

The background features a complex abstract design. On the left, there are curved shapes in yellow, red, and white. On the right, a black crosshair is superimposed over a white background, with yellow rectangular blocks at the bottom corners.

**Meditations on
the Eve of a
National Election**

Dedicated and presented to the people of the
United Methodist Congregations of Carroll County
by their pastors
&
to our colleague
The Rev. Dr. Colin Phillips
serving at St. Paul's UMC, New Windsor
and Trinity UMC, Emmitsburg.

Including special meditations from our new bishop of the
Baltimore-Washington Conference,
Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, and
Frederick District Superintendent, the Rev. Edgardo Rivera.

Sunday, October 2, 2016
World Communion Sunday

Scripture: *Beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.* (Romans 10:15b)

Thought for the day: To all of those who, like me, are beginning a new season in a new place...

*Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God does not change.
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.
Saint Teresa of Avila*

May we listen more than we speak;
Help more than we hurt;
Laugh more than we cry;
Give more than we receive;
Love more than we hate;
Encourage more than we discourage;
Bring peace and not war.

Prayer: May this beautiful day of new beginnings bring Glory to Almighty God.

– *Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, resident bishop BWCUMC*
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Monday, October 3, 2016

Scripture: *So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:14 NRSV)*

Thought for the day: *Wash someone's feet today.*

The practice of washing a guest's feet was common in Jesus' day, but it has fallen out of favor today. When the church offers a footwashing service (usually on Maundy Thursday), many people find a convenient reason to be absent. Part of this may stem from our culture's preoccupation with hygiene and our belief that cleanliness is a personal activity. But, Jesus' words are not JUST about washing feet; his words are a call to kneel down before another person and attend to their most basic needs. Today I wonder what the world would look like if we brought back footwashing and put serving others at the top of our agenda.

Prayer: Holy Lord, the world seems full of dirty feet and too few people willing to wash them. Help me to kneel down and attend to the needs of those around me. Amen.

– *Rev. Stephen Ricketts* (Linganore UMC)

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

Scripture: *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* (Jeremiah 29:11 NRSV)

Thought for the day: *God has a plan for us infused with hope.*

Every now and then, a spotlight shines on our American democracy, and when it does, a respectful nod should be offered. This isn't to suggest that we have arrived as a nation. We haven't. But it's important to say, even though we have a long way to go, we also have come a long way. It appears (at least from my faith perspective) that God is doing something new and creative and beautiful in America right now--tearing down walls, building bridges of understanding, and reminding people that political campaigns should never be a barrier in our society. My mother told me that everything in life happened for a purpose. She said all things were part of God's plan, even the most disheartening setbacks, and in the end, everything worked out for the best. If something went wrong, she said, you didn't let it get you down. You stepped away from it, stepped over it, and moved on. Later on, she added, something good will happen and you'll find yourself thinking -- 'If I hadn't had that problem back then, then this better thing that did happen wouldn't have happened to me.' As usual, mother was right.

Prayer: Lord, may we commit ourselves to your way and to your plans that we will have a future wherein hope will succeed. Amen.

– *Rev. Robert T. Wellman* (Sandy Mount UMC)

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

Scripture: *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, or kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*
(1Timothy 2:1-4)

In this scripture, St. Paul strongly advised his spiritual son, Timothy, and his church members to pray for the kings and the officials in high positions. It seems pretty reasonable. However, it was not. That's because the kings and high officials were those serving the Roman Empires. They were the main enemies of Jews and other small countries. Ever so many Jewish leaders at that time were killed and slaughtered by the roman soldiers due to the Jewish independent movement.

Then why did St. Paul ask his colleagues to pray for them? Pray for the enemy? It seems not quite right and fair. Even God does not seem to care for his chosen people. But the real intent of this advice from St. Paul was to teach them about the reign of God. From his perspective, the people of God should understand that the power of God is beyond the system and earthly organization, and the almighty God works for his people in his ways. And St. Paul believed that.

Today, we see so many people simply placing blame on others. They enjoy cynical criticism and pour out their emotional hostility on certain issues. Then how does God want us to react? What is the role of Christians today?

The people of God should pray first before criticizing others, or blaming people. This is not because Christians have no practical answers, but because we, faithful Christians, clearly trust in God and the reign of God. Pray for our community and for this country!

Prayer: Dear God. We are your people. We believe in you, Lord, and your power is beyond our thoughts and the system of human beings in this world. Show your plan for this world when your people pray. Answer us when we cry out to you for the people who need your mercy. Be with your people and bless this country. We pray in your name. Amen

– Rev. Dr. Steven Sunghwan Cho (Alpha Community UMC in DC, Stone Chapel UMC in Westminster, and Zion UMC of Shipley)

Thursday, October 6, 2016

Scripture: *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Romans 12: 12-14, 21)

As the days draw us closer to Election Day in our nation, it seems that the passion and rhetoric is escalating as many with deeply held positions try to advocate for their particular views regarding their vision for a preferred future for this blessed nation. With the current discussions in social media and the speeches we hear in the news, it is easy to give way to frustration and hopelessness in what appears to be a divisive discourse. I would like to encourage the faith community to remember who and whose we are, to remember our call to be in the ministry of reconciliation, and to be respectful of one another in the midst of our differences.

