



*Lenten Devotional
2018*

Week 4

March 11 - March 17

*What's Your Story?
Joseph's Plot Twists*



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LENTEN DEVOTIONAL WRITERS 2018

Sunday—Rev. Brenda Wideman is our Associate Pastor of Congregational Care. She is a former teacher and IT administrator at the UofA and lives in Fayetteville. She received a calling to ministry in 2008 and has recently completed the ordination process. She will be ordained as a deacon on June 19, 2018 at our Annual Conference in Hot Springs.



Monday—Alan Packard and his wife Judie moved to Bella Vista in 2007 from Wisconsin. They joined the church in September of that year. Alan has been a life-long Methodist having lived in many Midwest states from the time he was a young child. Most of the congregation knows him from his teaching the Disciple Bible Study classes and the Golden Links Sunday school class. He is past president of the United Methodist Men and currently serves as its secretary. He recently took on responsibility as Charter Organization Representative of the Boy Scouts, now that our church is a sponsor.



Tuesday—Amy Fulton (and Carole Boyd) moved to Bella Vista in December of 2002 and Amy currently works for Arvest Bank at Town Center. She's the church photographer and is rarely seen without her camera in hand. She truly enjoys capturing the life and service of FUMCBV... a place she has called home since joining Easter of 2012. She sings on the Praise Team and enjoys cooking, reading, traveling, fishing, singing and playing musical instruments (saxophone and guitar) when she's not busy taking pictures or involved with something having to do with photos. She has plenty of energy and has enjoyed writing since her early teens.



Wednesday—Lynn Prueitt moved to Bella Vista with husband Keith in October of 1995 from Des Moines, Iowa. They joined our church in January of 1996. In Des Moines she was a legal secretary for 29 years. After moving to Bella Vista she worked part-time for 9 years at the POA in the Membership Services Department. She sings in the choir, plays hand bells and is in the Bella Vista Women's Chorus. She likes to walk on the Bella Vista Lake trail and she does water aerobics at the Kingsdale pool in the summer. Lynn loves to read, cook, play Candy Crush, crochet, and visit their four children and grandchildren in Iowa, Oregon and Pittsburgh, PA.



Saturday, March 17, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

I had to read these verses several times before I realized how wonderful and promising they are. In a nutshell, Paul, the author of Ephesians, says that a sinful person can be saved by grace and sit in Heaven, a gift of and from God. The ruler of the kingdom of air and the spirit it mentions means Satan. If we follow Satan as sinful creatures, we are considered being dead in transgressions. Dead? Not physically dead, but spiritually dead – dead to God. And what an empty feeling that is. You may think you are enjoying life, but inside you are devoid of feeling. Not feeling the forgiveness, the love, and the knowledge that no matter what happens in your life, God will always love you.

Grace – what does it mean? Elegance, loveliness, style, poise charm? These are all definitions, but not the ones we are looking for. We say “grace” before meals so I don't think that definition applies either. However, the second set of definitions are the ones that do – kindness, mercy, decency, charity, benevolence, blessing, beautify, honor. This is what the scripture is telling us in the above verses. Paul is compelled to add here that this is the work of God's grace in no way involving man's merit. Our salvation - our rescue - from spiritual death is God's work done for the undeserving.

(The newer versions of the Bible explain these verses in a better, more understandable way; however, I enjoy the NIV because 1) I grew up hearing the verses in this manner and 2) it makes me study and look up the meanings.)

PRAYER: Our Heavenly Father, grant us your grace, a clean heart and a desire to live with you in our beings, so that when our earthly bodies die, we may sit with you in Heaven. **Amen**

Wanda Williams

Friday, March 16, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 107:17-22

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.

Redemption

One of my favorite stories of the Bible is the story of Samson. Samson was one of the judges chosen by God to rid the land of evil from the Philistines. Samson had specific orders from God of what not to do. God gave him a miraculous strength to help him fulfill his duty. Well, Samson did not listen to God and fell in the trap we all do when temptation knocks on our door. Samson then got his powers taken away.

When the Philistines captured him and chained him between two pillars in the central courts where they met, they mocked him. Samson then asked God, for strength one more time so he could honor God and fulfill his calling. He was renewed and redeemed for just a moment. Samson then, with the might God gave him, pulled the pillars down on thousands of Philistines killing them all. I believe the reason this story is my favorite is because God uses Samson even though he failed. God uses a man who struggled with sin, but sought redemption because of his conviction.

