**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-16-2020**

I remember my Dad singing, “The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be…” This wasn’t his derogatory way of speaking of older women, but of the one old mare in the back pasture.  I remember riding with him on horseback, listening to him sing. Oh, by the way, my poor Dad, he couldn’t sing himself out of an old paper bag. I know, I know, too many metaphors.

The older I get, the more I feel like that old gray mare in the back pasture.  I don’t move as fast as I used to, and the old ticker upstairs (my tiny brain) has to get jump-started every morning to work.  Maybe some of you know what I’m talking about.

In the Bible, Acts 2:17, we read these words, “...and your old men shall dream dreams.”  I like to think the author’s use of these words includes older women--they dream dreams. But what does this mean?  When we get down to the “nuts and bolts” of these words found in the Bible, what we learn is that this is God’s promise to older people, who may feel like they’ve been put to pasture, because they are no longer needed.  What God is saying to older people is this: You are God’s wanted and loved child who is desired and needed. You have been filled to the brim with God’s Spirit and can serve God and the church in ways that are beyond that which you could ever imagine or think.

It is true, you are God’s beloved child and we need you. As your pastor, I can honestly say with passion, I need you.  You can make a difference.

Let’s pray:  Dear God, sometimes I feel like I’m a nobody.  Thank you for making me your beloved child. Help me to reach out to others who may feel the same way I do.  Help me to change the world. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-17-2020**

Today is St. Patrick’s Day and it is a special day for a lot of people around the world.  I’m one of those people, I love St. Patrick’s Day, but not the green beer.

Legend has it that St. Patrick who was a priest chased out all the snakes on the island of Ireland, even though we know there were no snakes in Ireland during this period.  More than likely, this old legend of snakes referred to the practice of druidism, which was an old ancient pagan religion found on the British isle that St. Patrick considered to be of the devil.

In the Bible, James 4:7, we are told to “...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”  Here evil is personified by the name, the “devil”.  More than likely, however, the devil for us is the temptations and evils we face in our daily lives: addictions, personal struggles, and other behaviors we need to change.  The Apostle Paul talks about a lot of these behaviors in the Bible, Galatians 5:19-21. So, how do you resist the devil? Let me give you a few points to help you.

First, be humble. It is true, a person with a humble heart is less likely to allow pride to rise in their life where evil things can take control and cause them to fall. Second, be on guard.  As we know, evil and temptations are all around us. Be aware of this fact and keep a healthy distance from the evil traps of life. Third, keep a close relationship with God and your church. By doing this, you will build strength for those trials you will face in life.  Lastly, pray. This may sound like a cliche in many ways, but for Christians, it is their direct line to God, who they can call upon, in their time of need.

So, on this St. Patrick’s Day, be strong, resist the devil and reach out to those you can help during their times of struggle.  And God will truly bless you.

Let’s pray: Loving God, so often in life, it seems that I’m pressed to say and do things I know are wrong.  I need your help. Give me the strength and wisdom to overcome the temptations, addictions, and struggles in my life.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-18-2020**

“...it’s a bittersweet symphony this life.  Trying to make ends meet, you’re a slave to money then you die.” ~The Verve

This is the cry of James, “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (James 4:14).  I think everyone can relate to James. Why? Why are we even born? It really doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. Yes, even Christians ask this question from time to time.  Well, at least I do. This is true of all of life, we work to make ends meet, and in the end, we die. We are a mist, a vapor. Here one day and gone the other.

The author of James writes these words, not to be a downer, but to put life in perspective. In the end, if all you have done is worked to make the old mighty dollar, you’ve really missed the boat.  There is an old saying that goes something like this, “No one ever said on their deathbed ‘I wish I’d spent more time at work.”  It is true…

God gives us a better perspective on life which is illustrated in the life of Jesus Christ, it is becoming a servant of God.  When we become servants of God, everything else begins to fall into place: our faith and family become our priority, and work, well work becomes our way of caring for others.  Ask yourself, “Am I praying to God to help me make the right decisions for my faith and family? I’m I treating people the way Jesus would treat them?  Am I a servant to God or to the company clock?

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, it is so easy to get my priorities in life all messed up.  Forgive me and help me to make you and my family the center of my life. Help me to treat others with understanding and love.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-19-2020**

“I'm learning to fly, but I ain't got wings” ~Tom Petty

From time to time I have one of those reoccurring dreams where I am flying through the clouds, but I have no wings.  It’s not a nightmare, although, I don’t like heights. Rather, in the dream, there is a sense of freedom and knowing that God is right there beside me.