God has given us the capacity for resiliency, to reset, to adapt, and to continue to be the body of Christ in this world notwithstanding its challenges. We do not cease to be who we are as people of God based on our circumstances. Our identity comes from God and as such we have a calling to live out the good news of forgiveness, transformation, and peace, trusting God's presence to sustain us along the way.

For the founders of the Methodist movement, the most important aspect in our path toward holiness is to grow as disciples to the point where the image of God in us is restored and present in our lives. The result of this amazing gift of grace is our renewed ability to love God and our neighbor with all of who we are.

When we are tempted to forget our identity due to the 'noise' around us, remember grace and what God has done for you.

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace! Amen.

– *Rev Edgardo Rivera* (Frederick District Superintendent)

Friday, October 7, 2016

Scripture: *Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.* (Psalm 105:1-5)

Thought for the day: *Take the time to see God's world with new eyes.*

Recently, I took a trip back to the Pacific Northwest to the state where I was raised. I had not been back in a very long time, too long. When I looked out the window of the plane upon arrival, I saw the mountains that represented God's strength, omnipotence, parental gaze, comfort, and love upon love of the Almighty. It takes an act of God to make me cry; I am not a person who cries. The beauty of God's mighty acts in the world that has been shared with us as a temporary home made tears run down my face as my soul was once again bathed in His love and light. If I had been on my cell phone or computer, I may have missed the mighty acts of God.

Prayer: Holy God, so often I busy myself with the unimportant; please help me to refocus on you. The beautiful earth as a temporary home is magnificent. Thank you for all that you do for me in every way. Amen.

– *Rev Shari McCourt* (Westminster UMC)

Saturday, October 8, 2016

Scripture: *But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*
(John 4:14 NRSV)

Thought for the Day: *Christ Jesus: the real thirst quencher.*

As of yesterday, we are officially declared to be in drought conditions. But we didn't need last night's TV's news report to tell us that. Our once-green-now-brown lawn confirms what was said; and in an effort to conserve water resources, our town's mayor and other officials recommend that we should restrict watering our lawns, forego washing our cars and take less time in the shower.

Perhaps worse are the droughts of heart, mind and spirit that people endure during times of upheaval and uncertainty. Indeed our time may be just such a time as this. However, we who are invited to quench our thirst in Christ Jesus are also called to embody a spring of water gushing up to quench the thirst of others. Every prayer, word and action we offer as Christ offers has the potential to bring calm and ward off fear. Yes, it is true; when we share the Living Water we have received, new life comes forth.

Prayer: Gracious God, when we are thirsty and parched in heart, mind and spirit, grant us a generous portion of living and eternal water in Christ Jesus so that we might be refreshed and renewed to your service and glory. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

– *Rev. Chris Suerdieck* (retired)

Sunday, October 9, 2016

Scripture: *But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”* (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

Thought for the Day: Who will reign over us?

They always intended to follow God. God established the covenant with the people who once were slaves in Egypt. God brought them to a land filled with milk and honey. God chose Moses to be their leader for a season, then Joshua and after Joshua, God placed judges over the people. All his life, Samuel served the Lord with faithfulness but now he was old. So the leaders of Israel came to Samuel.

They looked around them and they noticed how other countries around them had rulers--and they were jealous. So they came to Samuel and asked him to place a King over them. In his quiet time with the Lord, the Lord spoke and assured Samuel that this quarrel was not between Samuel and the leaders; it was between the leaders and God. They want a king; we will give them a king.

Samuel called the leaders of Israel together and told them the cost of a king. The king will reign over you, take your sons and appoint them to his army. The king will appoint commanders over thousands, over hundreds and over fifties. You will plow his fields and make implements of war. Your daughters will be perfumers, cooks and bakers for the king. He will take the best fields, orchards and will take one tenth of all your grain and your vineyard. He will take slaves.

And on that day, you will cry out, but the Lord will not hear you because you chose a king ... a human king ... instead of the Lord. It will be Egypt all over again.

Prayer: Sovereign God, who will reign over us if we do not choose? How would you have us to choose? Do not abandon us as the people of old, but guide us in the decisions we are to make in accordance to your good will for us. In Jesus' name, Amen

– Rev. Malcolm Stranathan (Westminster UMC)

Monday, October 10, 2016

Scripture: *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (John 15:12-17)*

Thought for the day: *Loving like Jesus.*

Jesus calls us to love one another as he loved us. Jesus served others through helping and teaching with kindness, regardless of their background. He was the example of how to live in peace with others, not to be served by them, but to be their servant. If we live our lives with this in mind, everything we do will yield fruit that glorifies God.