In the above Psalm we see the same thing. Sinners who were on their last leg and suffering from conviction, and when they called out, God answered and healed them and made them new, so that they could go tell others the power of God. Every one of us are like Samson. We have been given rules to follow and have been given gifts to use. However, the effectiveness of those gifts rely on the strength of our walk. Sure you will stumble and fall during your walk with God, but just like Samson, our loving and merciful Father above is always there to help. You too can be redeemed, but you must first cry out to God. Remember, let others know of His amazing love, grace, and mercy when He does something in your life. You never know who needs REDEMPTION!

PRAYER: Lord, you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Work through us so that others may see your redemptive love as we share our stories of you. **Amen.**

Be Blessed, Austin Curtis

Thursday—Austin Curtis is our Director of Youth Ministries. Austin is no stranger to youth and church ministry. He graduated from Elkins High School in northwest Arkansas, earned his Bachelors in Sports Ministry at Campbellsville University, and received his Masters of Divinity from Liberty University. Austin has served in various capacities as a youth pastor and YMCA Site Director from 2003-2012. Currently, Austin also serves as the Associate Pastor of Sulphur City Baptist Church and is the chaplain for C. I. Solutions. He is married to Amber, and they have an adorable 3 year old daughter named Elizabeth. Austin brings a passion for youth ministry and an infectious love of Jesus Christ to his commitment to our youth and to our church family.



Friday—Sonnie Andersen I was born on an Iowa farm where my roots seem to have been established in nature, justifying my being outside...even if it is "work". When less than five, our family moved to Muscatine, Iowa; and it was there I realized my love of singing...thus my involvement yet today. In spite of my BME degree at the U of Iowa, my position in the public schools was short-lived; while Dick was establishing his engineering career, my primary role was "keeping our home" and both of us raising our children. Directing church children's choirs became important; but I realized, I was happiest when I was a part in vocal singing, whatever form that took. Sometime later, I served in a number of positions in (what was then) Christian Women's Club, leading to a surge in my walk of faith. Realizing I wasn't really honoring Dick (scripture in mind), I took the risk of asking if we might go to a marriage enrichment program. Due to its lessons on Holy Matrimony and a gentle invitation to accept Christ not only into one's life but into our marriage, God worked in a mighty way by allowing us (through United Marriage Encounter) to share our lives with many...in the USA, England and many parts of Asia...something we never dreamed we would be doing for 26 years, until we permanently moved to Bella Vista ten years ago and FUMC became our home church.



Saturday—Wanda Williams was born and raised in Colorado but has lived in Montana, South Carolina and for the fourth time in Arkansas. She has been in Human Resources over twenty years and continues to work with the hopes of retiring before too long. She loves to read, do X-stitch, and has embroidered tea towels for the UMW bazaar every year she has been here. She also loves doing creative crafts, and her granddaughter Jenna can be found in her craft room joining her in alcohol ink and melted crayola projects. She is also the proud Grammy to Alec, and Craig who lives in New Jersey. Wanda attends the Well service with her daughter, Amy, and son-in-law, James, and Alec & Jenna.



What's Your Story? A Call to Adventure

4th Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 11, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 39:20-23, 40:20-23

Joseph's master took him and threw him in jail, the place where the king's prisoners were held. While he was in jail, the LORD was with Joseph and remained loyal to him. He caused the jail's commander to think highly of Joseph. The jail's commander put all of the prisoners in the jail under Joseph's supervision, and he was the one who determined everything that happened there. The jail's commander paid no attention to anything under Joseph's supervision, because the LORD was with him and made everything he did successful.

The third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a party for all of his servants. Before all of his servants, he gave an audience to the chief wine steward and the chief baker. He returned the chief wine steward to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had said would happen when he interpreted their dreams for them. But the chief wine steward didn't remember Joseph; he forgot all about him.

Wow, talk about ups and downs of life! Joseph is thrown in jail (downer!), but gets put in charge of the prisoners (yeah!). Pharaoh gives an audience to two different servants (who incidentally were with Joseph in jail – see Monday's devotional). One servant's audience leads to a positive, hopeful outcome - he gets his job back (yeah!), and a second one leads to a very negative, life-ending outcome – he is hanged (downer!). Now granted there is a lot in these stories that we do not know. We have no idea why the wine steward was thrown in jail in the first place but then went on successfully in Pharaoh's good graces. We have no idea what the rest of the story for the baker was and then why Pharaoh treated him so differently. But I don't think that's the point.

