

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.

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| 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, March 11

Bible Passage

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. —*Colossians 3:12-13 (New American Standard)*

Devotional

I grew up in a loving, compassionate home and, although we weren't rich, I lacked for nothing. I played sports, was in the girl scouts, played piano, took ballet, performed in plays and sung in the chorus and church choirs. I had a normal, well rounded youth. As an adult, my life was the complete opposite. The moment I moved out on my own everything started going wrong. Wrong partner, wrong decisions, wrong outcome. I alienated my old friends, hurt my entire family, and strangled my soul. This went on for 29 years – a slow and miserable decline away from who I was and what I know to be right. But I finally found myself because God hit me on the head (literally) so I would finally see the path He had laid out for me the day I was born. I was saved by going to Jail – God gave me two years to readjust myself and I was glad for it! What I found was that the ladies incarcerated with me were very much like me. My path was due to an adult life filled with abuse, neglect and desperation...and so were theirs. Even though we'd all come from different backgrounds we had all lost our spirit. We had all made poor decisions and had low self esteem. This bible verse touches me because we all deserve these things it speaks of. Who are any of us to judge when we are all so similar? And who are any of us to decide who should get a second chance and who shouldn't? To me its our obligation to never forget how and where we've gotten in our lives and to help others attain the same. This begins with forgiveness...the forgiveness we get that is born of humility and the knowledge that God's mercy is for everyone.

Sunday, March 11

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

Thank you for this beautiful day. Please give us the strength to be the people you made us to be. The strength to stay in good character and loving heart. Thank you for the love you surround us with, the graces you flow down upon us, and the mercy we need to give others. In Jesus's name I pray, Amen.

About the Author

Barbara Barrick began attending Grace UMC in December, 2016. She is a member of the Progressive Sunday School Class. Along with her partner, Kelly Miles, she has started an Adult Coloring Class here at Grace UMC. She will talk to you at length about our expanding Jail Ministry and our Labor Finders Outreach. Barbara believes God had led her to Grace UMC and finally set her on her current path!



Monday, March 12

Bible Passage

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 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Devotional

In July 2016, my mother and I visited Manassas for the first time so I could attend a job interview. While sightseeing, we met Darlene Runaldue and chatted about her church, Grace UMC. However, I never knew how important our encounter with Darlene would be until I received a job offer two weeks later.

Shortly after I graduated from college and moved to Manassas to start my career, I faced numerous fresh experiences and life milestones. With so many new experiences also came many great struggles. Growing up in a Philadelphia suburb and then uprooting myself to attend college 12 hours away, I assumed that moving once again for work wouldn't be as challenging as it was this first year. Immersing myself into a new part of my life in a new area brought about responsibilities, which often made me feel quite alone as I faced challenges without the direct support of my family and friends.

As I faced pressure to manage my adjustment to professional life while cultivating a life by myself, I struggled increasingly. Although I was extrinsically successful, I experienced an ongoing sense of emptiness and isolation. My physical successes were abounding, but I continually lacked a sense of ownership and satisfaction over my own life while my spiritual journey was not growing.

I grew up as an active member in the United Methodist Church and continued my faith journey throughout college. Upon my move to Manassas, it took many months to find a new church home, so I continued to struggle without a sense of community outside of my life at work. I felt unsustainable and robotic, but remembering Darlene during my first visit to Manassas, I finally found myself at Grace UMC's Thrive service after many months of searching and struggling.

Quickly, I found a community of people who welcomed me – people directly reached out to me and invited me into their community. I valued Grace UMC's conscious effort to know me and grow with me, and still value that today. I transferred my membership from my home church to Grace UMC in the summer of 2017 – one year after I first met Darlene.

Over one year later, I'm still living happily in Manassas. I still struggle

Monday, March 12

at times with work and my daily life, but my struggles are ameliorated through a church family that supports me and calls me to be a faithful servant of Christ. I now serve in the Young Adult Ministry and as a Georgetown South tutor.

The small conversation my mother and I had with Darlene in passing during our visit to Manassas had a lasting impact on my life here today. God works through us always, whether we recognize the impact we have on others or not. I'm continually thankful for Darlene and the entire Grace UMC community for fueling my ongoing faith journey, wherever it may take me.

Reflection

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1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
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Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to be faithful servants for you without ceasing. Even when we struggle and find ourselves surrounded by newness, let us seek you. When we face challenges, please equip us with positive minds and open hearts to praise you and trust in you. New experiences can bring about positive change, so please help us to trust in your work to cultivate the best futures for us. In your holy name we pray, amen!

