

2018
Volume 7

A Way in the Wilderness



A Devotional Written
by Family and Friends
of Grace United Methodist Church

A Note of Thanks

A Way in the Wilderness is a Lenten Devotional written by the friends and families of Grace United Methodist Church. These reflections and meditations come from the heart of the writers who were asked to share evidence of this truth with you. We hope you as the reader hear and see evidence of God working in your life and the lives of others through these stories.

Please use this devotional as a daily practice of reading, meditating, praying, and discovering new things about your relationship with God and others.

Many thanks and much appreciation goes first and foremost to the writers—you really wrote from your faith! We are deeply indebted to Dennis Dubois, parishioner and local artist, for the use of his artworks: “*A Way in the Wilderness*” and “*The Garden*” Also, we would like to thank Chris Dixon in helping to make this happen. Thank you all so much!

The Grace UMC Staff & Intentional Faith Development Team

Introduction

2018 Lent / Holy Week Celebrations

Please join us for worship and celebration this Lenten season.

Shrove Sunday Pancake Breakfast	February 11, 7:30 to 10:30 am
Ash Wednesday Soup/Salad Supper	February 14, 5:45 pm
Ash Wednesday Service	February 14, 7:30 pm
Lenten Wednesday Night Suppers	February 21, 5:45 pm February 28, 5:45 pm March 7, 5:45 pm March 14, 5:45 pm March 21, 5:45 pm
Palm Sunday Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	March 25
Maundy Thursday Service	March 29, 7:30 pm
Good Friday Service	March 30, 7:30 pm
Prayer Vigil (24 hours)	March 30-31, 8:30 pm
Easter Sunrise Service	April 1, 6:30 am
Easter Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	April 1
Confirmation Sunday <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	May 13
Change the World Day	May 19
Day of Pentecost Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	May 20

Cover Artwork by Dennis DuBois

I struggled with this: “A way in the wilderness?” A literal wilderness, a landscape? Perhaps “wilderness” is a metaphor, for what? Maybe this is to be a wilderness of the mind, Picasso-like?

The reference photo for the painting was taken on a backpacking trip and suddenly came to me in the middle of the night. I got up, found the photo, and knew this is what I was to paint. A metaphorical-theological painting of a literal wilderness! Let me explain. A painting should draw the viewer into the work. Is the trail drawing you into the dark of the “wilderness?” Or are you hiking out of the wilderness into sunlight? Your faith journey may sometimes take you into some dark places you don’t want to go to or make you wonder why you are in a “wilderness” at all. Christ provides the trail when you accept Him into your life. He will always be your backpacking companion, even when you think you may have lost the trail or realize you are perhaps on the wrong trail in someplace you don’t want to be. When you think you are lost, stop, orient your map and compass (Bible), shoot some bearings with your compass to the land features around you (pray), and He will show you the way.

What is Lent?

Our Lenten journey is one of “turning around,” of changing directions from self-serving toward the self-giving way of the cross.

The word *Lent* comes from the Old English word *lencten*, which refers to the lengthening of days and the coming of spring. Lent is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but it is Biblical nonetheless. Throughout Hebrew history, based on the Torah, every religious festival required time for preparation, and it is from this example that Christianity has kept this tradition. Thus, Lent is the time of preparation for Easter.

Lent lasts 40 days; why 40? In early times each number was felt to reveal a certain aspect of God. The number 40 meant “complete.” There are many examples in the Bible of the number 40. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing for His own spiritual journey and ministry. Sundays are not counted in Lent, they are considered “little Easters.” Hence, Lent actually lasts 46 days, but again, we only count the 40 days of preparation as Lenten days, and not the *rest* days of Sunday Sabbath.