And looking at the last verse... seeing the life-giving outcome that the wine steward received, and presumably that he knew of the life-ending outcome to the baker, how **could** he in any way, shape or form forget about Joseph, who predicted all of this from the dreams? (Again, wait for later in the week for the dream part of the story.) You would think that the wine steward would have looked for Joseph, wrapped his arms around his neck, and thanked him profusely for the prediction that he would get his job back. After all, the wine steward could have been hanged, too, right? But he 'forgot all about' Joseph. Curious, don't you think? And so the question I asked myself was, "Where do I see God in this?"

Having traveled to Israel, I can verify...it is a long, arduous trip "up" to Jerusalem, even by bus. In biblical times, it would have been by foot...when families, maybe even communities, together traveled to celebrate festivals in Jerusalem. Perhaps much of the trip was facilitated by the fact they sang scripture as they moved along. Through reiterating their parent's faith, youngsters capable of making the journey, would be taught a reverence for God and an understanding of worship. Indeed, they may well have learned the history of their peoples...and, perhaps, a sense of their destiny through the words of Psalm 107.

Music nearly always, drew me to church long before I understood Bible stories were not fables or mythical tales. I learned scripture through hymns and anthems (which seeped into my inner being)...while sermons were beyond my listening abilities (with mind wandering and feet dangling), as I squirmed in the pew beside my family. Though unrealistic, envisioning the pilgrims on their way to their Holy City, I would have far rather be skipping along with the other children and being in the great outdoors and singing until breathless!

As we examine this scripture further, "deliverance" is the theme...God is calling the Jewish nation from all parts of the world where they have been in bondage. His intention is for their redemption...and a call for each of us to return to Him.

Words from the anthem I shared in last week's writing continue on:

"Come follow me," said the Lord. "leave your worldly cares behind.
Free as a bird soaring above, filled with my redeeming love.
And share the love you feel this day with all whose hurt you find.
If all do so, then love will flow through all mankind."

PRAYER: Lord of all, thank You for delivering us from the cold, hard fact of death (in this life). In all things, we have thanksgiving...the good fortune we receive from You; and hard as it sees, the trials and tribulations You see us through. In scripture, You tell us to "pray for peace in Jerusalem". Your prophetic word does not tell exactly what this means...but we pray for the Jewish nation as a whole...that they will come to recognize and accept "Messiah" for Who He is.

Keep us observant of what You are doing and of miracles happening in these days. Thank You for the privilege of supporting those who receive the call to proclaim You in other lands; while at the same time, make us be "salt and light", right where we are, by reaching out to help others.

"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Redeemer". **Amen**

Sonnie Andersen

We are all familiar with the scripture verse John 3:16. It might have been one of the first Bible verses we learned when we were young, and those of us in the older generation probably learned it from the King James Version of the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Jesus Christ came to save us from the fires of hell. He told us how to live in order to have eternal life with him. God sent his son, his only son, because he loved his children and instructed that in order to have eternal life with him we needed to follow Christ's instructions. It sounds easy, but if it is so easy to follow the instructions of Christ Jesus and to live in faith and harmony with him, why is there so much evil in the world? Why do people take guns into schools and kill innocent children? Why do people steal and pillage; why do they rape and torture; why do they lie and cheat?

I certainly do not know the answers to these questions. I only know that as long as I have Christ in my life and as long as I surround myself with people who have Christ in their lives that I will be more at peace and hopefully can be assured of everlasting life.

PRAYER: God, because you sent your Son into the world to save it and not condemn it, I will lean on that understanding and not try to judge the acts of others. Be with us all Lord as we learn to live by faith that you sent your Beloved Son to us to teach us how to live eternally with you, and finally to take our sins upon himself in death. May we be worthy, blessed Savior. **Amen.**

Lynn Prueitt

Thursday, March 15, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 107:1-3

*Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!
For His mercy endures forever.*

*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south..*

Thanksgiving and Deliverance

Description: Psalm 107 is a Wisdom Song. It is also a "traveling song". As one writer interpreted: "probably a group thanksgiving for pilgrims".

And I believe that is the point. The first scripture says, "...the LORD was with Joseph..." In these mere four verses, this is stated twice. Now as Methodists, we believe heavily in God's grace. We believe that God's grace is forever before us, beckoning us toward God and toward the Truth and Life that God is. However, as human beings, we do not always pay attention to what God is beckoning us toward. And I believe that is the point. In Joseph's case, at this point in his life, he pays attention to God's wisdom. He seeks God and follows where God would lead. And others can see this in Joseph. The jail's commander saw this and put all the prisoners under Joseph's supervision. The Lord was with Joseph, AND Joseph paid attention and followed as the Lord directed.