Prayer: *Gracious and loving God, through Jesus, you taught us how to live in peace with others in a spirit of mutual respect. Instill in us this spirit of love so that we, like Jesus, can be an example to others. Amen.*

– Rev Pat Dols (Messiah UMC)

Tuesday, October 11, 2016

Scripture: *Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 29:12-14a)*

Thought for the day: *Expect to find God.*

I remember playing, first, peek-a-boo with my children as infants, and then later on, hide-and-seek. Such interaction teaches children to be actively engaged, to focus on others, and to trust. Just because Mommy can't be seen does not mean she is not there. The interaction builds relationship between parent and child. However, if the apparent separation goes on for too long, then fear creeps in and children need reassurance that they are not abandoned.

God offers such reassurance to the exiles in Babylon. "Keep looking! You *will* find me!" The exiles in Babylon were afraid that they had been cut off from God because they were no longer near the temple in Jerusalem. They were no longer near the house of God. Perhaps they were too far away for God to hear them. God tells them otherwise. We, too, have expectations to find God in a certain place or in a certain way. When that doesn't happen, there is disappointment and fear. But we are to keep looking, praying with all our heart. God is near wherever we are.

Prayer: O Lord, when I fear I am too far away, hear the cries of my heart, let me find you and feel the reassurance of your grace and love. Amen.

– *Rev. Mary Buzby* (New Hope/St. James UMC)

Wednesday, October 12, 2016

Scripture: *Study to show yourselves approved...* (2 Timothy 2:15)

Thought for the Day: *Do your best!*

Paul did not challenge Timothy to be better than everybody else. He exhorts him, “Do your best.” You don’t have to compare yourself with others, compete with others, or come ahead of others. Just give God your best, nothing more, nothing less.

Two siblings went to the same high school, and both boys participated in track and field. The oldest (James) ran the 100-yard dash in 10.1seconds, while the younger (Bob) could only run it in 10.19seconds.

One day after a race, the younger, Bob, came home crying. Mom and Dad asked him what was the matter; he said crying uncontrollably. “I never can beat James’s time.” Both parents smiled, gave him a big hug and said, “I love you no less for doing your best.”

Prayer: Gracious God, we bless your holy name. Thank you for giving us eyes to see, ears to hear, legs/feet to walk, and yes to run. Amen.

– *Rev. Richard D. Lindsay* (Union Street UMC)

Thursday, October 13, 2016

Scripture: *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14 NRSV)*

Thought for the day: *God responds to our humility and prayers.*

Humility. There seems to be unity crisis in our land because there is a great scarcity of humility and an over-abundance of pride everywhere we turn. When we humble ourselves, God promises to hear and respond; and he never breaks that promise. We need to realize that God puts the responsibility to humble ourselves on us. The command is not to feel humble, not to praise humility, not to act humbly, but to intentionally humble ourselves. It is hard to get people to work together when neither the leaders nor the followers are humble. What does it mean to have humility? One dictionary says: “the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.” Simply said, having humility means being of low estate. Humble people are not filled up with the hot air of arrogance and pride. They are not people who clamor to be President. Case in point is this year’s Presidential campaigns. Looking at this passage of scripture, we are encouraged to humble ourselves and pray for God to heal our land as we discern our options for leadership in the election. Be humble and pray.

Prayer: Lord God, humbly we ask for you to heal our land and help us to discern our option for those who seek to lead us. Amen.

– *Rev. Robert T. Wellman (Sandy Mount UMC)*

Friday, October 14, 2016

Scripture: *For God has destined us not for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other as indeed you are. (1 Thessalonians 5.9-11)*

As followers of Jesus worship and life in a presidential election year can be interesting as well as disturbing. My father once said “if you are going to use a hammer use it to build something.” He added “anyone can use it to tear down.” In the same vein Timothy in the Christian scriptures reminds us that since we are to “live with Jesus” we should not only encourage one another but also build each other up. Is that possible in an election year when so much is at stake? For months the political rhetoric and personal attacks from those who are running for office and their supporters have gone non-stopped. Jesus reminds his follower that first of all we are called to live by the Word and the words of scripture. Our task therefore is to remind ourselves and others that we are more than Democrats or Republicans, more than conservatives or liberals. We are called to be God’s people! And God’s people are called to bring unity and wholeness to the nation that we love. Our task is difficult but it can be done.

Prayer: Most holy God, empowered by the Spirit help us to be “agents of reconciliation” to bring our people, your people, together. Amen.

