

Lent 2024

Awaken to the Light

The Congregational Church of Brookfield

Lenten Devotional Guide

Offered to you by:
The Deacons of CCB

“Awaken to the Light”

You may know that the liturgical season of Lent is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) that precede Easter every year. Maybe you also knew that word “Lent” comes from the Old English word *lencten*, which means “lengthen,” as the hours of daylight lengthen into spring. So Lent is a church season to move us spiritually from darkness to light.

Traditionally, Lent has been a purple season of repentance and spiritual preparation for Easter. It evokes for us the 40 days of fasting and challenge that Jesus underwent in the wilderness following his baptism, and it also reminds us of the 40 years the Israelites struggled in the wilderness after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt.

Many of us know this path of hardship and loss all too well. We have had so many funerals at our church this past year, it seemed we were constantly changing the paraments on the pulpit from the color of the liturgical season (purple or green) over to white again. We do that to awaken us to the light of Christ in our time of sad darkness. When we give thanks at a memorial service for the life of a loved one, we recall our Christian promise of resurrection – and the brightness of Easter.

So, just as we do in that other purple season of Advent, during Lent we are called by God to lift up our heads from this world’s suffering and look ahead with hope, to Christ’s light and life eternal. This feels far different from the often escapist quest most Americans would call the “pursuit of happiness.” Instead, people of faith acknowledge suffering, while offering one another comfort and holding to the deep joy that comes from knowing the truth of Christ risen, present with us, and in the end, welcoming us home into the Divine Light.

The Greek Orthodox word *charmolypti*, which translates as a “bright sadness” or “joyful sorrow,” is a wonderful phrase to capture the spirit of Lent. As we walk the way of the cross with Jesus this season, we can acknowledge both the joy than can emerge from the midst of grief and the tears of wistful sadness that can arise from our deepest joy and gratitude.

We thank our Deacons and others who wrote or contributed to this year’s Lenten guide, as well as our faithful editors, Deacons John Pondiccio and Jim Eagan. May your reading and your prayers bless you and truly help you **“Awaken to the Light”** this Lenten season,

Pastors Bryn & Jennifer

The “Why” of Love and Forgiveness

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return “

~ Ash Wednesday Day Service, Book of Common Prayer

This year we have an unusual convergence of Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day both occurring on the same day. While these two days stand for something quite different, there is a teaching story that provides wisdom on how to approach both.

Imagine a person buying a beautiful bouquet of flowers for someone they love for Valentine’s Day. When the beloved person receives the flowers, they are touched and extremely grateful. Now imagine the person, after giving the flowers, carelessly adds, “Well, it is Valentine’s Day, and this is what a person is supposed to do, right? Plus, I didn’t want you to be mad at me if I didn’t do something for you today.”

Ouch! The flowers, in and of themselves, would have been a wonderful gift. But when the person says, “This is what a person is supposed to do, and I just didn’t want you to be mad at me,” all the positive energy of the gift of the flowers disappears. Why? Because the giver of the flowers revealed that their giving was motivated not by love, but by obligation and even fear.

This is where Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day have something in common. Our intentions regarding how we approach these special days make all the difference. We have often heard people come to the season of Lent with an attitude of, “I feel like I have to do something to be a good Christian, and I certainly don’t want God to be disappointed in me.” In matters of love, as in celebrating Valentine’s Day and Lent, the “why” we do something is as important as the “what” we do.

We invite all of us to approach Lent this year, not from a place of guilt or obligation, but from a place of love and as a wonderful opportunity for spiritual growth.

The invitation to us is to approach the practice of forgiveness not as something we ought to do, but as something we want to do. Practicing forgiveness will help us grow our spiritual life and deepen our relationships with God and others.

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For those who attend Ash Wednesday services, when the sign of the cross is marked on your forehead with ashes, these words will be said: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." These words are not intended to make us feel bad, but to remind us of the truth of our mortality. There is great wisdom in remembering these words as we begin our focus on practicing forgiveness because they humbly remind us that our time on this earth is limited. So there is no time like the present to deepen our practice of forgiveness for others and ourselves.

As we begin our journey through Lent and focus on practicing forgiveness, we pray that we all approach this journey with humble hearts, minds, and souls, open to learning what God has to teach us.

Questions for Meditation:

What thoughts and intentions are you aware of as we begin this season of Lent?

What hopes do you have regarding practicing forgiveness?

Source: Excerpts from *Living Well Through Lent 2024* by [Livingcompass.org](https://livingcompass.org)

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

You Are the Light

The heart of our heavenly Father is to partner with us in seeing the light of his kingdom advance to every dark corner of the earth. Why he in his perfect wisdom has chosen to use us baffles me. But his desire to co-labor with us is the truth of Scripture. God has called us to be the light shining into the darkness of others' lives in love.

Jesus said it this way, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."*

~ Matthew 5:14-16

For a long time I considered myself incapable of giving "light to all in the house." I know my weaknesses all too well. I see the darkness in my life. How can I give light to anyone? You see, I thought the light I was supposed to give was the light of my own perfection. I thought I needed to get my life sorted out before I could ever minister to someone else. And out of that misconception I failed to experience the abundant life that comes from being used by God.

The truth of Scripture is that God is not calling us to minister out of our perfection. He isn't calling us to figure everything out before we can be used. The most powerful declaration we can make to those in darkness is that we who are in desperate need have been met by a perfectly loving Savior. When all the world sees is our facade of perfection, they know right away that they don't belong in Christianity. But when we live with the courage to be truly vulnerable and honest, we open our lives for those in darkness to see the light of God within us—that he in his grace encounters, loves, and dwells with weak and desperate men and women.

God is not calling you to share with the world your own perfection. He is calling you to simply be who you truly are, encounter his loving-kindness, and share with the world the grace-filled hope we have in Christ. Take time today to simply let God love you. Allow him to mold and shape you into a child who wholly experiences the love of the Father. And from that place of being loved as you are, open up your life and love others as you have been loved. Live today openly and honestly before God and man. Open up your life to those in darkness that they might see the light of God's glorious grace. And live as the light of the world, illuminating the path to God's heart for all those around you. May you experience the joy, passion, and purpose that comes from being used by God to advance his kingdom today.

Scripture for meditation: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Sun Exposure

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path."

~ Psalm 119:105

While the amount and type might vary, all plants require sun exposure to grow. Light energy is essential to creating the sugars and starches that sustain the plant. Even on the cloudiest of days, a few minutes of sunlight peeking through is better than if the plant were placed in a dark corner.

The same can be said about spending time in God's Word each day. Of course, schedules are full, life's circumstances create cloudy conditions, we enter into seasons when we want to give up, and eventually find ourselves in a dark corner, thinking for whatever reason that this is as good as life gets. Oh, our vision adjusts to the darkness, but we never really see clearly. And sometimes we do not see God's truth at all. We need light. We need *His* light.

No wonder, standing in the dark each day, we find our spirits getting depleted and needing to be fed. Your choice of spiritual nourishment may differ significantly from the next person's choice, and that's fine. Getting the nourishment is what matters. You may spend an hour with Him each morning before the sun comes up or at night before you crawl into bed. You may open the Bible or pray during five-minute intervals throughout the day. You may have time to read a single verse and ponder it later. And in some seasons of life you should definitely count ten minutes of solitude with Him as a victory—because it is! Even a few minutes with the Almighty God—with your Good Shepherd—and His Word will provide nourishment for your spirit. And you find yourself hungrier for more, know that He will gladly provide.

For now, for this moment, make the commitment to spend time with God each day. However this happens isn't as important as making it happen. We can't grow spiritually if we don't go to the food Source that God provided: our spirits are starving and can only be satisfied only by Him. Besides, a few minutes of "Sonlight" peeking through life's clouds is better than spending the day in the dark.