Do you remember the beautiful hymn, On Eagles Wings?  The lyrics are beautiful,

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings

Bear you on the breath of dawn

Make you to shine like the sun

[And hold you in the palm of His Hand](https://genius.com/Michael-crawford-on-eagles-wings-lyrics#note-19045127)...

Today, you may be struggling and wishing that you had wings to fly, but you ain’t got wings.  Fear not, God will raise you up on eagle’s wings and take you to places you could only dream. The Bible says, Isaiah 40:31, “...but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Whatever your struggles maybe today, give them to God and just let go-- and fly. You may not have wings, but God is at your side.

Let’s pray: God, this has been a really rough day and I need to fly. Raise me up above the struggles of life and allow me to trust in you.  May your calming Spirit give me the comfort I need today. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-20-2020**

“There's got to be something better than In the middle…” ~The Wallflowers

It is Friday night and you want out of the house, but you’re stuck.  “Lord have mercy, the kids are driving me crazy. Don’t get me wrong, I love my kids, but I need a break.”

Do you ever feel stuck in the middle with no place to go?  I’m feeling that way tonight. It is just me and the dog and I NEED a break, I need to get out of here. We all need a break from time to time, but sometimes you just have to grin and bear and live with it.  It is what is and nothing is going to change it.

These are the times you need to ask God for some guidance. In the Bible, Jeremiah 33:3, it says, “C*all to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”* You see, your usual Friday night getaway will not compare with God’s plan for you. Maybe your “stuck in the middle” is just the thing you need to get your life back on track.

Maybe it is time to spend a little more time with God.  Grab your Bible and learn more about your faith and your relationship with God. When was the last time you read your Bible or had a heart to heart talk with God about your life and your family?  You see, sometimes, God has to slow you down in order for you to see God’s blessing, sometimes God’s blessings come in disguises.

Let’s pray: Okay God, I get it.  I need to slow down a little and listen to your still small voice speaking to me.  What is it that you are trying to tell me? What is it in my life that I need to change? Speak to me, I’m listening.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-21-2020**

“Everybody hurts…” ~R.E.M

Every once in a while, I must confess, I snap and I bark, a knee jerk reaction, and I say things that hurt other people.  Most of the time, those people are the ones I’m close to. It reminds me of the words of the Apostle Paul, whether it is in context or not, “*For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” (Romans 7:19).  Oh! By the way, the Apostle Paul doesn’t just stop there, to my chagrin he goes on and says in verse 24, “Wretched man that I am!”  It is true, I am the chief of sinners...*

There is a saying that is so true, “Hurting people hurt people.”  Because we all hurt, we hurt other people. Yes, everybody hurts. But how do we break the cycle of hurting other people?  I would love to give you magical incantation to wish your wretched behavior, but to be honest with you, there are no easy answers.

A good starting point, however, can be found in the words of the Apostle Paul, Romans 12:10, *“Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor.*”  Imagine for a moment if each one of us not only loved each other but outdid each other in showing honor and respect?  The keyword here is “Outdo”. In other words, make it your goal to outdo the others to show honor and respect. If ever there was a time in the Bible when competing against your brother and sister in Christ was ethical church living, it is here. Be the world champion at showing honor to others.

Of course, just like in any sport, you will get beat here and there, but don’t give up.  You will make mistakes, you will say things you shouldn’t have said. You will hurt others, but don’t give up.  Rather, put on your Jesus sweat pants and get back into the competition of outdoing the other person in showing honor and respect.

Let us pray: Oh Lord, I sure fumble and bumble about in life.  Sometimes I say things I should have never said and hurt other people.  Forgive me and help me to outdo others in showing honor and respect. Help me to love others.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-22-2020**

“Well, my church has been the mountains and solitude. No doors at all.” ~(The Shootist)

“Hello God, it’s time for church, but today, it is just you and me.” Sometimes we can’t make it to our family church, and I don’t know about you, but I need to be with my church family.  Without my church family, I know I’m really missing out. The rest of the week just isn’t the same. I understand why the Bible says, Hebrews 10:25, *“...don’t avoid worshiping together.”*  I need to be in my church and worship with my church family.