Christians focus on their relationship with God, often choosing to give up something or volunteering and giving of themselves for others. Why give up something or volunteer and give yourself for others for Lent? Well, perhaps in the giving up or giving of yourself, you may find yourself sharing in the suffering of Christ, or at least coming to a greater understanding of temptation and suffering. Maybe the discipline of “giving up” or “giving” will help you focus on Christ or help you to understand the sorrow over your own sometimes selfish behavior. Maybe it will help you realize that God is ultimately what should fill your life, and not your belongings, desires, or habits.

Because we cycle around to this scenario every year, it also points to a cyclic understanding of spiritual growth. Every time we come to this part of the year, we come as changed, different people. Each time we contemplate the world ending, it is a different world. Each time we set out on a path toward God, we hopefully do it with greater depth and with more wisdom.

What are all the “other days”?

Shrove Tuesday – Shrove means “to repent.” Shrove Tuesday is celebrated the Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday, and is sometimes celebrated in churches with pancake suppers as a reminder of the unleavened bread and the Israelites’ hasty departure from Egypt. Here at Grace UMC we celebrate this event as Shrove Sunday Pancake Breakfast on the Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday – Ash Wednesday is celebrated 46 days before Easter or 40 days not counting Sundays. It may fall anytime from February 3 to March 10. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are burned from the palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday. The ashes are mixed with oil and then a cross is smudged across the forehead as a symbolic reminder that we are all sinners and desperately in need of forgiveness. Although there is not a scripture associated with Ash Wednesday and Jesus did not celebrate Ash Wednesday with his disciples, we can draw on Old Testament references for remorse and sorrow associated with ashes. “O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son.” – *Jeremiah 6:26*.

Palm Sunday – Palm Sunday is the Sunday prior to Easter and is the first day of Holy Week. Jesus entered Jerusalem and began his final days on earth. A large crowd gathered and greeted him

Introduction

waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna!” – *Matthew 21:1-11*.

Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday – Holy Thursday is celebrated the Thursday prior to Easter. Maundy is Latin for *mandatum novum* or “new commandment” remembering Jesus’ new commandment recorded in *John 13:34*: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Thursday services remember Jesus’ betrayal, His washing of the disciples’ feet, the Lord’s Supper (communion), and His final teachings as recorded in the Gospel of John. Here at Grace UMC the altar is stripped and everything is removed. All leave the worship service in silence as a reminder of the death of Jesus Christ.

Good Friday – Good Friday is celebrated the Friday prior to Easter, and it is an alteration of “God’s” Friday. Good Friday remembers Jesus’ crucifixion and His last words from the cross. On Good Friday a Tenebrae (Latin for shadows or darkness) service features scriptures, meditations, and extinguished candles as the Christ candle exits the room.

Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday) – The Easter Vigil or Holy Saturday is celebrated the Saturday prior to Easter. This Saturday evening service remembers the promises of God throughout history and the dark moments before the resurrection. Here at Grace UMC we celebrate the Easter Vigil with a 24-hour Prayer Vigil. The Prayer Vigil starts at the end of the Good Friday service and continues through Saturday until 8:30 pm.

Easter – Easter is celebrated the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or next after March 21, the spring equinox. Easter can be any time from March 22 through April 25. Easter celebrates Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. “He is not here, but has risen.” – *Luke 24:6*.

Bible Passage

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.
—*Psalm 103:8-14 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Devotional

The imposition of ashes on ones forehead is a humbling experience and yet, a gentle reminder that we are claimed by Christ. How can such a simple gesture mean so much? Ashes from last year's palms are burned and placed on our foreheads in the symbol of the cross. Very pure, simple, and organic in a very basic and authentic way. The palms we waved in recognition of Christ as our Savior on Palm Sunday, now bear forth on each of us, as we recognize and claim that our Savior has *indeed* saved us. Nothing could be more purposeful, poignant, and so extremely powerful. We bear the image in ashes of the cross that Jesus died on to save us.

Today is Valentine's Day. What love is this that rescued me? What can I give of myself to show even a small measure of gratitude? A life of devotion, prayer, worship and service hardly seems enough, yet that is what I have to give. I imagine that many will receive ashes this day and like me, will be so thankful for this gift of love. One day, my body will return to dust—ashes, yet, my spiritual self will live forever because of the cross.