Prayer: *Lord, forgive me for the times when I prefer darkness to Your light. Forgive me for the times I think, "I've got this." And thank you for moments like this one, moments in Your light, when I recognize that I need both You and Your Word to guide me, feed me, and lead me. Amen.*

Source: *Devotions from the Garden: Finding Peace and Rest from Your Hurried Life*,
by Miriam Drennan

Submitted by: Marie Immohr

Overcoming Fear and Pain

I witnessed extraordinary courage, perseverance, strength, and wisdom in my amazing son Nick Ruschmeyer while battling cancer from 2010 when he was first diagnosed at age 20 until we sadly lost him on Dec. 5, 2020. What follows are some of my favorite quotes from his journals. May they bless and uplift you, as they have me, as you strive to “Awaken to the Light” this Lenten season.

“Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light”

~ Romans 13:12

Fear is what can prevent all of what follows. To try to overcome, I must first remember....

- Fear and pain are only a matter of perspective and only temporary
- You must expand your mind and meditate to find a still and quiet balance
- You have to stretch your mind and your body
- You must test and train both the mind and your body to be ready for whatever the day may bring
- Move forward with purpose and intention but remain open and accepting of what the world presents to you
- Love with all your being

To live in peace means to forgive yourself for your failures remind yourself of your triumphs and to learn from both experiences in order to find peace.

The path to enlightenment is knowing that you will fail and being OK with that. Pick yourself up and try again. Make a change and you will be closer to peace.

Relationships are some of the most special connections in our lives. Every person that we meet deserves respect for their strengths, love for their faults, empathy for their losses, and joy for their triumphs.

Wake each day with the strength of a leader; to do what is right and love each person and be courteous to them and yourself. Forgive your weaknesses, live each day and be thankful for its light.

Much Love, Nick

Submitted by: Sherrie Ruschmeyer

Awaken to the Light: *When the Clouds Part*

Genesis 9:8-17

^{9:8}Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Mark 1:9-15

^{1:9}In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Christ Be Our Light

"This is a relatively new hymn, (1980's) I used to sing it in my old church, but as soon as Bryn mentioned her theme it came to me" – Celine Teagarden

Christ, Be Our Light
Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us, make us your living voice.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another, making your kingdom come.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Source: Bernadette Farrell

Submitted by: Celine Teagarden

Why do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

~ 1 Corinthians 13:12

It was the summer of my 13th year when I first pondered that question. The girl that I had a crush on wrote in my junior high memory book, "Jersey girls are pretty, Boston girls are smart, but it takes a New Yorker to win a fella's heart." After she and her brother moved from New York to Brookfield, her brother ended up being my classmate. She allowed me to kiss her one summer evening as we played hide and go seek.

The first Thursday back from my family's vacation to Niagara Falls, my mom answered the phone and handed it to me. It was the brother of my summertime crush. She had been involved in a very freakish, serious accident and it did not look like she was going to survive her massive brain trauma. "Stop playing games," I said to her brother, but my mom's face said I should take him seriously.

So I prayed, begged, pleaded and negotiated with God for her to be all right, but she died that Saturday. After that, I questioned why God allowed her to die. Why should such a bad thing happen to such a good person? Who am I to have lived while she lost her life? Like ripples in a pond, that question still echoes in my heart.

The years pass, as they do for us lucky ones that continue through life, and I reflect upon how much of my life has been somehow linked to her. Her brother is still my best friend, plus brain trauma and advocacy for its victims has been part of my past employment and life's calling for years. These facts remain, while in reality had she lived, we probably would have parted after a while – as such teen romances so often end.

In a conversation with CCB alumni and Methodist Pastor Betty Lou Flood about some low point in the past, she said, "That's why it's called Faith!" Her remark got me thinking that no doubt we are not meant to have all the answers.

Perhaps, at least in some degree, we Christians can invite God into whatever it is we are experiencing. If God were water, in other words, perhaps God could fill and take the shape of what we poured the water into – and that is especially true as we approach a tragedy. From death comes new life. Easter's promise is that Christ promises to be with us always.

My apologies to my fellow past church school teachers for using this example again, but what do you see in the following set of letters? GODISNOWHERE. The atheist may see "God is nowhere," but through the eyes of faith, I see "God is now here." God is always close at hand, but I think you have to "awaken to the light." You have to **want to** see God.

My hope for us through this Lenten season is that we can be at peace with tough questions, while clinging to the hope of finding the answers in the light of Easter, when our thin veil is lifted and we face our God.

Written by: Pete Lane

The Light from Within

"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it that the light within you is not darkness."

~ Luke 11:34-35

I have had many beacons of light guiding me when I was most in need of that guiding light. One of the people I often remember as a light in my life was a lady named Mary. She had both her legs amputated above the knee and lived alone in a big house. This was in the 1960's before the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, making her access to life outside her home difficult. Living alone in her large family home where she was restricted to one floor would seem to me that her life was in a dark place.

However, the Mary I met was anything but in a dark place. She lived independently and only wanted a companion during the nighttime hours. She paid a high school girl to sleep at her house so that she would have assistance in the night if she needed it. That is how I came to know Mary. I was one of the girls who spent the night.

During those awkward teen years, Mary provided me a safe place and a place I could observe the world and see new ways to be. She often would sit out on her big front porch and neighbors walking by would stop to visit. I remember those visits being positive as she heard their stories and shared their joy or sadness.

Mary looked outside herself and shared love and joy rather than turn in on her own loss. She did not let her disability keep her in a dark place, she shone the light of love and concern to others to keep the light of hope alive. This is an example of a light shining from the darkness to bring others to a place of peace and joy.

A quote from Maya Angelou is *"Nothing can dim the light that shines from within."*

My friend Mary kept her light from within shining bright and kept her home a happy place in the midst of difficulty.

Prayer: *May we always seek light even in the darkest hour so that we can shine that light to others. Amen.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

On the Road to Emmaus

"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."

~ Luke 24:13

Several years back I attended a weekend retreat in the Cursillo Movement. It was with a group of about 20 men, all strangers to me from various neighboring city's churches. Throughout the weekend I kept thinking that I had met each of them previously at some point in my life, but in conversations determined that I had not, yet I kept feeling a familiarity with each one. At the end of the retreat family members and friends came to a closing ceremony where each of the retreat participants shared what they had experienced and would carry away with them from the weekend. I had come to the realization and shared that the familiarity I had felt with each person over the weekend was me recognizing the presence of Jesus in each one of them with our mutual desire to grow closer to God.

Prayer: *Lord, you give us opportunities to walk with others on our life's journeys. May we always seek to invite others to share the journey along the way and in turn recognize your presence in each other. Amen.*

Written by: Richard Nyers

We Believe

"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before God; for [the day] is coming..."

~ Psalm 96:11-13

We believe the day is coming
when God's grace will change the human heart,
and we will live as one with every living thing.

We believe the day is coming
when Christ's compassion will fill the earth,
and no one will do harm, be hurt, or feel alone.

We believe the day is coming
when the Spirit's freedom will unbind our souls,
and we will live generous lives for each other
with a joy no circumstance can alter.

We believe the day is coming,
and we wait and work for it with steadfast hope,
for God has promised it, and God is faithful.

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

Source: By Mary Luti, *Still Speaking Daily Devotional* Oct 20, 2023

Prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Submitted by: Susan Dodd

Excerpts from the poem “Balloons Belong in Church”

This poem was a favorite of Marion Ramsey Miller. We shared it together many, many years ago in Deacons' meetings.

I took to church one morning a happy four-year-old boy holding a bright blue string to which was attached his much-loved orange balloon with pink stripes... Certainly a thing of beauty
And, if not forever, at least a joy for a very important now.

When later he met me at the door, clutching blue string, orange and pink bobbing behind him,
He didn't have to tell me something had gone wrong.