Probably my most favorite John Wayne movie is The Shootist. In one scene widowed Bond Rogers (Lauren Bacall) invites the shootist, J. B. Books (John Wayne), who is dying of cancer to church.  Books’ reply to her invitation is a classic, “Well, my church has been the mountains and solitude. No doors at all.” The truth be told, in God’s church there are no windows, and there are no doors.  God cannot be put in a box and that includes a church building.

Now, let’s be clear, I’m not giving you an excuse to not go to church.  Remember, I’m a pastor, of course, I want you to go to church. Of course, I want to see you.  It’s the Christian thing to do. But sometimes, your church has to be a church without doors. And here’s the good thing about churches that have doors or churches that don’t have doors, God is still right there beside you. This is what the Bible says, Hebrews 13:5, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

So when you are in your church that has no doors, remember that God is with you.  Take some time to talk with God. Imagine God sitting right in front of you and talk--God will answer you if you will listen.

Let’s pray:  Gracious and loving God, here I am today in your church that has no doors or windows.  I miss my church and friends, but it’s just you and me, today. Speak to me your words of love and care.  I need to feel your presence in my life, especially today. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-23-2020**

Well you only need the light when it's burning low

Only miss the sun when it starts to snow

Only know you love her when you let her go

Only know you've been high when you're feeling low… ~Passenger

Evil, good and God--theodicy--the struggle of philosophers, theologian, the struggle of humanity. In most people’s minds, there’s the belief that if there is a good God then there must not be evil, or at least, at some point in time, evil should be destroyed and God’s goodness should reign forever and ever.  And yes, as a pastor, scholar and a person who has experienced enough evil for a lifetime, I get it. We would all like to see evil eradicated.

The problem with the idea of evil being eradicated, totally destroyed, is that in your lifetime, if it ever happens, you will never see it.  Evil and suffering are just a part of everyday life--they are a part of and within the bookends of God’s history.

In the Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, the author illustrates for us that all of the evil and sufferings we experience in life are just a part of life:

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die...a time to kill, and a time to heal...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

This is not to say that God doesn’t care, but it is to say that God is in control. Good and evil are bookended with God’s wisdom and love.  We may not understand everything that happens in life, but God knows you from the inside out. I love how the Bible passage in Psalm 37:23 reads: *“Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way…”* Place your trust in God and God will care for you.

Let us pray: God, there is so much in life that I don’t understand.  How I wish you could just push a button and destroy all evil and suffering.  The hurt and loss I feel inside are real. I ask you this day to help me deal with hurt and loss so that I can be whole again. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-24-2020**

Take me down to the river bend

Take me down to the fighting end

Wash the poison from off my skin

Show me how to be whole again… ~Linkin Park

Why do I feel so bad all the time?

Sadness has been a part of life since the beginning of humanity and most likely longer.  Even the Bible says, Ephesians 4:30, “...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”  Yes, even God is sad from time to time. We live in a castle of glass, a castle of sadness.

I once read that 15% of American people will experience depression at any one time and that one in three will experience, in their lifetime, major depression (Ruth Bullock).  Keep in mind that this is a conservative estimate. Indeed, if you are struggling with depression, you are not the only one.

I know what it is like to get trapped in depression.  Some twenty years ago, I lost my son, Jeremy, in a car accident.  It sent me into a tailspin of depression that has taken me many years to overcome.  This is not to say that I have gotten over my son’s death. No, not at all. I am completely aware that this pain will always be there.  But with the help and patience of God, family, and friends, I have left this dreadful state of depression and moved ahead in God’s grace.

Where do you start?  First, if you are struggling with depression, get help. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you can cure yourself. Talk with a friend, your doctor or go and see a counselor. Second, consider using some medication.  There are antidepressant medications that can change your life. Lastly, whatever you do, don’t forget God, because God, knows your suffering and is with you. The Bible says, Psalm 56:8 “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle…”  God is at your side.

Let’s pray:  Gracious and understanding God, the bottle you have placed my tears of sadness must be overflowing.  I need your help today. I cannot deal with this depression alone. Help me to be brave and seek the help I need this day. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-25-2020**

I don't know what's right and what's real anymore

I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore

When do you think it will all become clear

'Cause I'm being taken over by the fear ~Ben Howard

A friend asked me a few days ago what I feared the most.  Honestly, I really didn’t know what to say, but after a few days of thinking about it, I think I would have to say the biggest fear I have is losing another child.  You know, parents are supposed to die before their children. Isn’t that the way it’s supposed to work? Oh yes, I have other fears as well. I have a very good friend who is struggling with serious health issues, public speaking kills me (Glossophobia), and I have to add heights.

