

Devotions for the Week of March 4, 2018

LARGE-PRINT

3rd Sunday of Lent

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, March 4, 2018

**Read Luke 13:1-9; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 6:12;
& I Timothy 6:11-12.**

During this 3rd week of Lent, think a bit about the questions that new members and the parents of children being baptize answer. Many of you who are reading this once stood before your church family and answered “yes” to these same questions. It is important for us to remember what we said “yes” to and the commitment we made on the day we joined the church or had our children baptized. Lent is a season to remind ourselves of the commitments we have made before God and one another, and to recommit to those same things if we have fallen away.

The first question asked reads, ***“On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?”*** In this question, we are rejecting all that is evil in the spiritual realm (*the demonic*), the world (*prejudice, injustice, hatred, violence*), and in ourselves (*pride, lust, greed, selfishness*).

Jesus tells the people, “...*but unless you repent, you will all perish...*” In Jesus’ parable of the fig tree, Jesus teaches, “*If it bears fruit next year, well and good...*” Jesus calls on us to take

a stand against the sin, that which is evil within ourselves, and repent. Jesus also calls on us to take a stand against that which is evil in the world, and to have our lives bear fruit, standing for justice and loving our neighbor. We must not simply repent with words but with action.

Paul tells us that “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” and “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” We are called to stand against that which is evil in the “*heavenly realms,*” that which is evil in the world, and that which is evil in ourselves. As Christians, recognizing what Christ has done for us, what Christ has done on our behalf, we commit to taking such a stand.

How are you living out your commitment? Are you going to God in prayer, repenting of your sin, asking God to help you stand against your selfishness, your pride, your greed, the many things that get in the way of your relationship with Him? Are you looking for ways you can fight temptation, stand against the “*wiles of the devil*” when he tries to divide, discourage, and lead you and our church in the wrong direction? Are you actively involved in fighting against injustice and hatred in our world and community?

Ask God to help you in living out your commitment to Him, taking a stand against that which is ungodly. Take time tonight in prayer.

Monday, March 5, 2018

**Read Hebrews 11:24-26; Deuteronomy 30:15-20;
& Proverbs 3:6.**

The second question asked those joining the church or baptizing their child is, ***“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”***

This question reminds us that God has given us another gift that is often overlooked. We have been given the “*freedom*” to choose...and that means that we have the “*freedom*” to choose the right path in every situation.

Not only do we have the “*freedom*” but we have the “*power*” through God’s Holy Spirit to make the right choice and live Godly lives. We cannot make excuses; we cannot say, “*The devil made me do it*” or “*That’s just the way I am*” or “*That’s how I was brought up.*” God has given us “*freedom*” and “*power*” to walk the path of faith, to live Godly lives for Him. We are not victims in this life (*unless we choose to be*)...We are victorious in Him!

Moses made a choice and called on the people to make a choice to “*walk in God’s ways.*” As Peter Wade writes, “*There is always a choice. The freedom of choice is a tremendous power. In all of life’s situations I can make a choice. ‘Do I choose to experience peace of mind, or do I choose to experience conflict? Do I choose to experience love or fear? Do I choose to be a love-finder or a fault-finder? Do I choose to be a love-giver or a love-taker?’ We always have a choice. When life gets difficult, say to yourself, ‘I could choose peace instead of this.’”*

Proverbs 3:6 tells us, “*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*” When we choose Him, God directs us and guides us; when we choose to go outside His protection and love, we must face the consequences. Of course, the most important choice we have to make is to be in a

relationship with our Heavenly Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.

How are you living out this gift? Do your daily choices reflect your faith, your relationship with Christ? Do you make excuses for your behavior instead of accepting the “*freedom and power*” you have to change your situation, to grow in your relationship with God and others, to make a difference?

Choose everyday to allow Christ to guide you and accept the Holy Spirit’s power to help you on your journey, to help you live a Godly life, to resist and fight all that is not of Christ.

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

Read The Roman Road to Salvation: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:13; 10: 9-10; & Revelation 3:20.

The third question new members and parents are asked is, “*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races?*”

The second part of this question deals with the fact that prejudice, racism, sexism, ageism, etc... has no place in God’s Church...for “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all One in Christ Jesus.*”

The first part of the question deals with inviting Christ into our hearts, putting our faith in Him, and allowing Christ to be the director of our lives. Have we recognized that yes, as Jesus speaks of in Luke 13:1-9, we are all sinners? Have we recognized our need for God, for a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ? Have we confessed our sin, professed that Jesus is who the Bible claims He is, that He died for us and was raised

from the dead and ascended to heaven, and have we asked Christ to direct our lives, to be our Lord?

