means of intelligent giving.
8. Work with the right motives. The highest purpose of your life should be to grow in spiritual grace and power.
9. Be interested in others. In the degree that you give, serve and help will you experience the by-product of happiness.
10. Live in a daylight compartment. This means living one day at a time. Make the most of today for it is all you have.
11. Have a hobby. Cultivate an avocation to which you can turn for diversion and relaxation.
12. Keep close with God. True and enduring happiness depends on close alliance with Him. It is your privilege to share his thoughts for your spiritual nourishment, and to have a constant assurance of Divine protection and guidance.

Jill Karl
Member- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

-from the National Religious Press (condensed version)

6th Sunday of Lent
Romans 8: 38-39

Several years ago as my husband and I prepared to become empty nesters, we decided to adopt a dog from a local animal shelter. We named our new family member, Stella. And true to her name, she was a shining star in our lives. She brought us a great deal of joy, as well as loyal and devoted companionship. She did, however, have one issue. She suffered from severe separation anxiety. Nothing we did seemed to help alleviate her suffering. It was heartbreaking to hear her yelp and cry whenever one or both of us would leave the house. Even though she was never left alone for great lengths of time, and we always returned, she believed we would never come back.

The scripture passage from Romans is one of my favorites. It is as powerful and beautiful a statement as any in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing can separate us from God. Ever. They are words of comfort, hope, and solace, and they speak to the steadfastness of God's unending and unconditional love for us. Just as our dog, Stella, suffered from separation anxiety, so too, do we humans. All of us at one time or another have experienced separation anxiety, loneliness, and isolation.

These words from the apostle Paul remind us that when we experience those moments in our lives, when we feel lost and it feels as though no one is there for us, God's love and presence never fails.

I believe one of the greatest gifts we can give each other as encouragement and strength on this journey of life and faith together, is the reminder that God loves us, wholly, fully and unconditionally, no matter what. Lent reminds us that we can always turn back to God, that God never gives up on us. No matter how many times we may turn away from God, God's grace is a welcome home for us when we turn back.

Nothing, nothing, we say or do, nothing anyone else does, can take that away from us. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: God of mercy and grace, we give thanks that even in our darkest times, your steadfast love never fails. During our Lenten journey, enable us to extend that same mercy and grace to others. Amen.

Rev. Robin Labolt
The Spring Hill UCC- Spring Hill, Florida
7.

Thursday March 13, 2017

Maundy Thursday
John 13:34

A New Command.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Maundy Thursday was the last evening our Savior would spend with his disciples. *“Drink this cup and remember me. Eat this bread and remember me.”* He washed their feet and *he told them of the things that would come.* He also *gave them these words, “By this sign, all people will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

How will the world know that we are Christians? How will they see the light of Christ in our lives? Will it be by how nice we look in our suits and dresses when we are our way to worship on Sunday? Will it be by our superior morals, or by the amount of money we put in the offering plate on Sunday?

Nope... they will know we are Christian by how well we follow the commandment that Jesus gave his disciples their last evening together. They will know we are Christian by how we love one another. They will know we are Christian by how we treat the waitress in the restaurant on Sunday after church. They will know we are Christian by how we act when they line at the grocery store is really long, and the cashier is working really slow. They will know that we are Christians, not by our clothes... not by how we look... not by how much money your family, or my family has given the church... but they will know that we are Christians by our love.

♪♪ We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord. We pray that our unity will one day be restored. And they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they'll know we are Christians by our love.♪♪

Prayer:

God who made me in Your image of love, help me to share that love with the world. Amen

Rev. James Robinson
Pastor- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Good Friday
Matthew 26:46 & Luke 23:46

Into Your Hands.

It was a leap of faith,
not into the unknown, as we often think,
which is laden with fear;
It was a leap of faith
into what Jesus had known
from before his birth,
which moved him through the pain of
the world's suffering –
through the pain of dying.
It was a leap of faith
into the embrace of God
with whom he was one.
It was a leap of faith –
the same one we are called to make –
from “Why?” and I abandoned
to “Into” your hands,
God's “always-there-for-us” hands.

**(Prayer) Into your hands, O God, may I always
commit my body, mind, and spirit. Amen.**

Rev. Patti Welch
Associate Member- 1st UCC Shelby, Ohio

Easter Sunday
John 20:1-18

I Have Seen the Lord!

“CHRIST IS RISEN...CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!” This Easter proclamation is the foundation of the Christian faith. Jesus crucified becomes the risen Christ. However, resurrection is more than a single event that happened almost 2000 years, for it is alive in our lives today.

It is difficult at times to see things objectively when our vision is blurred by the barriers of hurts, pains, frustrations, hatreds, despair, and evil. God touches our lives, moves us, and changes us into new creations. God speaks through Jesus, the Christ, even at points in life where it seems all we are facing are tombs. We do not look to an empty tomb, but to a full life; not what is gone, but what is possible; not of fear of living but a hope of a future—God’s future—ever before us.

Like the first followers of Jesus who went to Jesus’ tomb, we are often overcome by tombs of fears, doubt, and an often dejected spirit. We will never prove the reality of the resurrection until we experience it in our lives. It will always be a matter of faith to find “new life” to our problems through the living Christ.

Easter is not only an event of two thousand years ago: Easter is for this time, this place. Resurrection is God raising us from dying/death and giving us life now and forever. In our time we meet the risen and living Christ in ministry to others—and resurrection happens in acts of reconciliation, extravagant welcome, forgiving one another, generosity, caring for one another, and sharing God’s Shalom (peace).

(PRAYER) Still-speaking God, we pray down Your Holy Spirit upon us so that we, too, see the Lord. As You forgive us, we forgive one another. You have blessed us to bless one another. “I have seen the Lord” and Christ is risen...INDEED. Amen.

Rev. Daniel L. Busch,
Association Minister-NWOA UCC

Lent and Holy Week 2017
Worship Opportunities

Ash Wednesday

March 1st - 7:00pm

Sunday Worship Services with Lenten lunches following...

March 5th- 10:00am

March 12th- 10:00am

March 19th- 10:00am

March 26th- 10:00am

April 2nd- 10:00am

April 7th- 10:00am

Maundy Thursday

Seder Meal- April 13th- 7:00pm- Fellowship Hall

Good Friday

April 14th- 7:00pm

Easter Sunday

April 16th- 10:00am