“What's the matter?” He wouldn't tell me.

“I bet they loved your balloon...”

Out it came then, mocking the teacher's voice:

“We don't bring balloons to church.”

Then that little four-year-old, his lip a bit trembly, asked:

“Why aren't balloons allowed in church? I thought God would like balloons.”

I celebrate balloons, parades, and chocolate chip cookies.

I celebrate seashells and elephants and lions that roar.

I celebrate roasted marshmallows and chocolate cake and fresh fish.

I celebrate aromas: bread baking, mincemeat, lemons...

I celebrate seeing: bright colors, wheat in a field, wild flowers...

I celebrate hearing: waves pounding, rain falling, soft voices...

I celebrate touching: toes in the sand, a kitten's fur, another person...

I celebrate the sun that shines slap dab in our faces...

I celebrate the snow falling: the wondrous quiet of the snow falling...

I celebrate the crashing thunder and the brazen lighting...

And I celebrate birth: the wonder – the miracle – of that tiny life already asserting selfhood.

I celebrate children who laugh out loud, who like to be tickled, who scribble in church, who whisper in loud voices, who cry at the top of their lungs, who bury their goldfish, sleep with the dog, scream at their best friends. Who hug us in a hurry and rush outside without their hats.

I celebrate children who are so busy living they don't have time for our hang-ups,

And I celebrate adults who are as little children.

I celebrate the times when we let God get through to our hiding places, deep down to our selfhood, deep down to where we really are. God's children – I celebrate that we are called God's children even when we are in hiding.

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Where did we get the idea that God loves gray and sh-h-h-h, and anything drab and anything will do? I think it is blasphemy not to bring our joy into God's church.

What beautiful gift cannot be offered unto the Lord – Whether it is a balloon or a song or some joy that sits within you waiting to have the lid taken off?

The scriptures say there is a time to laugh and a time to weep. It's not hard to see the reasons for crying in a world where hatred for others is so manifest.

But it's also not hard to see the reasons for laughter in a world where God's love is so manifest. So, celebrate!

Bring your balloons and your butterflies, your bouquets of flowers. Dance your dances, paint your feelings, sing your songs, whistle, laugh.

Life is a celebration, and affirmation of God's love.

For God so loved the world...surely that's a cause for joy.

Surely, we should celebrate!

Good news! That God should love us that much.

Where did we ever get the idea that balloons don't belong in church?

Source: Ann Weems

Submitted by: Sherrie Ruschmeyer

Awaken to the Light: *With a Divine Mindset***Mark 8:27-38**

^{8:27}Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

What it Means to be the Light of the World

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don’t hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

~ Matthew 5:14-16

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus compares his followers to light, saying we “are the light of the world,” unable to be hidden. No one puts a lamp under a bowl because a lamp is designed to help people see in dark places. Christ’s words and actions showed the true nature of the world around Him. Christ-followers give light to those around them by doing and saying what Jesus did. By growing in a relationship with Jesus every day, following Him step by step, we partner with Him in spreading the truth.

Another of Jesus’s disciples said it this way: “This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1 John 1:5-7.

Light cannot be anything other than what it is. It’s bright; it dispels darkness; it enables people to see what they are doing. God is light, and since He sent His Holy Spirit to live inside believers, so are we. As His ambassadors on earth, we shine even when we don’t know it.

Jesus told his followers to “let your light shine before others,” calling them to live an active faith, not a passive one. Put your light on its stand. Your circumstances are an opportunity to shine brightly for the Lord and to share God’s overcoming truth with those around you. Your family and community can tell what you believe by how you live.

Prayer: Jesus, help us as we live each day to remember your words reminding us to let our light shine. By doing so, we share God’s truth with those around us. Amen.

Source: Newspring Church

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

God's Light Guides Our Path

Along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.

~ Isaiah 42:16

I took my seat in the middle section of a small local theater, but my mind was not on the performance about to begin. Pesky worries whirled around my head. Should I take early retirement from my part-time nursing job?

Recently I'd felt pressure from the administration. But how will I support myself then? To make ends meet, I will have to move. Where to?

I shivered at the thought of leaving the security of friends and family. So many life-changing decisions at a time when I felt weak and vulnerable. The theater darkened. The curtain on the stage parted. A beam of light coming from the control room behind me illuminated the stage.

Lord, light up my life like that, I thought. I need more light to make wise decisions.

Halfway through the first scene, an usher came down the aisle, guiding two latecomers. The flashlight he held formed a small circle of light at their feet. Slowly, he moved ahead to the appropriate row, then shone the light into two vacant seats. He waited patiently until the man and woman sat down. Then he turned off the flashlight and walked quietly back to the entrance.

That's how I lead you! The thought was crystal clear, as though I heard God speaking. As you read My Word and obey it, you'll have enough light to know what step to take next. And then there'll be more light for the next step, and the next. Trust Me. Have I not promised to get you safely to the right place?

Thankfully, I relaxed and enjoyed the rest of the play.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the light of your presence. Amen.

Source: Helen Grace Lescheid in *Daily Guideposts*

Submitted by: Martha Parvis

When I Am Among the Trees

For the past few years, I haven't been attending church as often as I have in the past. Although I miss seeing many of you, I needed to change my outlook on a lot of things. I had always loved being outside. I realized that was my place to see and hear God. I find Him in the woods or on a path in a field, I was filled with His love, His direction and His amazing strength.

I found this poem by Mary Oliver. It sums up my love of nature and how God has helped me work through some changes. I hope you enjoy it.

May you find a way to see God in each of the days He has given to you.

When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Source: Mary Oliver

Submitted by: Sue Ronan

Sweets

Once upon a time A little boy and his father visited the favorite country store, and upon leaving the store, the owner of the store offered the little boy some free sweets... “Get a hand full of sweets,” the merchant said to the boy.

The boy just stood there looking up at his father for approval. The owner repeated himself: “Son get a hand full of sweets... it’s free.” Again the boy did not move, continuing to look up in the face of his father for approval.

Finally, the father reached into the candy jar and got a hand full of sweets and gave it to his son.

As they walked back home, the father stopped and asked his son why he did not grab a hand full of the free candy. The boy with a big smile on his face looked into the face of his father and said: “Because I know that your HAND is BIGGER than mine.”

So, whatever your needs are, please place them in ALMIGHTY GOD’s HAND, because HIS HAND is BIGGER THAN YOURS.

Source: Unknown

Submitted by: Jim Eagan

Light in Our Days

I find myself thinking about the light this time of year. Some of our family lives in Norway and they get VERY little light right now—Sunrise is about 9am and it sets by 3:30pm. The sun never gets high in the sky either, just a low arc above the horizon. The flip side of course is in visiting Norway in summer it never gets overly dark. You need to have room darkening shades to sleep and it is pleasant to sit outside at midnight and talk and laugh!

It does make me more energetic when the sun is shining. Even when there is snow outside, and it is brighter from the reflection on the white snow, I am perkier. Grey, rainy, or snowy days are made for staying in PJs and reading and napping. Many of us are just more productive with more light in our days.

It follows, then, that moving toward Christ brings us closer to HIS light, His warmth, and his encouragement in our productivity on this earth, helping neighbors near and far. The light from him should inspire us daily. We should ever strive to be closer to the light in him.

Written by: Celine Teagarden

Kierkegaard, Jonah Hill, My Big Sister, and Four Pairs of Old Socks

"Life must be lived forward, but it is only understood backward"

~ Soren Kierkegaard

This morning I finally threw away four pairs of socks. I *used* to love them. They were warm and wonderful. When they were new, they were the best socks I had and they have served me well. But for a very long time now they have been neither warm nor wonderful. They are threadbare and full of holes. And yet I have kept them in my top drawer for years; finally throwing them away felt more significant than perhaps it should.