If we have done these things, if we have opened the door, Christ promises that He will enter and come to us. When we answer “yes” to this question, we are accepting who the scriptures claim Christ to be...the Son of God. We are accepting the relationship God is offering through His Son, opening the door of our hearts to Him, and we are committing to trust and serve Him as the Lord of our lives.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, *“Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do.”*

Take time tonight to be in prayer...to thank God for His Son, Jesus Christ and the relationship that is offered to you. Ask God to show you how you might trust Him more and how you might serve Him. And if there are doubts, pray like the man who came to Jesus crying out, *“Lord, I believe...Help my unbelief.”*

May Jesus truly be the Lord of your life.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

**Read I Corinthians 12:7-26; Galatians 6:2;
& Proverbs 22:6.**

At this point in the sacrament of baptism, the parents are asked to make a commitment to raising their child in the church, that they may grow to know Jesus Christ for themselves. But I want us to focus more on the congregation’s response.

The congregation responds, *“With God’s help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of*

love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.”

In the sacrament of baptism, many of you, the congregation, commit to helping raise the child in the faith, to surround them with love and forgiveness, not criticism, gossip, and judgment, to help them grow in their trust of God by providing opportunities to learn and to serve, and to pray for them.

I wonder how often this commitment is just part of a liturgy and therefore, the words are not heartfelt and lived out. I Corinthians tells us that we are given gifts for the common good, to help others, to care for our brothers and sisters in the faith, the body. We promise to nurture, teach, and support those who are being baptized, who will grow up in our midst, to carry their burdens. We all need mutual nurturing and support, mentors who will guide us along right paths, a community of love and forgiveness to hold and surround us., to welcome us back when we stray.

During baptism, we the congregation commit to do everything in our power, sacrificing ourselves, to provide just such a support system. Unfortunately, often we fail in our commitment. We aren't willing to change in order to reach out to these young people growing up in the church and many of our own children end up leaving, frustrated, finding the church irrelevant to their generation. Often churches struggle to find teachers, nursery workers, youth leaders to guide and instruct the children. Often we fail to provide the opportunities needed for these young children and youth to serve others.

How are you keeping your commitment to the children who have been baptized...whom you have promised to surround and pray for? What are you willing to sacrifice in order to reach them, connect with them, help them to know Jesus Christ deeply and personally? What gifts has God given you to use for this task?

Take time in prayer asking God to show you how you might reach out to the children and youth of our churches and keep the commitment you made on the day of their baptism.

Thursday, March 8, 2018

**Read Colossians 3:23-24; I Corinthians 12:7-26;
I Peter 2:9; & James 2:14-26.**

Later, to the new members and those who have been baptized, the congregation responds, *“We give thanks for all that God has already given you and we welcome you in Christian love. As members together with you in the body of Christ and in this congregation of the United Methodist Church, we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”*

This question mirrors a question that every new member is asked when they join the church.

Take time to pray about how you are living out your commitment to *“faithfully participate...in the church...by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness.”*

Ask God to help you in each of those areas that *“in everything God may be glorified...”* and the church may fulfill

its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to love one another.

Friday, March 9, 2018

Read Luke 13:1-9; Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8.

These are the scriptures for the 3rd week of Lent. God calls on us to recognize our own sin, to “*seek the Lord*” finding water and food that does satisfy (*forgiveness and peace*), and to produce fruit, using our lives to make a difference, to live our faith, not just speak it.

The only way we will find “*freedom from thirst*” is to turn to God, seek His face, lean on Him, and live for Him.

Sit & talk with Him tonight. Put your faith into action this week.

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Once Again...Read and Reflect On:

INVITATION TO THE OBSERVANCE OF LENTEN DISCIPLINE

How Are You Observing a Holy Lent?

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation. During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the

life of the Church. In this way, the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. To make a right beginning of repentance, as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now bow before our Creator and Redeemer in a moment of silence and reflection.

***“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.”***

-Psalm 51:10

Be in prayer tonight, join a small group, read and study the weekly devotions, pray, & serve. Live out your commitment to God and the Church.

***Don't Forget to
Invite Someone to Church Tomorrow!***