

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*.

Sunday, February 25

Bible Passage

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
—*Isaiah 43:19 (New International Version)*

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. —*Galatians 6:2 (New International Version)*

Devotional

Do you let God speak to you through others? I find that if I am stuck in a dark place, it is so much easier to come out of that darkness if I talk to a friend. Someone I can trust – a safe place. Everyone needs a place that feels safe. I admit that even though I know this in my head, it is not always easy for me to do. When you can unload some of the pain and fear, and let someone you trust help you carry it, the burden becomes so much lighter. Gradually the darkness dims and the light begins to shine through. Stephen Ministers at Grace UMC are trained to be that safe place, to listen, and to pray with you, to help you see that light again. God loves us and is always with us. He uses other people to be his hands and feet. Do you let God speak to you through others?

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

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending others to help me when I am struggling. Give me an open heart and mind to listen to what you may be saying through others. Help me to sense when I might be that safe place for others. In your precious Son's name I pray. Amen.

About the Author

Sylvia Bynum has been a member of Grace since 2001 and a Stephen Minister since 2003.

Bible Passage

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? —*Matthew 6:26 (New International Version)*

Devotional

God has a plan for every one of our lives. Even the most seemingly insignificant of us. To have a part in His story, He asks one thing that is simple, yet impossible without the grace He afforded us on the cross: “follow Me.” The choice to do so is the single most important decision to be made in a person's lifetime. More important than our relationships, which college to attend, or career path. All we must do is follow Him, he will be the lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our path (Psalms 119:105), and he will provide.

Reflection

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Prayer

Dear God,

I pray that we might find the strength and the will to follow in your footsteps. To seek you first, and in all our ways honor you. Show us the path that you would have us walk, and bless us as we continue on our journey. In the Lord's name, Amen.

About the Author

Michael Hill, 23, is a member of the Young Adult Ministries (YAM) study group. As a college student, he attends Northern Virginia Community College for a degree in Cyber Security.

Tuesday, February 27

Bible Passage

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. —*Isaiah 41:10 (New Living Translation)*

Devotional

Wandering through a wilderness lost or alone without like-minded others seeking God—finding Him—knowing He will guide me to understand others and their ways, to bring us all out together thanking and praising Him as we learn from each other.

Reflection

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day and the many blessings you provide. Guide me in the path you choose to do your will. I pray in your Son's name, Amen.

About the Author

Jean Bane has been in Virginia for seven years and belongs to Grace UMC, referring to it as her home. Volunteering gives her a peace and satisfaction, part of the ways of serving the Lord.

Bible Passage

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. —*James 1:2-4 (New Living Translation)*

Devotional

Come again?!

As my husband, Dan, and I sat in the office of a local neurologist in February 2015, hearing the words “malignant neoplasm” being used to describe the large mass inside his brain, feeling like we were in the wilderness was an understatement. We were overcome with shock, trepidation, questions, and uncertainty.

A short time later, our fears were confirmed. After a long surgery to remove the mass, we found out that his tumor was indeed cancerous and would require concurrent radiation and chemotherapy. We chose to relocate to another state to receive treatment, living out of a hotel for two months.

We were at a bifurcated moment in life. In the midst of so many important decisions to be made, paramount was how we chose to live our faith. It was through many tears and middle of the night conversations that occurred while lying sleepless in bed, we chose the continued path of gratitude, trust, and faith in God.

We have never looked back, second guessing. It is down our road of faith that we have found contentment, happiness, peace, and fulfillment. Though our future is still unknown, we have grown closer to God, putting our complete trust in Him.

Reflection

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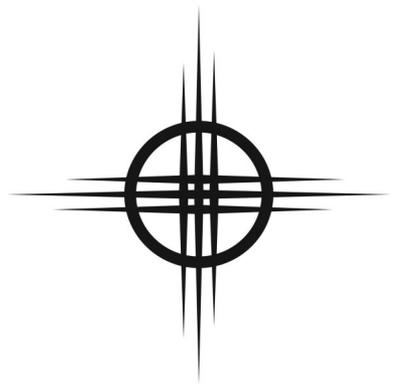
Wednesday, February 28

Prayer

Gracious God, I thank you for the blessings you have bestowed upon me. When my faith is tested, and I feel as if I'm lost in the wilderness, help me to see all the ways You have blessed me. Guide me to put my complete trust in You. It is in your name I pray, Amen.

About the Author

Page Meador is a native Virginian, who moved to Manassas in 2009 with her husband, Dan. Members since 2010, Page is currently serving on the staff of Grace as Assistant of Children's Ministries and Dan is serving as a Lay Leader. Together, they have one son who attends Grace Children's Learning Center.



Thursday, March 1

Bible Passage

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. —*Genesis 28:15 (New International Version)*

Devotional

Last year, I was blessed over three days to watch something special. A Morning Glory Vine had climbed up the chimney next to our kitchen window. Instead of continuing up the chimney, it stretched across to the window sill. It found no place further to go. That evening, a spider had spun a web between the window and the chimney. This became a barely visible bridge that the Morning Glory Vine found and was able to return to the chimney to continue its journey upward. I believe that God watches us and provides us with many ways that we can return to him when we have gone astray. We need to continue searching and asking for his patience and guidance as we struggle with our daily lives.