For a few weeks now, really since the beginning of Lent, I have been reflecting on the past. More specifically, I've been reflecting on reflecting on the past. Meaning, I have both found my mind wandering to scenes from the past, especially moments at House For All Sinners & Saints (like the beauty of our candle-lit Ash Wednesday, and the chaos of having seven baptisms at the Easter Vigil, and the sight of a couple dozen kids running off to the children's liturgy, and the sound of over 200 people singing Schubert's Deutsche Mass acapella in 4-part harmony), AND I have been thinking about what purpose these memories serve, and how I relate to them now that that time is gone. I guess I am wondering (again): what purpose does nostalgia serve, especially when it leads to melancholy. Is it possible to think upon the shining events and relationships from our past that are no more and do so without - and here's the point - getting stuck?

There is an image from Stutz, the documentary comic actor Jonah Hill made about his extraordinary therapist, that has stayed with me since the day I saw it; it has to do with mazes and forward movement. From the beginning of the film, Phil Stutz speaks about the imperative to move forward in life. Forward movement.

Perseverating negatively about the past, especially in terms of our resentments about what other people did to us, keeps us stuck in a maze. And being in that maze keeps us from moving forward. And it is difficult to leave the maze because our ego demands *fairness*. And since it is the PAST, usually there *is* no real resolution to be had. There is no adjudicatory process available to us, and even if there were, what are the odds that the people we resent tell the exact same version of the story of what bastards they were as we do.

Then he said this: *Your quest for fairness puts your life in hold.* (prevents forward motion)

OUCH.

So today, as I threw out my once warm-and-wonderful socks, I wondered if, at times, the same could be said about our *good* memories; those nostalgic snapshots of moments from years ago when we had _____. ... (fill in the blank: community, fun, youth, health, ambition etc.)

Do those wistful longings for what was but is no longer, also keep us from moving forward in life? I'd never thought of that before, but maybe there's something to it.

Continued next page

We may pine for what we had in the past, even while we know that *nothing* stays the same. Not really. Our bodies keep changing even when we don't want them to, some of our relationships deepen even when we had no idea they would, some of our friendships end even when we never thought they could, our society changes even if we wish it'd slow down. Our children grow and change without us ever being able to fully keep up. Those perfectly warm and wonderful socks get worn down ... but the thing is, those socks get worn down *by serving their purpose*. And there's the rub for me.

My big sister once told me that friendships are in our lives for: a season, a reason, or a lifetime - and we never can predict which one. When I try to cling to times and feelings and relationships that were but are no more, I wonder if perhaps I keep from appreciating their *purpose* in my life. Because not every time and feeling and relationship is *meant* to last forever, which can be a really painful thing for me to accept. So when I feel stuck in a tide pool of resentment or nostalgia, maybe the forward movement I am looking for comes from practicing gratitude for the *purpose* that those times (good and bad) have served in my life.

What keeps YOU moving forward?

Source: Nadia Bolz Weber

Submitted by: Wendy Elsen

Awaken to the Light: *The World Upside Down***1 Corinthians 1:18-29**

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

John 2:13-25

^{2:13}The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

You Are Valuable

"You are valuable because of who you are. You are made in God's image, according to His likeness"

~ Genesis 1:26

A popular speaker started off a seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. A crowd of 200 had gathered to hear him speak. He asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" 200 hands went up.

He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you, but first, let me do this." He crumpled the bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" All 200 hands were still raised.

"Well," he replied, "What if I do this?" Then he dropped the bill on the ground and stomped on it with his shoes. He picked it up and showed it to the crowd. The bill was all crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it?" All the hands still went up.

"My friends, I have just showed you a very important lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.

Many times, in our lives, life crumples us and grinds us into the dirt. We make bad decisions or deal with poor circumstances. We feel worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value.

You are special – Don't ever forget it!

Source: Unknown

Submitted by: Jim Eagan

“Light” Quotes to Brighten Your Day

“There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” — Edith Wharton

“Nothing can dim the light that shines from within.” — Maya Angelou

“Just as one candle lights another and can light thousands of other candles, so one heart illuminates another heart and can illuminate thousands of other hearts.” — Leo Tolstoy

“It is as if the smallest amount of light is infinitely more powerful than massive amounts of dark.” — Rob Bell

“Light and shadow are opposite sides of the same coin. We can illuminate our paths or darken our way. It is a matter of choice.” — Maya Angelou

“No situation is so dark that there is not a ray of light!” — Norman Vincent Peale

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”
—Desmond Tutu

“There is always light. If only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.” — Amanda Gordon

“As we work to create light for others, we naturally light our own way.”
— Mary Anne Radmacher

“Why blame the dark for being dark? It is far more helpful to ask why the light isn't as bright as it could be.” — Rob Bell

“Your work is to discover who you are and then with all your heart give your light to the world.” — Jennifer Williamson

Submitted by: Marie Immohr

Be the Light

Jesus says he's the light of the World (John 8:12). As children of God, we should be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). But how can we do that? We can start by modeling what Jesus did. I know that this may seem impossible, but it isn't. Collectively, we can all make a difference when it comes to being "the light."

What Does "Being the Light" Actually Mean?

Being the light means doing your best to live each day on purpose and in a way that's pleasing to God. It means showing kindness and compassion to others and yourself. It's about looking for opportunities to be more like Jesus, to lift others up, and to do the right thing. It also means making a mindful effort to make your light shine brighter and help others discover their light. God is light and given that He sent the Holy Spirit to live within His believers, so are we if we follow his example. There are many ways to do this, but here are seven practical ways you can try.^[1]

1. Focus on Doing Right and Don't Be Swayed

Don't blindly do what the world claims to be right. Do what God's Word says is right. While this may be difficult thanks to the mixed messages we're constantly assailed with these days, it's important to set yourself apart from the world. You have to be in this world, but you don't need to participate in the things that are detrimental to your faith.

2. Treat Others as You Want to Be Treated

Be kind and walk in love, treating others as you would like to be treated. Show kindness to everyone around you, even if they don't do the same. Seek wisdom, learn how to recognize other people's pain, and offer help to those who cross your path that need it. Then go beyond your path and seek to help those outside of your circle if possible.

3. Practice Humility

Be humble, admit when you're wrong, say sorry, and try to be better next time. You can have ambition but remember who you serve. It's not about how amazing you are, but rather how amazing God is. The perfect example of humility was when Jesus washed His disciples' feet. It was a pure display of humility and servitude.

4. Give Thanks, Even During Life's Challenges

Giving thanks and being grateful, regardless of the circumstances, builds a deeper relationship between you and God, and with other people. God is always by your side. He can draw good out of evil. He forgives your sins and loves you (and all His children) completely. Even during the most challenging times, there are things to be thankful for.

The next time you're feeling disheartened, take the time to write a list of things or people to feel thankful to God for. Chances are you'll have several. If you're having trouble, start by being grateful for breath, then consider the rest of your body, and its function in serving both you and the world. After all, when was the last time you thanked your feet for doing what they do every day?

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5. Don't Be Afraid to Put Yourself Out There

I bet you didn't know that I am introverted. It's true! It takes a lot out of me to get on camera, walk on stage, or talk to a stranger. After many years, and countless mistakes, I'm getting better at it. But, it's still not easy.

Regardless of whether you're shy or outgoing, as a Christian, you're called upon to be a light to those around you (Matthew 5:16a). This is only possible if you put yourself out there, interacting with people and nurturing constructive relationships.

6. Unwavering Resolve

God expects us to be the light and empowers us to do so. Be firm and formidable in your resolve to follow the Lord in everything you do. Don't get distracted or waver in your beliefs and stay focused on God and his light. While this takes discipline, sacrifice, and courage, it's an important step in being more Christ-like. Talk to God frequently throughout the day. He will provide you with strength and be your loving guide if you open your heart to him.

