

Lenten Devotional
Church of the Redeemer
2011



God's Promise
In the seed an apple tree

Church of the Redeemer United Methodist Church
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Rev. Karen B. Graham, Pastor

Church of the Redeemer Easter Schedule 2011

Ash Wednesday March 9
Services at 12 noon and 7 pm
Church of the Redeemer

Stretch n' Pray March 16-April 20
6:30-7:30 pm Wednesday evenings
Church of the Redeemer

Maundy Thursday April 21
Service at 7pm
Church of the Redeemer

Good Friday April 22
Service at 7 pm
Church of the Redeemer

Easter Sunday April 24
Sunrise Service 6:15 am
Lakeview Cemetery

Breakfast 9 am
Church of the Redeemer

Worship 10:45am
Church of the Redeemer

God' s Promise

Lenten Devotional

Church of the Redeemer



The Nurture and Care and the Worship and Music Committee of Church of the Redeemer planned this Lenten devotional booklet. Special thanks to everyone who contributed to its production, especially:

Authors of the devotional pieces

Planning and Organization

Heather Mullen (chair) Mary Hopewell, Melanie Tyler,
Bridgett Emerson, Cathy Lipton and Jane Finley,
Pastor Karen Graham

Production

Kate Klaber and the collating team



A
Prayer for
Easter

Hymm of Promi se

The Theme of this year' s devotional is "Promise," draw-
ing on words and ideas from "Hymn of Promise" on page 707
in the
United Methodist Hymnal .

Verse 1

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be
free!

In the cold and snow of winter there' s a spring that waits
to be,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Verse 2

There' s a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
there' s a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and
me.

From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mys-
tery,



March 13, 2011
First Week of Lent

The Hidden Promise

By Pastor Karen Graham

“In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!”

My family sang this hymn at the outdoor committal service for my mother. Her cremains were interred in the common burial space that’s part of the Berea United Methodist Church’s memorial garden courtyard. It’s a lovely place. And on that August morning, the day after her memorial service, we stood as a family, with the pastor, Rev. Greg Palmer, as the committal prayers were prayed. My father placed the pouch of her ashes into the slot on the wall – and as he did, a butterfly came out of the bush by the wall, hovered around us for a while, and then flew up out of the courtyard. We sang this hymn with tears in our eyes,

but with also a firm sense that our mother was with God. The butterfly was a visible sign to us on that day of an invisible mystery – the mystery of resurrection. The mystery of eternal life.

And ever since, my
used the butterfly
connecting with our
comforting image.
image of celebration and joy.



sisters and I have
image as a way of
mother. It's a
But It's also an

March 14, 2011

The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11

By Lisa Richards (Cathy Lipton's sister)

I was recently standing in line at Gale's Garden Center waiting to purchase some flowers I was buying for thank you gifts. I had six beautiful primrose in gorgeous, vivid colors; hot pink, yellow, deep purple and red. The bright color of the flowers were in such stark contrast to the gray and frozen day. Their colors said warmth and growth and life. The woman in front of me in line and the woman behind both commented on the beauty of the flowers. One of the women said, "I need to have flowers in my house in the winter because after all 'Man cannot live by bread alone' ! I turned to her and said, " 'but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' ...and don't these flowers look like the Word of God?" The more I thought about that the more true it seemed. Not only does God provide beauty in the form of



flowers and all of nature but God provides for all our needs. How? By every word that comes from God's mouth.

When we read Genesis Chapter One, we are struck by the fact that God spoke and our world came into existence. He said the word and there was light, land, sky, oceans, plants and animals. Everything humans need to exist. Satan tempted Jesus to turn ordinary desert rocks into soft, delicious, life sustaining bread to satisfy a painful hunger brought on by many days of fasting. Jesus made a pointed and profound statement to Satan there in the desert. He rebuked Satan with the words, “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” He reminds us that God provides for the totality of human existence, not just food and warmth and shelter but companionship and salvation and the promise of a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Truly we live only by the sustaining and life giving power of the Word of God.

Prayer for today: I thank you, God, for speaking Words that brought this world into being and for speaking a personal Word to me to bring me life through your Son,

Jesus Christ. Amen

March 15, 2011

The Promise of Spring in our Lives

By Steve Hopewell

As I was in our driveway shoveling snow and chopping ice recently, I felt as though this winter would never end. The cold, the deep snow, the gray skies, the lack of daylight all seemed to be going on and on. Then I remembered that there is a promise of nature and the seasons. As long as the earth keeps moving around the sun, it will reach that point, (the vernal equinox) where spring begins. Northern Ohio will get more light, the warm, and the snow ground. The bulbs, be fed, and soon - have green and spring flowers.



temperatures will
will melt into the
trees, and grass will
very soon we will
beautiful bright

All of us have, at some point, those periods of cold and darkness; the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, estrangement from a spouse or child, health

issues, feeling alone, feeling angry. Any of these can make us feel as though what we are currently experiencing will never end. But, the promise of spring waits for us.