Reflection

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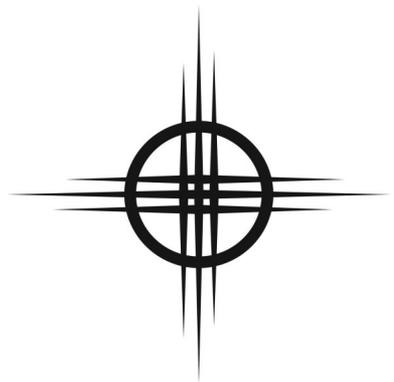
Prayer

The glory of your creation takes one's breath away. How beautiful everything is, from the smallest to great big things. How beautiful your plan is for all these things and for us all. Help us to take time to revel in your plan, to ground ourselves to the ways you speak to us. Fortify us with the courage to listen, and the impetus then to act. We are an instrument of your will. Amen.

Thursday, March 1

About the Author

Mary Jane Benjamin is a retired teacher living in Catlett. She enjoys singing in the Chancel Choir, Treble Choir, and the Manassas Chorale. She is a part of the Prayers and Squares quilters group. Mary Jane has been a member of Grace UMC for over 30 years.



Friday, March 2

Bible Passage

Give thanks to him who led his people through the wilderness. His faithful love endures forever. —*Psalm 136:16 (New Living Translation)*

Devotional

As a child growing up after World War II, I wondered what it would be like to have grandfathers to show me how to fish, hunt, have someone to tell me stories of their youth, and to look up to.

I was named after my Grandfather on my mother's side. He died in France during World War I. When he left, my Grandmother was pregnant with my mother. His brothers had pleaded with him not to enlist until after the baby was born. He never made it home to see his baby girl. My mom grew up not knowing her father. She was left with one remembrance. One day before he was killed he wrote a letter to his baby. He wished he could be home to see her, but that was not to be. I still have his very touching letter and read it often.

My father's Dad came from Sweden in the late 1800's and worked in the steel mills of Pennsylvania. He died at a very young age. Unfortunately I know nothing of when or how he died. My father never spoke of him, he was a young boy when he passed away.

As I grew up in the Methodist church, my neighbors and the leaders of our church filled my void with their experiences. I will always cherish those years and remember all the church dinners, the homemade breads, and fudge they made for the bazaars.

God has given me their memories to lead me through the wilderness and to where I am today in my Christian faith.

Grace UMC has meant much to me and given me ways to connect through prayer groups, Bible studies and being part of something great!

Friday, March 2

Reflection

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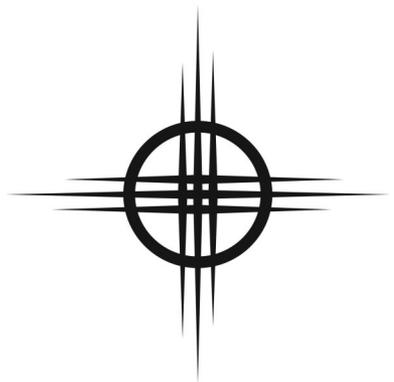
1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Dear God, hear my prayers and lead me out of the wilderness so I may offer prayers for others.

About the Author

Chuck Soderberg has been a member of Grace UMC for many years. He ushers at the 8:25 service, participates in the Men's Thursday Bible Study and the Wednesday Morning Bible Study, duffs about with the Grace Golfers, and is one of the original Grace Grillers.



Bible Passage

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry. Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.” But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me.” Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’” Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’” When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came. —*Luke 4:1-13 (New Living Translation)*

Devotional

On our mission trips through the years, we have been frustrated, tempted, rested, worn down, and many times felt like we were in the wilderness, especially compared to the luxurious life that we live here. When we remove all the distractions and get down to one on one interaction with our brothers and sisters in Christ, the path is lit by God’s love. He guides us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to help be the love that we want to see in the world. “Above all else there is love.”

Reflection

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

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Saturday, March 3

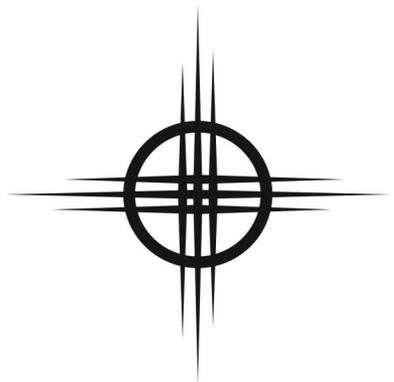
Prayer

Father Papa,

Help me to love you with all my heart and soul. Help me to be the flame of love and joy to all I meet and show me the way to love my neighbor as myself. Amen.

About the Author

Bill and Chris Lowe have been members of Grace UMC since the mid-1970s. They have been called to mission since the early 1990s. They have worked in clinics, schools, wherever God called them to be of service. Bill has also taught ESL, participated in local missions, is a member of the United Methodist Men's Group, and a member of the Grace Mowing Team.





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