Reflection

To help you meditate on today's devotional, consider the following questions:

1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for the life and love of your Son, Christ Jesus. We pray for the grace and peace of our savior to bear witness to others through our acts of devotion, however small and insignificant they may seem, so that His life will be glorified. Amen.

About the Author

Darlene stays busy these days! She is on staff here at Grace, owns a small business in Old Town, Manassas, is the caregiver for her mother, Ms. Gloria, the mother of two adult children—Kristen and Nathan—and the grandmother of 20-month-old Kayla and 3-month-old Joseph. However, she could not be happier, nor more thankful for her many blessings! “God has been my sustainer, redeemer, and life-giver in many, many life-changing circumstances and experiences.”

**We invite you to join us for our Ash Wednesday Service
at 7:30 pm in the Sanctuary**



Thursday, February 15

Bible Passage

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

—*Psalm 145:4-6 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Devotional

I always struggled with going to church since it wasn't something we did as a family growing up. It wasn't until I became an adult that I realized my connection with God had always been there and was present even when I wasn't physically in church. I started to notice when I was sitting in a tree stand early in the morning listening to animals wake up and watching the sunrise, I could sit for hours and talk to God in silence. I felt it the first time I went to the Grand Canyon and it literally took my breath away. I remember when our family went to Hawaii and as my husband and I walked along rocks looking at the expanse of ocean it brought tears to my eyes. We have taken our kids across the country to visit National Parks and connect them to nature with the hope of instilling a sense of reverence for God's creation.

You don't have to go out west or to places far away to see God's beauty. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities we've had to experience so many beautiful places with our children. However, I have realized that a sunset in Nokesville is just as beautiful and invokes the same emotions as one in Hawaii. It is all about perspective.

Whenever I have a stressful day it is comforting to know a run in the woods is the prescription to happiness, "...and on your wondrous works, I will meditate."

I "force" my family to take me to Shenandoah for my birthday every year so we can hike and camp. There is no way to put into words the beauty of looking up at the sky to see the Milky Way and watching meteors streak across the sky. It is as if God is putting on a show just for me and it restores my soul.

Thursday, February 15

Reflection

To help you meditate on today's devotional, consider the following questions:

1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Dear heavenly father, help us to slow down and recognize you in our daily lives. Not only in the majestic but in the everyday scenes. Let us appreciate the beauty and peace of your creation and feel the restoration it provides to our soul.

About the Author

Cyndee Sirk-Fear and her husband Scott have 4 children; Michael (24), Corinne (20), Samantha (15), and Levi (10). They have been members of Grace for 10 years. She has worked in law enforcement for the National Park Service for 19 years and is currently the Chief Ranger at Prince William Forest Park. Her husband is the Assistant Chief for the United States Park Police.



Friday, February 16

Bible Passage

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—*Philippians 4:13 (New King James Version)*

Devotional

I was on my way to chair a Church Council meeting for the first time. I had prepared for the meeting: I created an agenda, researched Bible verses and devotions on-line, selected one I felt was perfect for the first meeting, and I left early to ensure I would arrive on time. I was ready or so I thought.

I was driving on 29 toward Gainesville and out of the corner of my eye I saw a woman running down the median. I did a double take, and saw that she had parked her car in the median, and was running with reusable grocery bags in her hands. My first thought was: Is this lady crazy? Who parks their car in the median on a busy Saturday morning? Will her car get hit? What is so important?

I looked and she was running after a man who appeared to be homeless. He was struggling to carry everything he had, and was dropping items. Then it hit me, she saw another human in need and wanted to help. A simple need she could help fill with a few reusable bags. As I continued to travel with the traffic, they faded out of view.

As I drove, it struck me that I had just observed an act of courage and true kindness. I had to throw out the devotion I had planned, and use her example of courage as we talked about the year ahead at Grace UMC. I didn't have the right Bible verse or a nice written devotion to kick off the meeting, but I had the vivid memory of the woman and her Christian Courage, and her help of another.