A friend may offer help.

A book or Bible passage may come into your awareness.

That small quiet voice inside may let you know what to do or not to do.

You may meet someone who is concerned, seeing something is not right.

There has always been the promise of spring for us. God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit sends us messages, gifts of love, forgiveness, and grace in many ways. We can be warmed, the light can shine within us and the beauty of our inner spring can bring joy to us and to those around us.

March 16, 2011

**“There is a Song in every Silence...
Seeking word and Melody”**

By Mary Madison

Silence is “golden.” The golden aspect of silence is the expectation that something really important is to happen.

Silence is sometimes spoken of as “pregnant,” indicating that it holds mystery and anticipation.

Song on the other hand is up front, expressing the strongest emotions of humankind whether it be of joy or despair.

Some troubling passages in scripture advise that women keep silence in the Church (1st Corinthians 14:32 and 1st Timothy 2:11). This admonition seems contrary to the way that Jesus regarded his female contemporaries.

God gifted man with a voice which in its harshest tone can frighten **an adversary away, while God's gift to woman is a voice which at its highest pitch can shatter a crystal goblet.**

Think how monotonous the order of worship could become if all available voices were not allowed to contribute.

Let the silence befitting our Lenten season be of the golden, pregnant kind designed to bring forth a harmony of joyful song to celebrate the resurrection of Christ crucified.

March 17, 2011
Lenten Prayer
By Elysa Chao

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” –C. S. Lewis.

Dear Lord,

In this season of Lent, as we reflect and repent, help us to remember that at the end of our journey comes the celebration of Easter. In the midst of winter, when the darkness of the season weighs heavy upon us, help us to see the hope in the lengthening days. In the dead of night, help us to remember that after the darkness comes the light – that there is a dawn after every night.

Help us to see also, O God, that Easter isn't simply the light at the end of the dark Lenten tunnel; it is the promise that our journey through the tunnel is not in total darkness, for darkness can never overtake light. It is the light, even the tiniest of sparks, that overcomes the darkness.

Help us to remember what is written in the Gospel of John: “In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

When we feel overcome by winter's gloom, help us to see the beautiful reflection of sunlight off the snow; when we feel lost in the darkness of night, help us to look up and bask in the glory of the heavens, the stars shining forth as points of hope and light. And help us to not only seek out Your light, but to reflect it as our own, so that by it we might see, and also guide others in times of darkness and need.

We ask for Your help as we persevere through darkness, letting our light shine out. In the darkness before the dawn, let us remember light's power over dark, and look forward to the dawn with hope and not fear. Help us to remember that Jesus said, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

We believe, and so know that we will not stay in darkness, and we know that the promise is always true; it is not a promise for next month or next year, but as the little red-headed orphan sings, "The sun'll come out tomorrow"! And as we sing in the Hymn of Promise, "There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me."

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

March 18, 2011

Two Readings

By Mark Majewski

We try so hard to hang on to the teachings and “get it,” but actually the truth sinks in like rain into very hard earth. The rain is very gentle, and we soften up slowly at our own speed. But when that happens, something has fundamentally changed in us. That hard earth has softened. It doesn't seem to happen by trying to get it or capture it. It happens by letting go, it happens by relaxing your mind, and it happens by the aspiration and the longing to want to communicate with yourself and others. Each of us finds our own way.

Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are*

I once heard a story about a visit to heaven and hell. In both places the visitor saw many people seated at a table on which many delicious foods were laid out. Chopsticks over a meter long were tied to their right hands, while their left hands were tied to their chairs.

In hell, however much they stretched out their arms, the chopsticks were too long for them to get food into their mouths. They grew impatient and got their hands and chopsticks tangled with one another's. The delicacies were scattered here and there.

In heaven, on the other hand, people happily used the long chopsticks to pick out someone else's favorite food and feed it to him, and in turn they were being fed by others. They all enjoyed their meal in harmony.



Shundo Aoyama, *Zen Seeds*

Imagine walking along a sidewalk with your arms full of groceries, and someone roughly bumps into you

so that you fall and your groceries are strewn over the ground. As you rise up from the puddle of broken eggs and tomato juice, you are ready to shout out, “You idiot! What’s wrong with you? Are you blind?”