Some fears are quite normal, but some fears can be very damaging, and yes, even paralyzing, both personally, socially, and yes, spiritually. So, I have to ask you, what are your fears? Could it be a fear of relationships?  Fear of rejection? Fear of failure? Fear of losing control? Fear for your family and loved ones. We can all agree, whatever fear you may have, there is a lot more fear to go around.

If you are struggling with fear, the Bible has a message for you.  In 2 Timothy 1:7, we read, *“...for God did not give us a spirit of fear, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”* In 1 John 4:18, we are told, *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear…”*

So how do we overcome this damaging fear?  First, sit back and breathe. As my daughter would say it, Dad, take yoga.  And she is right, find some type of relaxing activity and breathe. Psalm 46:10 reads, *“Be still, and know that I am God!”*  Second, count your blessings and make a list.  Look at this list when fear comes your way. The Bible says, Psalm 103:2, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all God’s benefits…”* Last, have the courage to face your fears. We all know Psalm 23:4, right? *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley,    I fear no evil; for you are with me…”*

Let’s pray: It is me again God. You know, the one who struggles with so many fears. I really need your help today. I need to get back on track by facing my fears. Please send your comforting and guiding Spirit into my life and lift me out of this valley of fear and make me strong again.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-26-2020**

My shadow's the only one

that walks beside me

My shallow heart's

the only thing that's beating

Sometimes I wish

someone out there will find me

 ~Green Day

I’ve been a loner most of my life. I grew up in Minnesota on a ranch, we had horses to ride and in the winter we had this big hill you could inner tube down.  Often, in the summer, you would find me riding horses in the woods by myself and in the winter, in the middle of the night, inner tubing down the hill in the beautiful Minnesota snow, all alone.  If I wasn’t riding a horse or inner tubing down the hill, you could find me trapping, camping, or reading some book. No wonder my all-time favorite movie is “Jeremiah Johnson”, the mountain man, played by Robert Redford.

Loneliness is something we all experience in life, however, there are times when we lie awake at night *“like a lonely sparrow on the housetop”* (Psalm 102:7), and that is not good.  So, what do we do when it hurts to be alone?

First, remember that you are not alone in your loneliness.  Often in our loneliness, we think we are the only ones experiencing these kinds of feelings, but this is not true.  Loneliness is just as common as standing up and walking. We all get lonely. But if you are experiencing extreme loneliness, find a friend or professional who you can talk with about your lonely feelings.  These are great words found in the Bible, Proverbs 11:14, *“Where there is no guidance, an army falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”*

Second, find ways to connect with other people.  When you are feeling down and lonely, it is common to distance yourself from other people, even more.  So, it is important to remember not to close yourself off from others, rather, connect. If you cannot do it face to face, social media can be a life savior.  But make certain you don’t leave God out. This is what the Psalmist said in the Bible, Psalm 25:15, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.”

Let’s pray: Okay God, I'm feeling lonely today.  I know that you are always there, but I sure could use another human who has skin on their bones to talk with, but as you know, when I feel lonely, I tend to hide.  Push me out of my hiding and help me to face my loneliness by talking to you and to others who are just like me.

Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-27-2020 (Friday)**

*Every breaking wave on the shore*

*Tells the next one there'll be one more*

*And every gambler knows that to lose*

*Is what you’re really there for ~U2*

One of the hidden oddities of the psychological makeup of humans is that underneath it all, we are unconsciously seeking loss rather than gain, failure rather than success, sort of like a gambler. From a biblical perspective, this unconscious seeking for loss and failure is represented in the fallen race of humans. Do you remember the story of Adam and Eve?

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul discusses this fallenness by saying, Romans 7:15, *“I do not understand what I do.”* In other words, why did I do that? Think back and little, I’m sure you have said those same words--several times. In many ways, our thoughts and actions are just like addictions, we are gung-ho at sabotaging our hopes and dreams.