– Rev. Wm. Louis Piel, Pastor, (Mount Zion UM Church-Finksburg)

Saturday, October 15, 2016

Scripture: *All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* (John 14:25-27 NIV)

Thought for the day: Peace.

Jesus was talking with his disciples shortly before he would be arrested. It was a time of much turmoil and fear among them. They were confused and uncertain about what the future would bring. Even as Jesus was preparing himself to face the agony of arrest, torture and crucifixion, he was showing compassion and concern for his faithful followers. He offered them his comfort, encouragement and peace. His advice to them was to trust in Him and to trust in God. That's what "*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid*" means. The message, whether they understood it or not, was: "God is in all this. God has your back. You can get through this because the Holy Spirit will teach you and guide you."

That is a good message for all of us during the next few weeks as we face some difficult choices. We are in the later stages of the political campaigns. We will need to make important decisions about what we should do. Many are wondering what we can do. My suggestion is the same as that of Jesus, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" We are all in God's hands. If we will only trust in God and remember Jesus' words, we can trust that God will see us through whatever happens in our country and in the world. We can continue to pray for peace in the world. We can pray for peace among our people. We can pray for peace in our own souls. Jesus offers it. We only need to accept, trust and know that we are never forgotten or abandoned by God. Jesus' gift of peace is still available to us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we long for peace among all people. Help us to accept your peace and to share it with those around us wherever we may be. Grant us peace within our families, our churches and ourselves. Amen.

– Rev. John Dean (Deer Park UMC)

Sunday, October 16, 2016

Scripture: *So [the disciples] nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen...” (Acts 1:23-24)*

The disciples had to make a difficult choice when they were starting to spread the Gospel. They identified and nominated two men they felt were qualified to take Judas Iscariot’s place: Justus and Matthias. “Casting lots” ensued, and Matthias was chosen. While there is no other mention of Matthias in the New Testament, tradition suggests he planted churches near the Caspian Sea. We also do not know for certain what became of Justus, the disciple who lost the election. Tradition maintains Justus became a Bishop in central Galilee. We can be grateful that the loser of the election continued to live out his faith!

Before making their selection, the apostles prayed, asking to know God’s will for the one to be chosen. There are many candidates to consider in the upcoming election, but the actions of the disciples should serve as an example to us. Let us pray for God’s wisdom when we enter the voting booth, and let us continue to pray for the winner and the losers afterwards that they all may faithfully serve our country.

Prayer: Gracious God, you know everyone’s heart. Show me which candidate would serve my country best in the upcoming years. Guide all those who seek to serve in public office that they may know your will and feel your grace. Amen.

– Rev Martin P. Brooks (Calvary UMC, Finksburg)

Monday, October 17, 2016

Scripture: *He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'* (Luke 10:37)

Thought for the day: *Be a facsimile of Jesus.*

In Latin the words “Go and do likewise” are “fac similiter” which gives us our modern term, facsimile. Generally, we believe that a facsimile is inferior to the original; who would want a copy of a Picasso if the original were available? But, we sometimes forget that “copying” is how we learn. Children learn to talk by copying their parents, and an apprentice learns a trade by copying a master. Copying is also how we learn to be a Christian. We learn to serve by imitating Jesus as he reached out to the least and the lost; we learn how to proclaim the Good News by repeating Jesus’ words; and we learn how to give ourselves for others as we take up our cross and follow Christ. Today, the world is full of people trying to be unique. What would it look like if it were full of more facsimiles of Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, guide my feet so they follow you. Guide my voice so I speak your words. Guide my hands so they reach out in love to all your children. Amen.

– *Rev. Stephen Ricketts* (Linganore UMC)

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

Scripture: *Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.*
(Genesis 12:1 NRSV)

Thought for the Day: *Faith is a moving experience.*

Over the course of nearly five decades, my husband and I have moved 14 times. Some moves have been by choice, others by military assignment, and more than a few by appointment of the bishop. Each time after packing our worldly goods and setting up household in a new location, we encountered different accents, customs, and yes, amenities. Even so, we learned that while it took time to adjust to our new surroundings, we were also enriched by the experience of living in someplace unlike where we were before.

God often calls us to leave the familiar for the unknown. Sometimes this involves literally pulling up stakes and heading out. Other times the move God wants us to make is within ourselves. That is, God is asking us to change our perceptions, our attitudes, and our behaviors toward people we consider different. Rarely if ever, is this easy. Preferences, beliefs and biases keep us from accepting and embracing the “other.” And yet, if we are willing to place our trust in God and go where God wants us to go, we may discover wonderful commonality amid amazing diversity. After all, since God showed Abram where he should be, can we expect any less?