About the Author

Grace Rotz graduated from the University of Tennessee in May, 2016 with a B.A. in English/Technical Communication. Fusing her passions for writing and interdisciplinary communication, Grace writes end-user documentation as a Technical Writer for SWIFT. Grace transferred her membership from Haddonfield UMC (Haddonfield, NJ) to Grace UMC in the summer of 2017. Outside of her career, Grace enjoys music (as a former collegiate a cappella and choral singer), swimming and exercising, cheering on the Tennessee Volunteers, cooking (and eating), and exploring D.C./Northern VA. Grace looks forward to more adventures and experiences as a young professional and hopes to become more involved in the community in the near future. Although she enjoys her technical writing career, Grace is considering going to graduate school – she's always open to suggestions on what to study and where to go!

Bible Passage

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
—*Matthew 11:28-29 (New International Version)*

Devotional

This is one of my most favorite verses in the Bible. Who hasn't at one point or another in their life felt weary and or burdened? We may be under the yoke of sin, oppression, guilt, failures, anxieties or worries. However, Jesus set us free from the yoke. The Bible states we need only to come to him and cast our heavy burdens on him. What a COMFORT it is to know God is waiting to give each of us rest, we need only to lean into him. So many days filled, especially before the holidays, with anxieties and worries. The thought that we don't need to worry, that he has us all in his care and that he is waiting to give us rest from those things? What a blessing!

God is gentle and loving like a father with his child. We are all his children and he has proven to us time and again that he loves us and that he wants to protect us all. He is always ready, willing and able to give our weary and burdened souls rest. We need only to remember to ask and trust that he will do just that.

Reflection

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Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

I pray for our world and all the weary souls in it. I pray that they all feel you, Father, protecting them and loving them, waiting to give rest to them, and their weary and burdened souls. It's through your son Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, March 13

About the Author

Dawn Warren was introduced to Grace United Methodist Church in 2001 by a friend. She was married to her husband Kevin at Grace UMC in 2002. She began attending regularly in 2004 at the urging of her young daughter who was baptized at Grace UMC. Dawn remains a part of Church, children's ministries and many small groups.



Bible Passage

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
—*Isaiah 43:18-19 (New International Version)*

Devotional

“Peace...it does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.” I have seen these words on a refrigerator magnet every day for many years. Yet, they speak to me in an entirely different context now after I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2012. Due to MS, I can no longer work, drive nor do many other things that I used to enjoy. With the loss of such independence, it’s hard not to long for how my life was before MS. The manifestation of MS is my desert. There are some days when it really gets me depressed. The impact of MS will not let my body forget, but I pray and God makes a way in my soul to get through such extra-tough days. It is the hope he gives me that he will help me through it. And, I receive his blessings through a strong support system in my husband Dwayne’s daily caregiving and the wonderful doctors who help care for me. So, through God’s comfort and blessings, our souls can find calm and the peace that only comes through Christ, no matter what cross we have to bear.

Reflection

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3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for providing us a way through our individual deserts, and bringing us peace and hope no matter what our circumstances. Be with all those who are afflicted in body, mind or spirit and give them comfort and strength to get them through this day and all others. Amen.

Wednesday, March 14

About the Author

Kathy Priest is a native of South Carolina who has been married to Dwayne for 32 years. She is the mother of 25 year old twins, Aidan and Kellon. She joined Grace UMC in November, 2014. Before being diagnosed with MS in 2012, she worked as a Sales Consultant with Intuit. Her favorite pastime is America's pastime as she and Dwayne are big Nationals' fans. She looks forward to her semi-annual trips to Hilton Head to spend time with her Mom, who is 90 years old and blessed still with good health.



Bible Passage

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. —*Jeremiah 17:8 (New International Version)*

Devotional

When I was a young girl, we lived in a house in the woods. To me, with my northeast U.S. background, the wilderness is the woods. There was a tree in this woods that had grown at a low angle to the ground before finding the spot of sun it was looking for and then soaring to the sky. It made for a perfect climb and a safe seat above the brook that ran by its roots. It was my quiet place in the wilderness where, even as a child, I would sit and talk with God.

In the decades that followed I came to realize that the wilderness was not necessarily a place but more often a circumstance, an occurrence in life that seems out of control, wild. I faced the death of a sister, the loss of parents, the suffering of friends, a cancer diagnosis, a loved one in prison and more. All things that are suffered through by all humankind. Through God's grace in all these circumstances I could find a quiet place to sit and talk to God, but in my adulthood I seemed to forget the peace that comes from talking with God.

With age comes wisdom. Wisdom comes with hindsight, memories of our past colored by the knowledge we have earned over our journey through the wilderness. The Lord has led me to a home with woods and a brook. I have a chair to sit in instead of a tree, but I have learned again to talk with God, to listen for God's voice in the brook and the breeze. I can sit there and thank God for being with me throughout my journey and listen to God answer, "It is my pleasure. I will be there always and for all. You know I love you."