7. Love and Trust the Lord

I don't know where you are today. Perhaps you're stuck and looking at the huge mountain that somehow appeared out of nowhere. Maybe you're at the highest point on the mountain you just climbed and are celebrating. Or maybe you just reached the summit of the hardest hill of your life only to find out there's a bigger mountain beyond it. In whatever circumstance you find yourself in, you must love and trust the Lord. The world will throw so much at you, and Satan will do his best to destroy your light, but don't let him. You have Jesus, and He is enough.

Prayer: God, I praise each day that affords me the opportunity of being "the light." Let me be more like Your son, Jesus, sharing my light thus helping others to discover their own light. Amen.

Source: Tracie Rollins, *Bible Journaling Studies*

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

Surviving the Waves

Someone on reddit wrote the following heartfelt plea online:

"My friend just died. I don't know what to do."

A lot of people responded. One old guy's incredible comment stood out from the rest which might just change the way we approach life and death:

"Alright, here goes. I'm old. What that means is that I've survived (so far) and a lot of people I've known and loved did not. I've lost friends, best friends, acquaintances, co-workers, grandparents, mom, relatives, teachers, mentors, students, neighbors, and a host of other folks. I have no children and I can't imagine the pain it must be to lose a child. But here's my two cents."

"I wish I could say you get used to people dying. I never did. I don't want to. It tears a hole through me whenever somebody I love dies, no matter the circumstances. But I don't want it to be something that just passes. My scars are a testament to the love and the relationship I had for and with that person. And if the scar is deep, so was the love. So be it. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are a testament that I can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that I can heal and continue to live and continue to love. Scars are only ugly to people who can't see."

"As for grief, you'll find it comes in waves. When a ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was and is no more. All you can do is float. You find some piece of the wreckage hang on for awhile. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe It's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while all you can do is float. Stay alive."

"in the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crashing over you without mercy, They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall but they come further apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything....and the wave comes crashing. But in between the waves, there is life."

"Somewhere down the line, and its different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas - you can see it coming for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out."

"Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. And other waves will come. And you'll survive them too. If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of loves. And lots of shipwrecks."

Submitted by: Leslie Sands

(I remember feeling this way when my dad passed away on March 7, 1999)

A Meditation on Psalm 23 for Lent

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me."

~ Psalm 23

Let's be honest: life can be full of so much noise—so many distractions, so much busyness—and the temptation for many can be to just get swept away by all of it. There are meetings to be at, functions to attend, demands to be met, and if we're not careful, we can be in danger of drifting away from our Lord.

Though we live in a society that seems to continually clamor in both speed and noise, our passage today reminds us of a bygone era when the pace was a bit slower and the noise was a bit less. The psalmist's words invoke an image of peace, rest, and tranquility taken next to a stream of quiet beauty—an image that has resonated with souls over millennia.

I count myself blessed, having experienced in nature my soul being rejuvenated next to peaceful pastures and streams of quiet waters. And though I don't always have the means of picking up and physically traveling to a location where this image can be experienced, I do have the ability of reading the passage, closing my eyes (wherever I am), and imagining myself in this place Scripture reveals.

On many occasions, even in the midst of the busyness and distractions of life, I have recalled the words of the psalmist, imagining myself in this place of tremendous beauty and peace, and there I center my spirit and quiet my soul.

I encourage you, in this season of Lent, to take a moment today and ask our Good Shepherd to lead your spirit next to a place of green pastures and quiet waters—so that he may restore your soul.

Prayer: *Good Shepherd, today would you help to quiet the noise and limit the distractions so I can hear your still, small voice? Lead me in the way of green pastures and quiet waters and guide me in your paths of righteousness—for your kingdom and your glory. Amen.*

Written by: John Boyer

Submitted by: Marie Immohr

Let Your Light So Shine

Let your light so shine;
Let your light so shine;
Make a difference in this world.
That others may see;
Your good works and then;
Believe and trust in the Lord.

Be full of Jesus:
Choosing what is right.
Full of His mercy.
Shining in the night.

Jesus is the light:
The Word is our sword;
The light of our lives,
The light of the world.

Let your light so shine:
Let your light so shine;
Let Jesus come shinin' through.
Seek the Lord each day.
Be humble and pray.
That others may see Him in you.

Be full of Jesus;
Fill up on The Word.
Reaching out to those:
Who have never heard.

Be full of His love:
Full of Compassion.
Even if you think:
It is old fashioned.

Let your light so shine;
Let your light so shine;
Make a difference in this world.
That others may see;
Your good works and then;
Believe and trust in the Lord.

Prayer: *May the path I choose this day bring light and hope to the people I meet along the way. Amen*

Source: Susan Mikitenko Song, November 17, 2016

Submitted by Ruth Allen

Awaken to the Light: *Pointing to God*

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

² Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!

Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

³ For he has gathered the exiles from many lands,

from east and west,

from north and south.^[a]

Some were fools; they rebelled

and suffered for their sins.

¹⁸ They couldn't stand the thought of food,

and they were knocking on death's door.

¹⁹ "LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble,

and he saved them from their distress.

²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them,

snatching them from the door of death.

²¹ Let them praise the LORD for his great love

and for the wonderful things he has done for them.

²² Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving

and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.

John 3:14b-21

So the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

This Little Light of Mine

If the light that is in you is darkness how great is that light? It could be little, but still could be very effective. Ever wake up in the middle of the night to see an unexpected light on in the house? Not only does it stir up curiosity to go find out what's going on, but often after being in the darkness of sleep our eyes can hurt with the intense brightness of that light.

I know in our house my wife gets up, flips on the light and gets her work out clothes on, I usually rollover and try to protect my eyes from the sudden interruption in my beauty sleep! Yet the light still seems to penetrate my eyelids and as my eyes adjust, I get up. The light brings me to action.

This morning I had my candle burning while I was praying and like most people, I was mesmerized by the flickering of the golden yellow flame licking the space above it. As I stared at the flame, I began to think. So God provides this for me? He creates in me a mesmerizing flame of love and joy? A light that penetrates the darkness, a light that stands out, and light that provides warmth and guidance to others? Hum Nope, I don't feel it.

Yet the Lord promises the same thing that my light switch promises – Penetrating Light! So I decided to start looking up “lamp” and “lamp stand” and “light” in the Bible. I might add this is a fairly “enlightening” experience (sorry had to do that). Go on the journey with me.

I, first, found myself in Job 18:6 in the New King James Version (NKJV): “The light is dark in his tent, and his lamp beside him is put out.” Interesting place to start don't you think? I have often thought that the light was gone from me, that I had nothing worthy to offer. Yet God's Word (the Bible) was right next to me waiting to be picked up.

Then, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” Psalm 119:105. If the word is not in you, your path is darkened. Yet sometimes I do not want the light or I am unable to flip the switch, yet God promises to deliver, if I am only open.

As I continued in my search I stumbled upon Psalm 18:28, which says, “For You will light my lamp; The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” When life seems dark my only action needs to be asking God and reading the Bible.

Psalm 119:130 spoke to me with it's profoundness. “The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” Then, once the light comes in and penetrates the eyelids of my heart, I shall become changed and His light will illuminate my thoughts and my understanding.

Finally, we are urged in Matthew 5:15 to shine our light out for the world to see. “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.” So, let the light of God shine. Read His Word, consider it and realize you have value. God will bring you to action as a source of light for a darkened world.

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Questions from a Light-giving God:

When was the last time you filled your lamp with the oil of my Word? Is your light on a lampstand or under a basket? Are you Living It? I promise light and all that goes with it. Will you ask me now for my mesmerizing light in you?