Prayer: God of us all, open us to new places and possibilities. Stretch and expand our faith that we may become the people you have designed us to be, visible to all of the world as your children, your servants, your light and your love. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

– *Rev. Chris Suerdieck* (retired)

Wednesday, October 19, 2016

Scripture: *And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore, it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.* (Genesis 11:6-9)

God was disappointed at the people's heart and their behavior. As people became civilized, they were eager to create effective systems. They began building powerful community and installing a huge monument to show how powerful they were--the Babel. That's what people did when they were able to use their free will for themselves.

In that sense, the analysis of Reinhold Niebuhr, in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* seems quite right. He believed that people can be moral and ethical in a personal level of relationship, but when people get involved in the stronger organization and powerful system, they easily lose the pure motivation. The selfish initiation conquers the conscience and morality of human nature.

Thus God decided to confuse their source of evil. People began forgetting the reason why God had created. God commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it." (Gen 9:7) But the people did not understand the real meaning inside. It did not mean that it was OKAY to forget the purpose of their existence, the reason for life. God created people for the glory of God. God expected the created ones to look for the will of God and to follow the way of God. Thus, they were scattered. The one language disappeared. They lost good resources.

God wants the people of God to use their talent and good resources for the glory of God. Think about your life, and have a special time of meditation to consider where we are going.

Prayer: Dear God. You are the creator, the one who created this world for one purpose. You intend your people to follow you plan. Lord, let us open our eyes to see what to do. Open our ears to listen to your voice. And give us good heart to answer you call. We pray in the name of our Christ. Amen.

– Rev. Dr. Steven Sunghwan Cho (Alpha Community UMC in DC, Stone Chapel UMC in Westminster, and Zion UMC of Shipley)

Thursday, October 20, 2016

Scripture: *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:9)

Thought for the day: *Do not worry. Trust in the Lord.*

As I write this, a suspected bomber has just been apprehended in New York. The weekend's news of stabbings in Minnesota is still fresh. Each day, the news brings more stories of violence, deception, injustice, and heartbreak around the world.

It is easy in this environment to wish for what seemed like simpler times. The truth is, earlier times in our lives may have only seemed simpler before the 24-hour news cycle, or because we were youngsters who didn't watch, read, nor listen to much news at that time in our lives. But, there is another important truth that we see when we encounter the world of the Bible. With the exceptions of the reigns of Kings David and Solomon, most of the Bible was written in times of occupation, injustice, or a threat of war. In other words, most of the Bible was written when the "news" of the day was bad.

Isaiah's words speak to one of those times. The prophet reminds the people that God can do and is doing more than they see. He reminds them that a God who sees the whole tapestry of human existence understands far more than those of us who cannot glimpse more than a few threads. He reminds them--and us--to trust the One who knows and does and loves more than we can imagine.

Prayer: *O Lord, remind me that when I worry about the future, you are already there. Help me to trust you with it, always. Amen.*

– *Rev. Donna Renn (Oakland UMC)*

Friday, October 21, 2016

Scripture: *“And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”* (Romans 5:5 NASB)

Thought for the day: Hope in Christ alone.

Eavesdropping is not something I normally do; however, every once in a while I overhear a conversation that peaks my interest. A few Sundays ago I caught a conversation at church about losing hope in our political system and the candidates running for President. A lot of people are feeling this way these days. They are disappointed in our choices for President and are seeing the future of our nation as hopeless.

Placing our hope in Presidents, political parties, or the government is misplaced hope. Our only hope is in the risen Christ. Expecting a President, politician, or an organization to save us will only lead to disappointment. Christ alone can save us through the grace of God. Psalm 146 tells us not to put our hope in leaders because they cannot save us, but those who put their hope in God will be blessed. The hope for America is realized as the body of Christ impacts our nation one person, one soul, at a time by sharing the hope of salvation through Christ.

Prayer: God of Grace, help us share the hope of salvation that comes only through you. Pour out your Holy Spirit on those who believe to preach the gospel of Christ throughout our nation. In Christ’s name, Amen.

– Rev Sherri Comer Cox, (Taylorsville UMC)

Saturday, October 22, 2016

Scripture: *Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*
(John 37b)

Thought for the Day: *Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.*

Pilate asked Jesus, “What is Truth?”

In John 2, John states the people believed in Jesus because of the signs that he did, but Jesus never placed his trust in the people because he “saw their hearts” and knew what was there. Facing capital punishment, Jesus knew even Pilate’s heart, a man known for his brutality, a company man, sent to hold down a contentious lot of people, and Jesus knew his struggle. Faced with two choices Pilate profoundly asks, “What is truth?”

What choices do we have?

Let us remind ourselves that “We do have a king!” Pilate washed his hands of the people’s demands and he chose to hang our king on a cross on a hill called Calvary. Do you know of any human king that willingly gives up their life for the kingdom that they rule? Perhaps this is God’s way of returning us back to before the Israelites stood before Samuel and demanded their own human king.