Some of the most common unconscious self-sabotaging behaviors include manipulation in relationships, anger, procrastination, depression, self-medication with drugs or alcohol, and forms of self-injury such as cutting. But the list doesn’t end here. To our dismay, the list goes on and on…

To be a whole person, and move away from loss and failure, one must FIRST recognize this self-sabotaging behavior.  Ask God to help you figure out these patterns of behavior. Keep a daily diary. Whenever you mess-up, write it down and then go back to your diary and see if this is a repeating pattern.  One might think it should be easy to remember your foolish episodes, but as the Bible teaches, Jeremiah 17:9, *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things…”*  SECOND, learn to love yourself and not hurt yourself.  Remember what Jesus said, Matthew 22:30, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*  Learning to love yourself is key.  LAST, don’t be afraid to seek professional help.

Let’s Pray: God, all I can do is roll my eyes and say, “There I go again!”  I need your help to overcome this self-defeating behavior in my life. You said you would be there for me, so I’m calling on you.  Forgive me for all the times I have hurt other people, especially the times I have hurt myself. Help me to love again. Help me to love me.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-28-2020 (Saturday)**

*And in between the moon and you the angels*

*Get a better view of the crumbling*

*Difference between wrong and right. ~Counting Crows*

Years ago, I was a pastor out near the Mississippi River where there were a lot of conservative churches who would not marry couples who were cohabitating.  So, I was the go-to pastor, I did all their weddings and baptisms. I thought this is what Jesus would do even though the other church thought these couples were living in sin.

Society’s view of ethics, right and wrong, are changing so fast that it is hard to keep up with it. Clearly, what was right or acceptable thirty years ago is no longer right or accepted today, and what was wrong or unacceptable thirty years ago is now right and accepted today.  Some of the changes are good and some, well, I’ll just leave it right there for now. Still, our views of right and wrong are crumbling.

For a follower of Jesus, the question then comes, “Is anything ever right or wrong anymore?”  Of course, the answer is yes, there are things that are right and wrong. But what we so often forget is that even in Jesus’ times, there were societal changes in ethics as well.  For example, on the question of divorce, Jesus believed that divorce was always wrong, but there were many fellow Jews who disagreed with Jesus and cited Moses for their belief that in certain situations it was proper to have a divorce.  Jesus disagreed. (Mark 10:2-9). Ethics, right and wrong, are always changing.

What then is a follower of Jesus to do?  How can we know what is right and what is wrong?  In Luke 6:31, Jesus shares some wisdom in this matter, he said, *“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”* Jesus' guiding principle was love. As long as we treat others the way we want to be treated, you can know that you are right on target and ethically right.  Granted, there are times when things look pretty gray, but this can and should be your guiding principle. It is what we call love.

Let us pray: God of grace and guidance, It is difficult to know what is right and wrong anymore, but the Bible says, James 1:5, *“If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.”*  Well, I need your wisdom and guidance today.  There are things in my life in which I’m just not sure how to handle them.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-29-2020 (Sunday)**

*Sayin’ don’t stress out, it’ll be fine*

*Take a leap of faith, baptism by fire*

*And I’ve never been good at that*

*No, I’ve never been good at that*

*~Caroline Kole*

Sometimes I think my middle name should have been “Stresso”.  It is true, I get stressed out way too easy. My brothers and I often joke that all of our stress was passed down to us from our mother, but the truth is, there is no such thing as stress floating around or being passed down from one generation to another.  Rather, stress is something we create in our minds and choose to live by. We make stress into our personal demon who sits on our shoulders and controls our lives. Indeed, for many, this demon of stress acts as a thief who comes to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10).

They say the leading cause of death in The United States is Heart Disease, and stress has a lot to do with it.  The Bible says, Luke 21:26, people’s hearts fail them for fear of what might come upon them. Even in ancient times, they understood how deadly stress could be for an individual.