But just before you can catch your breath to speak, you see that the person who bumped you is actually blind. He, too, is sprawled in the spilled groceries, and your anger vanishes in an instant, to be replaced with sympathetic concern: “Are you hurt? Can I help you up?”

Our situation is like that. When we clearly realize that the source of disharmony and misery in the world is ignorance, we can open the door of wisdom and compassion. Then we are in a position to heal ourselves and others.

March 22, 2011

The Loveliest of Trees

By Virginia Stem Owens
Christianity Today (April 2000)

Submitted by Bridgett Emerson

Although it has not happened since 1913, and [didn't] happen again till 2008, Easter can come as early as March 23, just barely inside the official limits of spring. But whether Holy Week falls in March or April makes little difference in Texas. It's always springtime here by then.

People like the dogwood to be in full bloom for Good Friday. They like to point out to one another how the dogwood's white blossom, shaped like an ivory Maltese cross, each point dented and tinged with red, is an emblem of Christ's crucifixion wounds. They even send one another greeting cards bearing the so-called "Legend of the Dogwood," which links the tree with the wood used for the cross.

The dogwood trees are usually blooming at about the same time I teach college sophomores the Housman poem that begins,

March 23, 2011

Promises through Music

By Nadine Young

I really think God and I communicate the best through music, a special language that speaks to my soul. I come from a hymn-singing family. Growing up, every morning I would hear my mom singing as she worked in the kitchen. My father enjoyed his role as the song leader at church.

Since then hymns have been a blessing to me, both in times of despair and times of joy. I'm so grateful that I learned many hymns at an early age; they have always been there for me when I needed them. Hymns have given me hope and comfort and the courage to keep moving forward and not give up. I do claim the promise that God will never forsake me, and sometimes it takes a lot of faith to believe this is true.

I've known this hymn for as long as I can remember, but haven't thought about it recently. But, in thinking about writing this devotional, it popped into my head.

Each verse starts with the negative, "God hath not promised..."
The refrain then follows with, "But God hath promised. . ."

God's promises are everywhere.

It seems to me that in order to claim God's promises, I need to have the faith to believe them and to take action. As you read the words to this hymn, what do you think?

God Hath Not Promised

B. All in all I see, *Tibetan Buddhist in From the Ground Up*
God hath not promised skies always blue
Flower strewn pathways, all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labour, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptations, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labour, light for the way
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.

But God hath promised strength for the day
Rest for the labour, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

March 24, 2011

The Promise of Hope

By Melanie Tyler

“There is a song in every silence, seeking word and melody; there’s a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me...”

When I think about the Promise that God has made to us I think about hope. Hope is a driving force to help us to move forward. It is like an eternal light to lead us on. In all of the difficult times that come our way it is the hope and the promise of God’s love and grace that is sustaining. I feel that when we lose hope we have given up spiritually, but I admit that it sometimes becomes very hard to sustain hope.

As I continue to live my life and experience the losses of family and friends, it has been a challenge to continue to follow the light and to “keep the faith.” I lost both my oldest brother and my father suddenly. My brother died in 1996 and my father in 2007. I was angry when my brother died. He was only 46 years old and a father to two young sons. I stopped going to church regularly.

As time progressed I participated in more Bible studies and developed a better understanding of God’s Word and hopefully of the promise of God’s grace given to us through faith. So when my father died I was able to navigate that numbing time using my faith.

Wait I say
on the Lord
and be
of
good courage



March 25, 2011

In Christ There is No East or West

Submitted by Suzanne Keller

Since childhood this hymn has been important to me. My concern has always been for safety and caring in the world. This hymn reminds me of the wisdom of focusing on sharing its promise to keep worldwide fellowship.

Verse 1

In Christ there is no east or west, in
Him no south or north; but one great fellow-
ship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

Verse 2

In Him shall true hearts everywhere their
high communion find; His service is the
golden cord close binding all mankind.

Verse 3

In Christ is neither Jew nor Greek,
and neither slave nor free; both male and female
heirs are made, and all are kin to me.

Verse 4

In Christ now meet both east and west, in
Him meet south and north; all Christly souls are
one in Him throughout the whole wide earth.

March 26, 2011
March 19, 2011
Promise
Promise
By Doris Llambeis
By Glenn Harris

On a recent sunny day the snow all melted and the lawn was bare. Suddenly the flock of birds flew in and landed on the ground. They pecked here and there and were soon joined by squirrels that came down from the trees. Abruptly they all left, but it gave me great hope. There will be another spring and summer.

There is a melody, there is a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me. From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see!

Life is full of surprises. My life has included such changes as oil lamps to electric lights, wash boards to washing machines, dirt roads to cement highways, typewriters to computers, wall telephones to cell phones, coal stoves to gas and electric stoves, reading to television.