Prayer: *Light-giving Father, your brightness is ever around me and I am warmed by your flame of love and mercy in my life. You are amazing and you are my God. Father please give me your light. Fill the lamp of my heart so that others may see You in the light in my eyes. Thank you, Father. Amen.*

Source: John McCann, *Living It High School Outreach*

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

Prayer as Comfort

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds"

~ Philippians 4:6-7

Prayer can be a comfort, being in the presence of God and opening a dialogue with the Almighty. I have come to rely on prayer throughout my daily life, from a simple "Hello God!" in the morning, to requests for help throughout the day and thanksgiving for blessings received. I pray sometimes more fervently than others, depending on my circumstances.

Just over a year ago I was travelling back to my hometown in Indiana following the news that my sister's cancer was advancing and she was in the hospital. To center my focus on attending to her I turned to prayer and from my Catholic upbringing I prayed the rosary and meditated on the mysteries of the full fifteen decades of Hail Mary's—five Joyful, five Sorrowful and five Glorious.

The meditation that resonated most with me was the First Sorrowful Mystery - The Agony in the Garden. Jesus knew his suffering and death was fast approaching and in his human state of anguish and fear he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." And then his acceptance and surrender, "Yet, not as I will, but as you will." I shared this with my sister when I reached her bedside, that even Jesus feared what was to happen to him but in accepting God's will he found peace and strength to carry him through his suffering to his death, knowing that salvation, resurrection, and glory awaited.

People speak of the "power of prayer" giving hope in dire situations, and that power increases with the collective prayers of many joined together. During my visit to my sister in the hospital before she passed our family had gathered around her bedside and in our family's Catholic tradition, we prayed the rosary together with my sister. When we had finished my sister said, "That was beautiful!" Then she asked, "Am I glowing?" We said, "Yes, Maggie, you are glowing!"

Prayer: *Dear God, there have been so many deaths over these past few years in our church and social communities and in our families. It is the cycle of life to be born, to live and then to die. Yet, we believe in our eternal salvation and ultimate glory through the death and resurrection of Jesus. May we live with our lives open to your light in prayer, however we come to you – in dialogue, confident in knowing that you are still speaking to us. Amen.*

Submitted by: Richard Nyers

Being a Good Example

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." The Good News: Just like God is the light, you can be a source of light too. You can bring the hope to others by being a good example.

~ Matthew 5:16

At Christmas time in 2022, there was a blizzard in Buffalo NY. Many people were being stranded in the cold and at risk of death. One man let his light shine to bring safety and hope to several stranded travelers.

Jay Withey was driving out to help a friend when he got stranded himself. After offering shelter in his truck to two fellow motorists, he realized that they would soon be without fuel to keep warm on their cars. To keep them safe, he groped his way through the blowing snow to school building. He was able to break into the building and guided his companions to safety.

After they were safely in the building, Jay went out repeatedly to locate other stranded motorists and guided them to the school for shelter. Because of his efforts twenty-four people found shelter and were able to return home to celebrate Christmas with their families.

Jay says "God puts people in the right spot." I always say if I was able to make it to the top, if my hand is not stretched out to help the next person in line may God strike me dead. You have an ethical duty to be of service if you're able to, I just knew there were more out there." *

This young man shone the light of hope to these strangers who were fellow travelers stranded by a blizzard.

Prayer: *We give thanks, O God, for the many people who put their lives at risk to help others. Let us pray that whenever you put us "in the right spot" we can shine that light of hope to others. Amen.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

* From Buffalo News - December 28, 2023

A Morning Prayer

As we enter the season of Lent, we consider our relationship with God and His son, Jesus, through prayer. Try starting your day with the following prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father,
As the sun rises and a new day begins,
I come before you with a heart filled with gratitude and reverence.
I thank You for the gift of life,
And for the rest and renewal through my night's sleep.
Guide my steps as I walk through this day.
Lead me in Your paths of righteousness.
Help me to walk in obedience to Your Commandments.
Let me seek Your will in all I do,
As I face the challenges and opportunities that this day brings.
Grant me the strength and courage to overcome obstacles and
To embrace the task before me with a joyful and willing heart.
Use me as an instrument of peace, kindness, and compassion.
Open my eyes to others and give me a heart
That is ready to serve and uplift those who cross my path.
Lord, I surrender my worries, fears, and uncertainties to You.
You are my refuge and my strength.
My ever-present help in times of trouble.
May I find assurance in Your promises
And be reminded that You are in control of all things.
Thank you for the opportunities of this day
And the chance to grow closer to You.

Send this prayer to your loved ones and use it to share your love for God.

Source: *God Guides Bro, Motivational Videos*

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

What gives you great joy?

Take a moment to think about that... breathe in and breathe out ... do it again ... breathe in and breathe out. Do you have it? The first thing that comes to my mind is seeing my family happy and healthy. That can be so abstract though ... let's dig deeper. How do I know when my family is happy and healthy? What can I see or hear? Hearing their laughter brings me joy. Seeing their smiles brings me joy. Hearing a doctor give a good checkup brings me joy. Seeing my family hiking brings me joy.

Most of my friends at work and my students think of me as the Gratitude Teacher. I start each class with a list of things that I can be grateful for, and my students do the same. Our lists often repeat from day to day but bringing those gifts of gratitude or great joys to the forefront of your brain every day is so powerful. It brightens my days and puts me in a positive mind set. Try it. Does it make you smile? Does it make you happy? Does it bring you peace?

Now let's remember WHO we can thank for these great joys. God. Every day God gives you opportunities to see and hear joy. Take the time to remember that.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for bringing me joy throughout my day and life. Let me realize, remember, and appreciate all the joy you have provided for me. Amen.*

Written by: Linae Wutzl

Christ, Our True Light

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness."

~ John 8:12

"Go to the light!" That's what my husband advised as we struggled to find our way out of a big city hospital on a recent Sunday afternoon. We'd visited a friend, and when we exited an elevator, we couldn't find anyone during weekend hours to point us to the front doors—and the brilliant Colorado sunlight. Roaming around half-lit hallways, we finally encountered a man who saw our confusion. "These hallways all look the same," he said. "But the exit's this way." With his directions, we found the exit doors—leading, indeed, to the bright sunlight.

Jesus invited confused, lost unbelievers to follow Him out of their spiritual darkness. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). In His light, we can see stumbling blocks, sin, and blind spots, allowing Him to remove such darkness from our lives as He shines His light into our hearts and on our path. Like the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness, Christ's light brings us God's presence, protection, and guidance.

As John explained, Jesus is "the true light" (John 1:9) and "the darkness has not overcome it" (v. 5). Instead of wandering through life, we can seek Him for direction as He lights the way.

Prayer: *In a world filled with darkness, shine Your true light, dear Jesus, in my heart and on my path. Amen.*

Source: Patricia Raybon from *Our Daily Bread*

Submitted by: Leslie Sands

Awaken to the Light: *Growing Like Wheat*

John 12:20-36

^{12:20}Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

An Invitation to Awakening

This invitation is as simple as it is comprehensive. It is not an invitation to commit your life to this or that cause or to join an organization or to purchase another book. This is an invitation to awaken to the life you were made to live and to become the love you were made to give.

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily into the heavens where, according to the Bible, he sits at the right hand of God, as the Lord of heaven and earth. The followers of Jesus went forth and began to do the very things Jesus did—preaching, teaching, and healing—planting churches and making disciples all over the world. Today, more than two thousand years later, the movement has reached us. This is the Great Awakening and it has never stopped. This awakening movement of Jesus and his church is stronger than ever.

We all face many challenges and problems. They are deeply personal, yet together, they create enormous, complex chaos in the world, from our hearts to our homes to our churches and our cities.