God sent God’s son, Jesus. And Jesus, son of God, is our king. Jesus as king reigns over us and is a much more preferable model of a ruler. So should we submit or abdicate our authority back to another human being to rule over us? Heavens No!

Let us never put our trust in a human being, in a political party, in shock jock radio or news media. Never again. For, being human, they will always fall short. Our choice is to choose Jesus. Jesus doesn’t have a candidate in this political race; but Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

This doesn’t abdicate our right to vote, but it does mean that we start with JESUS. Pray. Listen. Pray some more and then Jesus will guide in the direction that we need to go.

Prayer: *Jesus, guide me in the decisions that I have to make for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.*

– Rev. Malcolm Stranathan (Westminster UMC)

Sunday, October 23, 2016

Scripture: *For you created my inmost being;*

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, God!

How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

(Psalm 139: 13-18)

“Idiot.”

The word practically jumped out of the headline. It was an unspeakably tragic story about police officers who had gone to a home to investigate child abuse and there met a battered and bruised little girl who told them her name was Idiot. Tragically, this was what she was usually called.

Thankfully, that little child has been removed from that environment, and we can pray for her health and growth. As horrible as her story is, it isn't an isolated one. Many of the people we encounter every day are carrying the burden of a name that someone else gave them, or that they continually give themselves. “Failure.” “Stupid.” “Not good enough.” “Crazy.” “The one who makes dumb mistakes.” “The one who came in last.” “The one who isn't a ten.” Whatever the name, it hurts and batters, even when the bruises don't show.

Thanks be to God, who formed us, who knows us, and who gives us better names! “Redeemed.” “Loved.” “Created in God's image.” “Child of grace.”

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, that you know me and you call me by name. Help me to live my life in a way that shows that I know I am loved by you, and that others are, too. Amen.*

– Rev Donna Renn (Oakland UMC)

Monday, October 24, 2016

Scripture: *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (Luke 16:10-13 NIV)*

Thought for the day:

*“God doesn't ask that we succeed in everything,
but that we are faithful.
However beautiful our work may be,
let us not become attached to it.
Always remain prepared to give it up,
without losing your peace.”
Saint Teresa of Calcutta*

In our society we are so focused on success and being successful that we, as humans, lose sight of the work that makes us successful as Disciples of Christ. Our model of achievement is based on worldly means--having control, being in charge, and having lots of money, just to name a few. God does not ask of us to be successful. God only asks us to be faithful. God offers us such liberation to serve only one master. The one true master of all, his son Jesus the Christ. Through His sacrifice, we are free to let the pressures of this world blow in the wind, and peace rule in our hearts as faithful people.

Prayer: Holy One, in this moment, open the heart of my soul and reset my priorities to serve only you. Help me to make my work your work. Grant me vision, wisdom, and courage to serve as you would have me to serve. Thank you for not placing unrealistic expectations on me as the world does, but only expecting me to be faithful and then giving me the gifts and graces to do so. I love you Lord! Amen.

– Rev. Shari McCourt (Westminster UMC)

Tuesday, October 25, 2016

Scripture: *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.* (Jeremiah 29:11 NRSV)

Thought for the day: *God has a plan for us infused with hope.*

Every now and then, a spotlight shines on our American democracy, and when it does, a respectful nod should be offered. This isn't to suggest that we have arrived as a nation. We haven't. But it's important to say, even though we have a long way to go, we also have come a long way. It appears (at least from my faith perspective) that God is doing something new and creative and beautiful in America right now--tearing down walls, building bridges of understanding, and reminding people that political campaigns should never be a barrier in our society. My mother told me that everything in life happened for a purpose. She said all things were part of God's plan, even the most disheartening setbacks, and in the end, everything worked out for the best. If something went wrong, she said, you didn't let it get you down. You stepped away from it, stepped over it, and moved on. Later on, she added, something good will happen and you'll find yourself thinking -- 'If I hadn't had that problem back then, then this better thing that did happen wouldn't have happened to me.' As usual, mother was right.

Prayer: Lord, may we commit ourselves to your way and to your plans that we will have a future wherein hope will succeed. Amen.

– *Rev. Robert T. Wellman* (Sandy Mount UMC)

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

Scripture: . . . *The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.* (Romans 8:26 NRSV)

The character of a person is a set of values that remains constant in both good times and bad times. These values may change over time as people grow and learn, but it is rare for a person to change one's character from moment to moment. Character is the way a person chooses to reflect God's greatness through his or her behavior. Our characters are reflected in our behavior, and that is a reflection of how close we are to God.

Character that reflects God's greatness is one that allows a person to be both transcendent and present. Being transcendent in your daily life means being aloof from those things that drag yourself down, that drag others down. Being present in your daily life means being in the moment, allowing our actions to reveal God's character as loving, forgiving, and powerful.