Reflection

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Thursday, March 15

Prayer

God of all creation,

Thank you for your presence. Thank you for planting me by the stream of your love so that I am nourished and refreshed no matter what the world sends my way. May the whole of creation turn towards the light of the Son in whose name I pray.

About the Author

Linda White is a baptized and confirmed Methodist who has been a member of Grace UMC for many years. She facilitates Friday Small Group on Fridays 10:30 am-Noon. It is an open group and all are welcome.



Bible Passage

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.
—*Psalms 47:1 (New International Version)*

Devotional

One day I became so overwhelmed thinking about what Christ had done for me. I couldn't stop praising him and, as I fell to my knees, the words kept pouring out of my mouth, "thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus." Tears ran down my face, overcome with the Spirit of God, and this song came into my heart.

My devotional song, "This is my Life:"

This is my life I'm a child of the King,
Blood washed and bought by the Lamb of God on Calvary,
This is my life I'm a child of the King,
I kneel in Faith and stand in Courage.

Reflection

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Prayer

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. —*Romans 15:13 (New International Version)*

About the Author

Jacqueline Rene' Newman was raised in a Godly home where she was taught about Jesus Christ at an early age. She accepted Christ at the age of 12 years old. All her life, Christ has proven to be her anchor, even in troubled times. She believes Christ led her to Grace UMC, where she feels loved and where together, we freely worship Jesus Christ.

Bible Passage

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. —*Romans 8:28 (New Living Translation)*

Devotional

The wilderness is immense. How do we find it and where should we make roads? Each year we are offered a list of opportunities to share our God-given talents. In this tender way, Grace UMC requests we reflect on our individual blessings, and determine how and if we will continue with our current activities and/or “do a new thing.”

Several years ago, as I perused the list, the need for care-givers caught my attention. My career involved daily interaction with clients across the nation. I enjoyed many close relationships as well as opportunities to resolve issues. Care-giving seemed a natural fit.

My initial mission involved monthly visits to Walter Reed Hospital. Volunteers from various churches and organizations hosted a luncheon for our severely wounded troops and their families. I felt honored...and extremely humbled.

I believe this experience led to an invitation to become a Stephen Minister, which I gratefully accepted. The assurances of challenging and rewarding care-giver/care-receiver associations were truthful, with God’s love providing the foundation.

An additional component of this ministry is continued education. In accordance with the Thanksgiving holiday, we focused on “How do you experience gratitude in your life?” I shared these passions:

I gratefully receive God’s gift of His son, Jesus, as my savior.

I sense the presence of my God whose love and peace fills my life.

I appreciate receiving strength and hope to meet the many challenges throughout the day.

I acknowledge that I am forgiven and saved by God’s gift of grace.

The group then addressed “How do we communicate this to others?” We shared common practices such as praying, listening, loving, and witnessing.

Now, here’s the thing...Out of curiosity, I looked in Roget’s Thesaurus at the antonym of gratitude, “ingratitude.” Dark words appear such as “ungratefulness,” “unacknowledged,” “thanklessness,” and “forgotten.” I offered these words to the others to emphasize that we

Saturday, March 17

serve as the image of Jesus to those who are hurting. We need to then travel the road in the wilderness, which will take us to the “unacknowledged” and the “forgotten.”

So how do we find the wilderness? We need to open our hearts and eyes by committing to one or more of the aforementioned opportunities, and apply our talents. Once I did, I soon found myself helping a rugged-appearing person sitting alone in a pew, a homeless person lying on a cold bench, a vandalized mosque in need of repair, a young Marine without his legs, a friend working diligently to regain the use of his, and many friends and relatives who have lost loved ones to death or divorce, lost their job or their beloved pet.

Making roads in the wilderness can be a challenge, but when the day comes that you witness rays of God’s light beaming through the treetops, your heart will be filled with joy.

Reflection

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Prayer

Lord God, we pray that you will make our lives a blessing to others. As we witness for you, may we be certain that others know not only your truth, but also your character and nature. Love through us; extend compassion through us to all who hurt. May we honor you as we reach out to those who have need, caring in a new way for our families, one another, and our community. Amen.

About the Author

Rich Sabey and his wife, Kathy, have been members of Grace UMC for 15 years. They have three adult children and a new grandson. Rich is enjoying retirement after 40+ years of professional sales and sales management in the electric power industry. He serves Grace as a Head Usher, Trustee, Lay Leadership and Nominating Committee member, and as a Stephen Minister.



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