Because Jesus lived a life of sinless perfection, he is able to save us from sin and restore us to a right relationship with God, others, and ourselves. He did this through his sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf. Because Jesus rose from the dead, he is able to deliver us from death and bring us into a quality of life both eternal and unending.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ: pardon from the penalty of sin, freedom from the power of sin, and awakening to the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live powerfully for the good of others and the glory of God. Jesus asks only that we trust him as our Savior, and follow him as our Lord. Following Jesus does not mean an easy life; however, it does lead to a life of power and purpose, joy in the face of suffering, and profound, even world-changing, love for God and people.

Source: *Excerpted from seedbed.com* by J. D. Walt

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, I want to know you. I want to live an awakened life. I confess I am a sinner. I have failed myself, others, and you in many ways. I know you made me for a purpose, and I want to fulfill that purpose with my one life. I want to follow Jesus Christ.*

Jesus, thank you for the gift of your life and death and resurrection and ascension on my behalf. I want to walk in relationship with you as Savior and Lord. Would you lead me into the fullness and newness of life I was made for? I am ready to follow you. Come, Holy Spirit, and fill me with the love, power, and purposes of God.

I pray these things by faith in the name of Jesus. Amen.

No Difference

Small as a peanut,
Big as a giant,
We're all the same size
When we turn off the light
Rich as a sultan,
Poor as a mite,
We're all worth the same
When we turn off the light.
Red, black or orange,
Yellow or white,
We all look the same
When we turn off the light.
So maybe the way
To make everything right
Is for God to just reach out
And turn off the light!

Source: Shel Silverstein on *poemhunter.com*

Submitted by: Celine Teagarden

Holy Spirit and Light

Over the years, I have felt like I have a decent grasp on who I think Jesus is and who or what I think God is all about. But the Holy Spirit has had me perplexed. As a younger person, I tried to figure out if the Holy Spirit had a human form – and I suppose if I were to envision the Holy Spirit years ago, it would be a girl – she would be ethereal, almost as if a light was shining from behind her or within her. These days, I don't believe the Holy Spirit has human form at all. For me, it's a totally different thing – like a soul.

When I was mentoring a confirmand years ago, we got to talking about the Holy Spirit. And as we talked, I came to have a feeling that I tried to describe that was related to the scripture about light. You read and hear all the time that God is in us. And you will hear things like "God is light". And this makes me think about that the Matthew Scripture "Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven". And of course, many of us grew up singing the song "This Little Light of Mine". So some of us understand the idea of not hiding your light under a bushel basket. Now, what does this have to do with Holy Spirit? I say – everything.

Inside each of us there something that is uniquely us. Inside each of us are things that I think of as orbs - I imagine orbs of joy...orbs of light, orbs of the Holy Spirit. Here's an example of someone named Jessica – Jessica is just like you and me. She has her fears, her joys, her happy and her sad. She goes about her life like we all do. But there is something about Jessica that is uniquely her. She is smart and witty. She has an amazing ability to sing, perform and has great stage presence. She can make others laugh with delight. She can make others happy. This is her Holy Spirit. This is her light that she shares with others. We can feel it. And just like Jessica, you have this. I have this. Even in your darkest hour, you have an orb inside of you that is lit. It may be small, but it is ever lasting. It is always there. It is God within you - and a piece of God for you to share with others.

Think about people you know. Think about the things about them that are uniquely them. Think about the things about them that give them light....a light they share with others...a light others can feel. It could be Ken's ability to sing, Eleanor's hospitality, Sue's compassion for animals, Elaine's understanding of forensic science, Jim's love of lacrosse, Marion's uncanny ability to meet and greet strangers, Walt's ability to make everyone think they are his best friend. These are things that make people who they are. This is what God gave each person to make them who they are and to share with others. To me, THIS is the Holy Spirit. And as such, the Holy Spirit is all around us, all the time. I like to recognize it, see it, feel it and know that God is with us and beside us through others, but also within us!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, may I be reminded to see the Holy Spirit in myself and in others, reminding me that you are with me all the time. Amen.*

Written by: Carol Ford Eagan

Giving Understanding to the Simple

"The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

~ Psalm 119:130

This verse highlights the transformative nature of God's Word. When we open our hearts and minds to His truth, His words bring light and understanding. The Scriptures illuminate our path, providing wisdom and insight for our daily lives. It is through the entrance of His Word that revelation and clarity dispel confusion and bring us closer to God's divine purposes.

In my college days I attended a weekend retreat—practically kicking and screaming—at the behest of a friend of mine who wanted me to come along with him. He and I were in a men's prayer group together, and even though I was a Christian believer he guaranteed I would be born again. Perhaps I was afraid of what being "born again" would do to me. Would I become an annoying fanatic? Would I be uncomfortable in the experience or in what I may be called to do?

In any case, I acquiesced and decided to go with an open mind. On the first night there was a worship service with several scripture readings, passages I had heard many times and accepted as stories of the times in the Bible. Following the service, we broke into smaller groups and my friend asked those in our group to pray over me, and so they did with their hands laid on me.

At first, I thought, well this is weird, but I decided to go with it again with an open mind. They then handed me a Bible and told me to open it at random and read the first verse that reached my eye. That verse was from the raising of Lazarus, John 11:44 *"The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

Immediately, I felt a freeing sense wash over me; that my eyes were opened and the scripture actually applied to me! This was new to me. As we were left to individually meditate to our own private spaces around the room, I decided to randomly open the Bible again several times and see what would happen. Each time I did this I lighted upon one of the scripture readings from the earlier worship service and found each one now spoke with application to my life! So, for me, this being "born again" that evening opened my eyes to reading the Bible in a new way and interpreting scripture as God still speaking to me.

Prayer: *My Lord and my God, continue to open our eyes to the enlightening power of your word. Call us to hear your word anew and know that it is alive in our hearts. Amen.*

Submitted by: Richard Nyers

Inspiring Story: Noah's Ark

Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark.

Don't miss the boat.

Remember that we are all in the same boat.

Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

Stay fit. When you're 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.

Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.

Build your future on high ground.

For safety's sake, travel in pairs.

Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

When you're stressed, float awhile.

Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

Source: *Unknown*

Submitted by: Jim Eagan

A Prayer For The New Year

As the dawn breaks on a new year,
let us give thanks for all we hold dear:
our health, our family and our friends.

Let us release our grudges,
our anger and our pains,
for these are nothing but binding chains.
Let us live each day in the most loving ways,
the God-conscious way.
Let us serve all who are in need,
regardless of race, color or creed.

Let us keep God of our own understanding in our hearts
and to chant God's name each day.
Let us lead the world from darkness to light,
from falsehood to truth and from wrong to right.

Let us remember that we are all one,
embracing all, discriminating against none.

May your year be filled with peace, prosperity and love.
May God's blessings shower upon you
and bestow upon each of you a bright,
healthy and peaceful new year.

Source: Attributed to Rev. Marcy Sheremetta, found at Jesuit Resource.org

Submitted by: Mary Gallagher-DeLucia

Awaken to the Light: *What Does the Lord Need from Me?*

Mark 11:1-11

^{11:1}When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

This Little Light of God's

"No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light."

~ Luke 8:16 (NRSV)

Every sermon I have ever heard, or preached, about letting your light shine was embedded with a set of instructions, calling the listener to figure out their gifts, put them to good use in the world, and shine as bright as they can.

There is nothing wrong with that message once in a while, but a lifetime of my favorite biblical metaphor telling me to "Go! Do! Shine!" makes me feel like I'm a 40-watt bulb shining in a 100-watt world.

I worry that I won't live up to the gifts I've been given or that trying to have the brightest light will make me burn out. Will I still be loved if I push the dimmer switch on my lamp once in a while and unplug from the world?

The part all those well-meaning calls to action miss is that it's not my light or your light. It is God's light. What a relief for all those times when my bulb threatens to come loose from its socket. How easy to forget that God is our source of energy. I know God is strong enough that even if my bulb is a little dull, or in need of changing, God's light will find a way to shine.