Over the past year, changes occurred in both my life and in the lives of others: I have retired from a lifelong career with one company, Grace UMC started a new 9:45 am service, and many in the congregation and staff experienced challenges and changes in their lives. I've tried to keep the theme of courage alive in my heart this past year. I have a "sticky note" on my car dashboard that says "Have Courage". This serves as a reminder. I've learned that we all seek courage to try new things, reach out to new people, re-imagine life, and help others. Everyone has their own struggles and ways of seeking courage. In my journey of courage this past year, comfort and encouragement from friends and those around

me has been helpful. When I am in my car by myself, my “sticky note” reminds me that real courage comes from God’s love and his involvement in our life each day. Until we need it, we don’t always realize that God’s love and courage are always there for us. Just like I’m sure God’s love shone through that Saturday morning in September, when one woman decided to park her car on a busy street and run with her reusable bags to help a stranger.

Reflection

To help you meditate on today’s devotional, consider the following questions:

1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help us to remember that you are with us as we try something new, recover from an illness, experience a heartbreak or difficult times. We only need to seek your help and the courage your love provides us. Thank you for the gifts you provide us through your love. Amen.

About the Author

Anne Young has been a member of Grace her adult life joining when she moved to Manassas after college graduation. She currently serves as the Church Council Chair and is a regular at the Thrive service. Anne and Paul were married at the Center Street Church building. Paul is active in the Audiovisual Ministry. Their two adult children, Michael and Ashley, grew up at Grace UMC and were active in children’s and youth ministries.



Bible Passage

You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
—*Colossians 3:7-14 (New International Version)*

Devotional

I am often asked by college students and recent graduates for career advice. I'm sure they are surprised when I tell them: "Be kind. You cannot overestimate the importance of being kind." It's not the sort of advice you expect to get in the workplace, especially in *my* workplace where division is considered normal.

Recent news headlines reflect widespread hatred and the worst of human nature. Our country is increasingly divided and we are experiencing that disharmony in our own communities and relationships. Sadly, it seems like there are more and more days when we see more bad than good, more hate than love. We are living in a world where family members no longer speak to one another because of arguments on Facebook. Where feuds with neighbors end in violence. Where civil disobedience is no longer civil.

When I was growing up, my mom always told me "if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Good advice. The anonymity and impersonal nature of social media enables people to say things that maybe they would have the decency not to say in person. We've become defined by our differences instead of our similarities. And we've become intolerant of those who don't think exactly like us.

It would be easy to feel discouraged and hopeless. Or worse, to give up and succumb to our basest instincts. However, the

Saturday, February 17

scripture reminds us that we are all God's children and have more in common than we are different. Rather than seeing our differences, we are challenged to be more like God; to be more patient, kind and forgiving. God doesn't even require us to *like* everyone we encounter; merely to "bear with each other." That is a very human standard that we should be able to meet; to bear with one another. It's a good start.

I work with someone of a different political party who always says "we can disagree without being disagreeable." As Christians, let us lead the way and set the example for how to start anew and change the tone of conversation in our nation. Let's look at one another the way God sees us; with love and forgiveness. Be kind. And if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

Reflection

To help you meditate on today's devotional, consider the following questions:

1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Dear God, please enter our hearts and renew us in your image. We pray for the compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience to bear with each other and forgive one another if we have a grievance. Amen.

About the Author

Shelley Husband and her husband, Chris, have made Manassas and Grace UMC their home for thirteen years. Shelley is originally from the Shenandoah Valley, and is currently the Chief of Staff and General Counsel of the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. Shelley and Chris have four children: Tyler, Ada, Christian and Emma, aged 6 to 13.





**Published by Grace United Methodist Church
February 2018**

**9750 Wellington Road, Manassas, VA 20110
(703) 361-7800 umcgrace.org**