What can we do with this self-created demon of stress?  The first place to start is to recognize that we are the ones who have created this stress and have chosen to make it a big part of our lives.  The old Scottish proverb is applicable here, “Confession is good for the soul.” Second, make stress your own. What I mean by this is instead of letting stress control you, you must control your stress.  Stress in and of itself is not bad, but when you allow stress to control your life that’s when it becomes paralyzing and deadly. The Bible says, Proverbs 4:23, *“Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”* Last, focus on the good things in life, Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

Let’s pray: God of peace, fill me with your comforting Holy Spirit and help me to focus on the good things all around me.  Often, I let stress dominate my life and I know this is not how you want me to live. I give myself to you this day. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-30-2020 (Monday)**

*Sometimes you may feel you're the only one*

*Cause all the things you thought were safe, now they're gone*

*But you won't be alone, I'll be here to carry you along*

*Watching you 'til all your work is done ~ Phil Collins*

Most of my emotions are bottled up inside; I blame it on my Scottish heritage. But when my children and their families pack-up their cars to leave for their own homes, the bottle of emotions bursts open and I cry like a little baby. I love my children and I would be as happy as a little Bumble Bee if they would live with me forever. And here is the good part; even though I am not the most expressive person, my children know that I love them. They can see it in my eyes as they well up with tears. No matter what happens in life, I will always love them.

Time after time, the Bible tells us that we are children of God. And yes, “that is what we are.” Do you feel the strength in those words? “That is what we are.” It is not a question of whether or not we are, the fact is this: we are God’s children. Oh, but how many times we question God’s love. And I wonder, “How often does God weep as we walk away from his fatherly love?” I love the Bible passage found in 1 John 3:1, *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”*

No matter what happens in life, don’t walk away from God. Instead, turn to God and let God cradle you in God’s loving arms. Melt in God’s presence as you experience God’s love without measure. Yes, you are children of God that is what we are.  We are a family.

Let’s pray: Heavenly God, it is so difficult to understand and yet marvelous to hear that we are your children. Help us to come to that place in our lives where we can say with childlike faith, “that is what we are.” Help us to share and to experience your ever wondrous love. Amen

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 3-31-2020 (Tuesday)**

*I never opened myself this way*

*Life is ours, we live it our way*

*All these words, I don't just say*

*And nothing else matters ~Metallica*

The Christian faith is a faith of contemplation where the followers of Jesus look deep within themselves.  It is a quiet retreat of renewal. In Psalm 119:114, the Psalmist praying to God declares, *“You're my place of quiet retreat; I wait for your Word to renew me.”* One might think this retreat is solely a time to escape from the craziness of this world.  In some sense, this is true, our quiet times with God can be a refuge from a noisy clanging world.  But it is so much more than this.

A large part of our contemplation with God is like bringing your car to the auto shop.  They put your car on a hydraulic lift and a mechanic with a utility light looks in every nook and cranny to find any problems that may exist with your car, while you nervously pray, “Dear God, please don’t let the mechanic find anything wrong.”

Our quiet times with God are an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to examine every part of your life to see if there’s something that needs to be fixed, something that needs to be renewed.  And yes, these quiet times can be very uncomfortable. Remember the old saying, God came to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”  I like what Susan L. Taylor once said, “We need quiet times to examine our lives openly and honestly…”

Today, you may be in your quiet time of affliction and you have had enough. When you feel this way, remember that God is at work in you, fixing you, and renewing you.   Open yourself up to God and allow God’s Spirit to transform you. I love the encouraging words found in the Bible, Deuteronomy 31:6, *“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you…”*

Let’s pray: God of grace, I never thought I would say this, but I have had enough of this quiet time. I understand that during these quiet times you are at work in my life, help me and transform me.  Give me the patience and strength to face this time renewal in my life. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-1-2020 (Wednesday)**

*It seems in a moment, your whole world can shatter*

*Like morning dreams they just disappear*

*Like dust in your hand falling to the floor*

*How can life ever be the same ~Genesis*

I think a lot about death.  Not because I’m morbid or have a death wish, but because I know I am human and will only be here for a short time, and of course, like many, I have lost loved ones.  I know that death is at our doorsteps, mined and yours. This sense of death is even heightened knowing that I am one of those who are in the risk category, where if I was exposed to a virus of some sort, I could die. For those who are not in a risk category, you could die tomorrow in a car accident, death is no respecter of persons.

In The United Methodist Book of Worship, for funerals, it reads, “Help us to live as those who are prepared to die.”  As followers of God, we all need to be prepared to die, not only this, we need to be prepared for the death of our loved ones.  This is really an essential aspect of a Christians faith.

You may ask why.  In relationships, there are always those twists and turns, some good and others, bad. The bad things included family and friends not talking with each other because of hurt feelings, unforgiveness, individuals and family members who are focused on those things in life that really don’t matter, such as work, sports, their smartphone, entertainment, the glorified self, and the beat goes on.