Source: Vince Amlin, *Still Speaking Daily Devotional*, January 3, 2023

Prayer: *Hey God, remember that time your light found its way through a tiny baby in Bethlehem? May it find its way through me, too. Amen.*

Submitted by: Susan Dodd

A Liturgy for Those Facing the Slow Loss of Memory

Yet you will know me, O Lord...Yet you will remember me.

This will be my enduring hope, until at last I wake from my long fog into a bright morning of clarity and see you face to face, remembering again all that I had forgotten, and knowing then even as I am known.

In light of this promise, give me peace even now, secure in the knowledge that what is obscured from me is not truly lost, only tucked away and waiting to be revealed fully in that eternal light.

O God, though all else be hid from me, all memory, all knowledge, all understanding, do not hide your presence. Be to me more present, more immediate, more abundant in grace and peace, than ever I knew.

Though I know nothing else, still let me know you. And if a morning dawns when I can no longer name you or remember to call upon you, be more immediately present to me than than my own confusion, than my own breath.

Be to me a peace and a light and an abiding sense that I am loved and held and that all will be well.

Reflection: What in your life feels “obscured” from you but “not truly lost”? How might you seek God’s presence even there, allowing God to be a peace and a light for you?

Prayer: *Dear God, as I am known to you always...In light of this promise, give me peace even now, secure in the knowledge that what is obscured from me is not truly lost, only tucked away and waiting to be revealed fully in that eternal light.*

Source: From: *Every Moment Holy Lenten Journal 2023*

Submitted by: Leslie Sands

Note: As our theme for Lent this year is **Awaken to the Light**, I just loved this liturgy for several reasons. Many of you may see me with my mom on Sunday mornings. My mother is dealing with dementia, yet she ALWAYS speaks of her love of our church and asks me every week to bring her to church. This is what I will always hold near to me. My times sitting next to her!

Believe That Joy is Possible!

Don't give in to despair. What Jesus said to his followers, he says to you.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete"

~ John 15:11

Be open to the possibility of a joy from heaven. Joy may be elusive, but it is never gone. Sometimes it just takes some work.

My friend Jerry has taught me the value of gratitude. He is 78 years old and regularly shoots his age on the golf course. (If I ever do the same, I'll need to live to be 100). His dear wife Ginger battles Parkinson's disease. What should have been a wonderful season of retirement has been marred by multiple hospital stays, medication, and struggle. There are many days that she cannot keep her balance. Jerry has to be at her side.

Yet Jerry never complains. He always has a smile and a joke. And he relentlessly beats me in golf. I asked Jerry his secret. He said, "Every morning Ginger and I sit together and sing a hymn. I ask her what she wants to sing. She always says, 'Count Your Many Blessings.' So we sing. And when we get to the line that says 'name them one by one', we do just that: we stop singing and start naming our many blessings, one by one. And when we are through, recognizing the truth of those many, many blessings does much more to relieve her pain and my anxiety than any of her meds could do."

Anxiety thrives in the petri dish of if only. It doesn't survive in the world of already. For that reason, treat each anxious thought with a grateful one.

Take a moment to follow Jerry's example. Look at your blessings. Do you see any friends? Family? Do you see grace from God? Love of God? Do you see gifts? Abilities or talents?

As you look at your blessings, take note of what happens. Sorrow grabs his bags and slips out the back door. Unhappiness refuses to share a heart with gratitude. One heartfelt thank you will suck the oxygen out of its world. So say it often.

Who is to say God won't give the same to you? Why don't you call out to him? Ask God, "Lord, what is separating me from joy?"

Ask him to replace your contingent joy with courageous joy. Ask him to help you anchor to the firm rock on his shoreline. Ask him to show you the joy that cannot be taken. He will. He will stir a revival of contagious joy in your heart.

Source: Max Lucado, February 2016, at www.maxlucado.com

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

The Glorious Light of Christ

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

~ 2 Corinthians 4:6

Sometimes our lives may feel mundane, routine, unexciting. Yet by Jesus' light, the simple and ordinary becomes sacred.

This morning my husband and I went to a local museum. We quickly made our way to our favorite rooms with the Impressionist paintings. Each time we visit, a different work of art captures my attention.

This time I stared at a painting Monet did of a wheat stack—an autumn sunrise as the mist cleared. He painted a whole series of the same subject in different seasons and times of day, showing the way light transformed his subject. As a friend described it to me, Monet wasn't painting wheat stacks, he was painting light.

This specific work of art glowed with the light of sunrise, bringing glorious beauty to a simple subject. Light had the power to turn a pile of wheat in a bare field into something transcendent and alive with color and vibrancy.

Our lives may feel like an unassuming haystack. Mundane, routine, unexciting. Yet when the light of Christ shines on us, we are transformed. The simple and ordinary becomes sacred. Each season, each time of day, is flooded with unique beauty and grace and possibility.

Faith step: Spend time outside today noticing the way light reveals, enhances, and transforms. Ask Jesus to shine in your heart, and clear away anything that interferes with the glow of His light.

Source: Sharon Hinck on [Guideposts.org](https://www.guideposts.org/).

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

Out of the darkness, Into the light

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

~ John 1:5

It was Easter weekend when the church celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. In the early morning hours of Good Friday, the darkest time for the church, my daughter called and asked me to come pick up the children because their house was on fire. Although the family was safe, there was great loss and concern about how to move forward.

Lost in the fire were not only possessions but personal records, work records, and all forms of ID. How very dark the world seemed as we watched the night sky be lit up by that fire!!

The children were at my house with only their nighttime clothes and no shoes. What could I do to begin the recovery for this family. The children needed clothes and shoes, but I could not take them shopping since they had no clothes to wear! The world seemed very scary and uncertain.

It felt very dark without a light to guide the way. Suddenly there appeared at my door friends from the church bringing food and clothes for the children. They assured me that others would be there soon with clothes for the adults. This was the light that began glowing for this family showing the way forward with hope.

During that whole Easter weekend people of the church and community provided support and guidance to find a way out of the darkness. What started as darkness on Good Friday glowed with hope and life by Easter Morning.

The light of Christian Love shone bright that Easter weekend making the way forward filled with hope.

"The light of Christ shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

Prayer: *Father in Heaven, thank you for sending your son to show the way to overcome darkness. Thanks for the many people who followed the teaching of Christ and guided this family into a hopeful time. Amen.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

Jesus Cooks Breakfast for the Disciples

Jesus appeared to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. Several of the disciples were there. One of them, Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing."

"We'll come, too," the rest said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing.

At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn't see who he was. He called out, "Fellows, have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!"

So, they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it. When they got to shore, Jesus served them bread and the fish they had just caught.

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you."

"Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said.

~ John 21:1-17 (excerpts)

The disciples came to recognize Jesus on the shore after their successful catch at his command. I can imagine Jesus standing near a lit campfire in the early morning light of dawn as they viewed him from their boat. Jesus cooks breakfast and serves them. After attending to their physical needs by feeding their bodies, Jesus turns to Peter and repeats a question, "Do you love me?" As Peter responds, "Yes," Jesus directs him to, "feed my sheep." The implication is to feed the spiritual needs of his followers.

Prayer: *Lord, when we start, our day may our eyes be opened to see you directing our lives and know that we must care for our physical needs to grow strong in service to your people, to show that we indeed love you by our actions and satisfy our spiritual hunger with our, "Yes!" to your commands. Amen.*

Written by: Richard Nyers

Awaken to the Light: *From Shock to Service*

Mark 16:1-8 & Shorter Ending

The Resurrection

16 Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body. **2** Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. **3** On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" **4** But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside.

5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, **6** but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. **7** Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died."

8 The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened.

Then they briefly reported all this to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.