Be transcendent, yet be also present. A transcendent, yet present character reveals God's greatness through you.

Prayer: Gracious God, enable me to live my life in such a way as to show your character at all times. Allow my faith to be one that reveals your greatness. Amen.

– *Rev. Martin Brooks* (Calvary UMC, Finksburg)

Thursday, October 27, 2016

Scripture: *For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.* (Psalm 95:3-7 NIV)

Thought for the day: God is in charge.

This is just one of the many scriptures that remind me that God is so much more than we can imagine. Isn't it amazing how God, who created everything, can also be aware of each one of us? "We are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." (vs. 7) God holds us in his hands. These are the same hands that created the earth, the seas and the mountains. Just think about that for a minute! If we truly believe in this God, how can we not take comfort in that? Our response must be to worship and bow down to God Almighty. "Let us bow down in worship," the Psalm says.

My wife and I like to sit down together for a few minutes each morning to drink some coffee and talk about our plans for the day. We also enjoy reading some scripture and a devotional together each morning. We pray together, thanking God for our many blessings and also asking God for help in many areas of our lives. We pray for the people we know who may be going through difficult times. It is a great way to start the day.

Lately, we seem to be praying for our country more than usual. You can probably understand that. I hope you are doing that, too. It does not matter whether you are a Republican, Democrat, unaffiliated or whatever; you should share your concerns with God, who created all that is. The God of all creation is aware of our situation and wants the best outcome for his flock. Our task is to turn to God with our prayers, our concerns and our requests for direction and discernment. It's the best way to start any day.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we try to handle everything on our own. When we feel that you may not have time to hear our concerns, remind us that you are always there for us. We pray that you will guide us in all our decisions. Amen.

– Rev. John Dean (Deer Park UMC)

Friday, October 28, 2016

Scripture: *"The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor." (1 Corinthians 12:21-23)*

Thought for the day: *I Need You. You Need Me. We're all a part of God's Body.*

In order for the church family to operate effectively, we must see the significance, the connectedness, and the interdependence of each individual and group within the body. When we accomplish this, the church will become healthy.

As falling leaves can clog gutters, drains, and even small streams in fall, disunity can impede and restrict church health and, thereby, church growth. When unity occurs, the spiritual water courses that were once clogged with debris--the debris of jealousy, envy, apathy and discontentment--will soon disappear, and clear fresh waters will burst forth and freely flow again.

I Need You. You Need Me. We're all a part of God's Body.

Prayer: Loving God, our Heavenly Father, we, the body of Christ, come before you to magnify and glorify your name. May we be a blessing to others, as we seek to do your will. Amen.

– *Rev. Richard D. Lindsay* (Union Street UMC)

Saturday, October 29, 2016

Scripture: *While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.* (Luke 24:15-16)

Thought for the day: *Look for the presence of Jesus.*

Heads turned toward each other, walking down the road, engrossed in conversation about the politics of the day, so deeply involved in conversation, that when they are joined by Jesus they don't recognize him. There could be several reasons for lack of recognition. They weren't expecting to see him; they were limited by their knowledge of the events in Jerusalem; they were blinded with grief. The only explanation offered is that something has kept them from truly seeing Jesus. It is such a human activity, to be caught up in the events of the day and so focused on the topics that we don't see beyond the immediate context in which events are happening. It's only much later, in the familiar activity of worship, of the blessing and breaking of bread, that the two travelers recognize that it is Jesus present with them.

Prayer: Holy Lord, may we not be so engrossed in the events of the day that we fail to recognize your Presence with us. Amen.

– *Rev. Mary Buzby* (New Hope/St. James UMC)

Sunday, October 30, 2016
Reformation Sunday

Scripture: *Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.*

(1 Timothy 3:1-13 NIV)

Thought for the day: Voters.

Paul writes to Timothy concerning the qualifications for leaders in the church to be used as guidelines in their selection. The NIV uses the term "Overseer" for such leaders. This term could also be applied to leaders who serve in many other capacities as well. At this time when we are preparing to elect a new President, it is important for us to consider the qualifications of the candidates based on the way they conduct their lives both publicly and privately. This person will not only become the overseer for our country, but a world leader as well.

Prayer: Lord, as we prepare to vote for new leadership for the United States and the world, help us to discern which candidates possess the best qualifications to serve with the utmost integrity. Amen.

– Rev Pat Dols (Messiah UMC)

Monday, October 31, 2016
All Hallow's Eve

Prayer and Praise!

May my hallelujah
be rendered as bread for those who hunger,
as drink for those who thirst.

May my thank you Jesus
be wrapped around the shoulders
of those who brace against the cold of the hardened, bleak heart.

May my shouts of glory
become words of welcome for those who have been left out,
pushed out, drowned out, hated out.