To be prepared to die means to get one’s life in order, because tomorrow, you or your loved one might be gone.  In the Bible, Psalm 39:4, we read these words, *“Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.”* So what do you do? Get your life in order and forgive, reconcile, don’t let the past control you anymore.

Let’s pray: God of love and forgiveness.  Boy have I made a mess out of my life and I really need to get my life in order.  Please forgive me and help me to forgive others. Help me to live as one who is prepared to die. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-2-2020 (Thursday)**

*You must've a been in a place so dark, couldn't feel the light*

*Reachin' for you through that stormy cloud*

*Now here we are gathered in our little home town*

*This can't be the way you meant to draw a crowd~Rascal Flatts*

To lose a loved one is one of the hardest things one can ever experience in life.  It will drag you down and tear you apart, but even more devastating is when a loved one takes their own life.  Many prefer to call this suicide. Personally and professionally, I think this is a mistake. I prefer to explain it as a person who has died from depression.  I’m not going to write a thesis here to argue my point, I will only say, for those of you who have lost a loved one because of depression, I’m so sorry. I really mean it, I’m so sorry and my heart goes out to you.  The Bible says, John 16:33, *“But take courage; I (Jesus) have conquered the world!*

Years ago, I officiated a funeral for a young, beautiful, and intelligent woman who had a very bright future ahead of her.  After she graduated from High school her life was taken. The funeral was at the church I served and it was packed. Little did anyone know, but at the end of the service, I had the students fill out and sign a promise card that if they were feeling sad, they would find someone, a friend, a family member, or professional to talk with, and then, they went forward to the front of the church and laid their promise cards on the altar.

It is important for each of us to know that no matter how bad life gets, there is someone we can talk with and share our sad feelings.  No one should have to feel alone. But during these dark times in our lives, it is really hard to remember that people do care and that there is hope.  It’s so important to remind your family and friends that you love them. But it is also important to remind and encourage our loved one that if they are struggling, they need to get professional medical help.  You see, one tiny pill can save a life.

Let’s pray:  Healing and caring God, I pray for those who have lost loved ones to depression.  I know the pain they are feeling inside will always be there. Send your healing and comforting Spirit and give them hope.  For those who suffer from depression, help us to remind them how much we love them and need them in our lives. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-3-2020 (Friday)**

*I don't believe in*

*I won't believe in heaven and hell*

*No saints no sinners no devil as well*

*No pearly gate no thorny crown ~Sarah McLachlan*

I cannot count the number of times I have had people, mostly younger people, tell me, “Pastor, I don’t believe in God anymore.”

In many ways, this is sad, but from another perspective, I get it.  We all have doubts. But what makes believing in God impossible is our human frail definitions and beliefs about God and what we think God should or should not be doing, rather than accepting that all of life is God’s life.

First, remember that God cannot be put in your handmade box.  The Bible says, Job 37:5, *“God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend.”* Second, remember that all of life is sacred, which means all of life is divine. God is everywhere and has enveloped all of creation. So, who is this God that you believe or don’t believe in? Going back a few Bible passages to Job 36:26, we read, *“Surely God is great, and we do not know him…”*

The Christian walk is a walk of faith.  This means, we don’t have all the answers and probably never will.  But here is the good news, even in the midst of our struggles and doubts, God is with us.  I like how the Celtic people of old would say it:

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,

Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ on my right, Christ on my left...

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,

Christ in the eye that sees me,

Christ in the ear that hears me.

Let us pray: God I cannot understand or comprehend you.  You are transcendent, and yet, you are all around us and in us.  And yes, many times I doubt you. I have so many questions and I cannot understand your greatness, yes, your vastness.  Let me rest in the sea of your love and participate in your divine love. Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-4-2020 (Saturday)**

*So keep on climbing, though the ground might shake*

*Just keep on reaching though the limb might break*

*We've come this far, don't you be scared now*

*'Cause you can learn to fly on the way down ~Maddie & Tae*

Often in life, we get broadsided.  We didn’t even see it coming, but lo-and-behold, there we are in the middle of a big mess.  We try to find the answers, but the answers we want are not always there. These are the times we have to, as my father would say, pull up our bootstraps and move ahead.  It was his way of saying, you have to have courage.