Then look at the second scripture. There is **no** mention at all of the Lord's presence. Now, **we** believe that the Lord was there. God is there through all of life; God is the great I AM, right? God was present, BUT in **neither** Pharaoh's nor the wine steward's case were they paying any attention. They were doing their own thing, relying on their humanly wisdom (or lack of it), and the outcomes were merely human, lacking in the Lord's justice and compassion.

PRAYER: Holy and Gracious God, we know you are always with us. You are always present beckoning us to do your will. Forgive us when we do not pay attention, but instead do our own thing. Help us, Lord, to turn around and see and follow you. For when we do, you become the co-author of our stories, just as you were with Joseph. **Amen.**

Rev. Brenda Wideman

Monday, March 12, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 40:1-8 (NKJ)

It came to pass after these things that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation. And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please."

Joseph's story – Part 2

In Part 1 of the Joseph story, Joseph has been sold by his brothers to a caravan of Midianite traders who have taken him to Egypt. In Chapter 39 of Genesis we are told he is purchased by Potiphar, the Captain of the Guard and put to work. Joseph is described as “handsome in form and appearance” and Potiphar’s wife attempts to seduce him and he refuses. She reports him to her husband and Joseph is turned over to the warden of the prison where God influences the warden to put Joseph in charge of certain other prisoners.

This brings us to our passage for today. The two prisoners are the chief butler and the chief baker to the king. They have angered Pharaoh in some way and are being punished. Each man has had a dream and does not know how to interpret it.

If you will recall, before he was sold by his brothers, Joseph had established himself as an interpreter of dreams. In fact, this was one of the reasons that his brothers were angry with him and had discussed killing him.

We leave Joseph and the two men as Joseph says “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me please.” What will transpire from the interpretation of the dreams? What will happen to Joseph? What is the rest of the story?

PRAYER: Grant, oh Lord, that we may spend our lives immersed in doing those things which will honor You and Your name. That we might be true to You and the covenant, and in so doing find reward in our faithfulness. **Amen.**

Alan Packard

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 40:9-19 (NKJV)

Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “Behold in the my dream a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. “Then Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” And Joseph said to him, “This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. “Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. “But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. “For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.”

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, “I also was in my dream, and there I had three white baskets on my head. “In the uppermost basket there were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head.” The interpretation of it: The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.

Wow! This is some vivid imagery! Most of us have heard the story of Joseph and how it ends, but at this moment in the scriptures he is revealing the God-given gift he has been given. He has the gift of prophesy, of being able to interpret dreams. This is the same gift that he’s had all his life that we’ve heard about in the previous sermons Rev. Jeanne has given. The revelation of these dreams that he used to tell his brothers that were foretelling things to come in a distant future are the same skills he is using when he is incarcerated. Yes, this gift got him in trouble with his brothers because of his pride and boastfulness and his way of rubbing in that he was the favored child. But, he has been gaining life experiences. He is developing in character and godliness and it is to his benefit to bear the truth as God has given him. These skills are what make him successful and eventually recognized by Pharaoh. Joseph has been faithful in the little things and is about to be put in charge of many things as Pharaoh recognizes the talents and gifts Joseph possesses.

Joseph’s story, like ours, continues to be written daily. God has given us special gifts and we are to use those gifts to further His Kingdom. How about you? What are your gifts? Where can you use those gifts (at home, at church, at work)? How can you go about your daily life and use them and give God the glory?

PRAYER: Father, God, You alone know what remains of the plots and twists in our lives on this earth. You, alone know the number of days that we have remaining. Help us to live our life in a way that is pleasing and honoring to You. Help us know that we need Jesus and to never forget He gave his life so that we might have eternal life. Thank you! **Amen**

Amy O. Fulton

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

SCRIPTURE: Scripture: John 3:14-21 (CEB)

And the Son of Man must be lifted up, just as the metal snake was lifted up by Moses in the desert. Then everyone who has faith in the Son of Man will have eternal life. God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them! No one who has faith in God's Son will be condemned. But everyone who doesn't have faith in him has already been condemned for not having faith in God's only Son.

The light has come into the world, and people who do evil things are judged guilty because they love the dark more than the light. People who do evil hate the light and won't come to the light because it clearly shows what they have done. But everyone who lives by the truth will come to the light because they want others to know that God is really the one doing what they do.