May my praise
become melodies of joy for the children
who were birthed, yet unloved and abandoned.

May my tears of joy
become as salve for the wounds of the othered.

May my lifted hands
be offered to embrace the ones born on distant shores,
longing for a brighter tomorrow.

May my worship of you
be more than words;
may my worship of you
be a tangible means of grace.

– *Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, resident bishop BWCUMC*
Facebook post used with permission

Tuesday, November 1, 2016 – All Saints Day

Scripture: *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 3:20)

Thought for the Day: Citizen of Heaven

Gary, my husband, served in the US Air Force for twelve years and during that time we lived in England and Germany. As much as we loved living overseas, seeing the sights, and experiencing the culture, it wasn't home. We would get homesick and long to be back on America soil. We love living in America and enjoying the rights and privileges we have as citizens, such as the right to vote. However, America is our temporary home; we are strangers passing through this country. True citizenship for every believer of the Lord Jesus Christ is heaven.

While we lived overseas, Gary and I represented America the best we could. As citizens of heaven, every believer in Christ has a responsibility to represent God the best they can. This means sharing the love of Christ wherever we go and being good stewards of our blessings. We are stewards of freedom and the pursuit of happiness. Casting our vote is one way we can be good stewards as permanent citizens of heaven and temporary citizens of America. Our vote is not where our faith rests. Our faith rests in knowing that Jesus Christ is our Lord and savior. Whichever candidate is elected in November, we will have an eternal home in heaven!

Prayer: Almighty and Sovereign God, thank you for preparing a heavenly home for me. Help me to be a good citizen in my temporary home by sharing the love of Christ everywhere I go and being a good steward of the blessing you have given me. In the name of Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, Amen.

– Rev Sherri Comer Cox, (Taylorsville UMC)

Wednesday, November 2, 2016 – All Souls Day

Scripture: *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”*
(I Corinthians 12.12-13)

In our national Pledge of Allegiance we say “one nation under God.....” At times in this election year it almost seems that we have reversed those words with “one God” but “many combative nations.” It almost seems that our nation is divided into many different combat zones. In his letter to the Christians in Corinth Paul reminds them (and us) that there are many different parts to the body but we are connected to one common head. Our call for both our faith and for our nation is “unity in the midst of diversity.” That is easier said than done but it can and must be done! As in the human body where there are difference parts, we have many different and contrasting thoughts and ideas in our nation. We have a choice. To reject anything we disagree with or to listen and share so we can build a better and stronger nation for ourselves and those who follow us. Since our primary allegiance is to God through Jesus our calling and task may well be to be the glue that binds diverse people together.

Prayer: *Almighty God, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken. Help us to be an “agent of reconciliation” to bring your diverse people into the unity of love. Amen.*

– Rev. Wm. Louis Piel (Mt Zion UMC Finksburg)

Personal Reflection for the Days Leading to the Election

Thursday, November 3, 2016

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Friday, November 4, 2016

Read: Matthew 6:19-24

Saturday, November 5, 2016

Read: Matthew 6:25-34

Sunday, November 6, 2016 – All Saints Sunday

Read: 1 Timothy 2:1-2

Monday, November 7, 2016

Read: Romans 13:1-8

Tuesday, November 8, 2016 – Election Day

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

Forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom and the power

And the glory forever. Amen.

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Read: Revelation 1:1-8

Meditations on the Eve of a Nation Election

At our September meeting, the Carroll County United Methodist Clergy shared our hopes for unity despite the frenzied environment surrounding our national election process. These meditations poignantly begin on World Communion Sunday as we gathered around our communion tables in our church buildings to celebrate our unity with Christians around the world. We hope that through the reading of God's word, reflect upon the meditations provided and pray that we will seek unity with other citizens of our nation as we elect those who will serve in local, state and national positions. Contributing clergy to this guide are:

Finksburg:

Calvary UMC – Rev. Martin Brooks
Mt Zion UMC – Rev. Wm. Louis Piel

Westminster:

Union Street UMC – Rev. Richard D. Lindsey
Stone Chapel UMC – Rev. Dr. Steven Sunghwan Cho Westminster
UMC – Rev Malcolm Stranathan &
Rev Shari McCourt

Sandy Mount:

Sandy Mount UMC – Rev. Robert T. Wellman

Shipley:

Zion UMC – Rev. Dr. Steven Sunghwan Cho

Sykesville:

Oakland UMC – Rev. Donna Renn

Taneytown:

Messiah UMC – Rev. Pat Dols

Taylorsville:

Taylorsville UMC – Rev. Sherri Comer-Cox

New Windsor:

New Hope UMC/St. James UMC – Rev Mary Buzby

Retired:

Rev. Chris Suerdieck

With thanks, special devotions are also provided by our new resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of UMC, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, and our Frederick District Superintendent, the Rev. Edgardo Rivera.