After I lost my son, I remember sitting in my office feeling paralyzed.  I did not know what to do. Then I heard a knock at my door, it was the Bishop.  He looked at me with compassion as I cried, “I don’t know what to do. I sit here all day and accomplish nothing.  He looked at me and said, “Brett, there are times in life when you just have to pull up your bootstraps and march forward.”

In the Bible, there is a story about the disciples who were under great persecution. According to the Bible, the persecution was so great that the followers of Jesus were running their own lives.  In time, one of the leading deacons, Stephen, would be stoned to death. What are these new followers of Jesus going to do?

The Apostles were released and they reported all that had happened...and then... they prayed.  What did they pray for? They prayed for courage.

*And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with courage, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”* (Acts 4:29-30).

In times like these, we need courage.  We need the courage to face what lies ahead of us. We need the courage to pull up our bootstraps and continue to live the life that God has given us, with courage.

Let’s pray: It’s me again God.  I need your courage. With all see and feel around me, if there is anything I need, it is courage.  Help me not to hide in fear to the point where I am no longer encouraging others. Help me to be a beacon of hope to the hopeless.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-5-2020 (Sunday)**

*I wear this crown of thorns*

*Upon my liar's chair*

*Full of broken thoughts*

*I cannot repair ~Johnny Cash*

Looking back at my life, there are plenty of things that I cannot repair.  I have hurt people by the things I have said and by the things I have done.  All that remains is a shame and a wish that I could go back and change all of that.  But that is only wishful thinking.

In the Bible, there is a story told of eleven brothers who sold their brother, Joseph, to some slave traders.  They told their father that a wild beast had killed Joseph. They even gave their father Joseph’s coat of many colors that was stained with blood. Little did they know that one day their brother Joseph would become a great leader under the Pharaoh.  On that numinous day, as they stood before Joseph in fear for their lives, Joseph said these words, Genesis 45:5, *“I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.”*

There are a lot of things we cannot change or repair, but what we can do is have an understanding and compassionate heart towards others, just like Joseph, and allow God to use us to preserve life, not only preserve life but to give new life to those who hurt. Make it your goal to be kind and understanding in everything that you do.  Don’t be resentful or even revengeful, but be loving and forgiving. Allow your brokenness to become a healing gift to others.

Let us pray: It’s me again, God.  As I look back at my life, I have really messed up and hurt others.  I am so sorry and would ask you to forgive me and help me to bring healing, love, and forgiveness to others who hurt.  Amen.

**Grace’s Daily Devotional, 4-6-2020 (Monday)**

*Risin' up, straight to the top*

*Had the guts, got the glory*

*Went the distance, now I'm not gonna stop*

*Just a man and his will to survive ~Survivor*

The true story is told that Dr. Robert Schuller, the zealous advocate of possibility thinking, had Pat Boone make an appearance on his weekly television broadcast.  Pat Boone is best known for his wholesome, boyish image and his trademark white shoes. As he was introducing Boone, Schuller remarked that sometimes Boone wanted to rebel against the squeaky-clean image that he had developed.  Schuller claimed that every once in awhile Boone, using an alias, would check into a motel, close the drapes, get into the closet, and put on some black shoes.

The next time Pat Boone sang for Schuller’s congregation, Boone was prepared with a rebuttal.  Boone said that there are times when Schuller got tired of his image too.

“So once a year,” Pat claimed, “Robert Schuller checks into a motel under an assumed name, goes to his room, pulls the drapes closed, goes into the closet, shuts the door — and shouts, ‘It’s impossible!  I can’t do it!’”

I think most of us speak more negatively about ourselves than we do positively.  Whether we are in a closet or not, we shout, “It’s impossible. I can’t do it. I’m not smart enough.” More negative statements pour out of our mouths from day to day than positive statements.

If we are ever going to gain self-mastery, we need to put into action one of the most important keys available to us through our Christ — We need to speak well of ourselves. There is a proverb that says, “A man’s curses will fall and wrap themselves around him like a cloak.” It suffocates us and chokes us. This is what the Bible says, Proverbs 18:21, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue…”*

Here is a great tip: Make a covenant with yourself, your family and friends to speak only positive things about yourself and each other.  If you do this, you are well on your way to becoming all that God wants you to be.

Let’s pray: It’s me again, God.  This may sound crazy, but every day I get up and work hard to make a better life for me and my family, and then, I shatter all my hard work with my negative thoughts and self-defeating words.  Help me to speak words of life and victory. Help me to become the person you want me to be. Amen.