I like to give to my high school students. I call it the **Bomb Shelter**. I have my students close their eyes and visualize a nuclear bomb in route, which will totally destroy the world. There is one bomb shelter, which is what god they will worship. When people of like beliefs get together, they become what we call a church and work together to live out their god's teachings. Our faith and our hope is in Jesus Christ and our source of teaching is the Holy Bible.

Does joining such a group change our lives? Yes. We study the Bible together, they will have to plant and harvest crops, for their survival. They will have to educate children, care for the sick, and deliver babies. Who will be the spiritual leaders? What about law and hospitals. They will have to be friendly to strangers, share in service projects, and learn to be understanding and forgiving.

I would like to recommend to students a book, "What's so Amazing About Grace?" by Philip Yancy. Here is a quote from the cover:

Grace does not excuse sin, but it treasures the sinner. The grace is shocking, scandalous. It stakes out no ground to which it insists on keeping close as sinners and the world bring them with mercy and hope."

They quickly come to realize that five people are sentencing five people to death. They find that it is not an easy job being

March 27, 2011

Third Week of Lent

The Promise of Hope

By Pastor Karen Graham

*There' s a song in every silence, seeking word
and melody;
there' s a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope
to you and me.*

How comfortable are you with silence?

How do you deal with darkness?

This part of the verse acknowledges that there are times in all of our lives when we face silence and darkness. When no words are adequate. When no light shines. Times of grief, perhaps. Times of loneliness. Times of pain. Times of intense struggle or suffering. Times of depression. Times when all seems forgotten or lost. Times when the world seems to have fallen apart

God!

The Bomb Shelter List

From the cross Jesus (Only holds nine people) my God, why have You forsaken me?" In his time of silence and darkness he prayed the words of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest" . (Psalm 22:1-2).

And while the gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion mention only this part of Jesus' verbal expression of his suffering, surely it is reasonable to conclude that if Jesus could recite by heart the beginning of the psalm, he also knew by heart its other verses.

"But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him!... For he did not despise or abhor the

It is not easy being God!

March 28, 2011

Reflect

By Connie Gillen

From Women's Devotional Bible

In our
end is
our

From Corrie ten Boom: *I once visited a weaver's school where the students were making beautiful patterns. I asked, "When you make a mistake, must you cut it out and start from the beginning?" A student said, "No. Our teacher is such a great artist that when we make a mistake, he uses it to improve the beauty of the pattern."*

I love this example because I have made MANY mistakes. I love the thought that God can help me eventually make something meaningful out of my

beginning; in our time, infinity; in our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Hope Is The Thing With Feathers

By Emily Dickinson

from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson

Submitted by Bridgett Emerson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—
Sunday, March, 20
Second Week of Lent
And sweetest—in the Gale is heard—
And sore must be the storm—
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm—

In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

I've heard it in the chilliest land—
And on the strangest Sea—

Yet, never, in Extremity, It asked a crumb—of Me.

I'm writing this entry on a Monday in February. It's a bit warmer, but the skies are still gray, and of course there's still quite a lot of snow on the ground. It felt like a long winter. For most of my life I've liked winter. I like the colder air. I like seeing the snow. I like how nice it is to come in from outside and have a cup of hot coffee or cocoa. I like wearing winter sweaters and scarves. But even so, by this time of the winter, I'm ready for signs of spring.

Our word “Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word that means “spring” or “springtime”. Taken literally, the word “lent” means that this is the time of year when the days “lengthen.”.

And just as with each day ~~March 30, 2011~~ ~~and~~ ~~early~~ ~~March~~ we move closer and closer to the vernal equinox (spring), so too with each day of Lent we move closer and closer to Easter. It's a gradual thing. We don't go from winter to spring overnight. Each day the earth moves on its axis, tilting closer and closer to the sun. Each day the ground warms up. Each day the air temperature increases - to the point when finally, at some point during the three-month spring season (not always before Easter, however!) precipitation comes down as rain instead of snow.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
So our season of lent is a 40-day journey instead of a one-time event. We have 40 days to prepare for and anticipate Easter. To look within. To look without. To make new commitments; to renew ongoing commitments. To give up things that get in the way of our relationship with God. To take on ways that will strengthen that relationship. To consider the cost of our Christian discipleship, and what that cost means to us personally and as a community of faith. It's meant to be meaningful, not dreadful, not such a burden that we'd rather avoid it than take part in it. It's meant to be meaningful, not a time of shameful, thoughtful, self-examination. A time to re-arrange our priorities as people of faith and the put first things first: loving God and our neighbors from generally to those in need, practicing kindness, doing just for all who love us.

March 31, 2011

Promise of Hope

By a member of Church of the Redeemer

Hope is the state of mind in which one is positively and confidently able to believe that the “promise of hope,” which is anticipated, will be fulfilled. Circumstance and action must exist to inspire hope. Hope is a gleaming light that cheers our way as the night darkens and a brighter light is seen in the distance.

We must wear laughter on our lips although there is pain in our hearts, because God promises the sun will shine after the rain. There will be a calm after the storm and peace after war.

We cannot allow hope to die. Instead we walk eagerly for what life holds. Although it seems the hard road ahead is endless, let us not walk with aimless feet. We hope not one life is less worthy when God completes his

April 1, 2011

Something God Alone Can See

By Kate Klaber

On Christmas Eve when I was 15, my mother died from a ruptured aneurysm. Her home was in St. Louis with her second husband and two young daughters. I lived in New York with my father, stepmother, and five siblings. The phone call with the terrible news was the last **time we heard from my mother's second family. Five years later, I decided to break the silence.** I hopped a train and went to visit my two half-sisters. Ann had been three when my mother died, Beth only seven months old. I arrived to discover that my stepfather had remarried and had a third daughter, 4-year-old Heather. All three girls were excited to meet me and we spent a wonderful day together.

The first Christmas after my visit, I sent them presents. But in choosing the gifts, I decided not to make the mistake my mother had made. For my 12th birthday she had sent me a beautiful umbrella, along with two modest ones for my new stepsisters. When my stepsisters discovered that my umbrella was prettier, they threw theirs on the floor and ran upstairs sobbing. I was devastated. I picked up their cast-offs, added mine to the pile and dropped them on the closet floor. None of us ever touched the umbrellas again.

Now would be different, I decided. I cared as much for Heather as I did for Ann and Beth. She would be my sister too. The presents I sent would all be beautiful. I mailed them off and happy thank-you notes soon arrived.

When my sisters reached adolescence, they lost interest in writing me. I stopped sending presents but continued mailing cards for a few more years. But with no response, I eventually stopped writing. I missed them.

Then one spring, twenty years after my visit, an invitation to Ann's wedding arrived. When I reached St. Louis, Ann's stepmother told me the following story: "Ann made up her list of invitations and read them out loud to the family. We all nodded in agreement until someone said, 'Wait a minute. You forgot Kate.' We all turned our heads, amazed. It was Heather! Heather, of all people, was the only one who remembered you."

To them this was a mystery, something to laugh about and shake their heads over. But I discovered that day what God had seen and known all along: the sister I had not forgotten had grown up to remember me. Though I doubted I would ever see my other family again, God's secret promise to me was that I would. I simply had to wait for His promise to unfold.

April 2, 2011
Three Blessings
By Anne Waltner

I am now in my fourth year in beautiful NEO and I've begun my fourth year as Music Director here. I'm wondering when I'll finally find out that the joke really is on me. No group of people, much less a church body, could be so unconditionally inviting, non-judgmental, genuinely funny, or as caring and Christ-like as you are. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. You people are not normal. There is something not quite right about you. Correction—**there's too much** right about you. Of the myriad reasons I'm delighted to be here with you on a weekly basis, I'd like to highlight three of them.

1. **Variety: I've never had the privilege of rubbing shoulders so intimately** with such a wide swath of American society. From GEDs to PhDs, educators, healers, laborers, caregivers, financially wealthy to those in dire economic straits. Those with lots of life behind them; those with lots of life ahead of them. Doubters, believers, skeptics, prophets. YOU—what a blessing.

2. Some of you may know that humor is exceedingly important to me. I don't mean buffoonery or foolishness, but humor as grace wrought out. Humor as melancholic release. Humor as acknowledgment of not taking ourselves too seriously as we undertake the incredibly serious work of **being Christ's hands and feet on this earth. Often humor functions as a** timely reminder of our own fallibility, a veritable call to humility. So much of life is difficult and painful.



3. I love working at Redeemer because it is a community. It's a fellowship, a sisterhood. We are a family, warts and all. Except unlike a family that you can't choose, we **DO** choose each other. We choose each other every week. And we keep on saying yes to each other. You keep on saying yes to me. We will miss you terribly if and when you leave us, but know that you will always have a home here.

I came to Redeemer for a **JOB**. I don't know how to begin to describe what I got instead. I'm no Biblical or theological scholar, but I think this is a pretty good representation of what Jesus had in mind when he talked about loving God and loving each other. Certainly we don't do everything right. But this is as close as I've come to what real church is. I couldn't be more grateful. May it be so.

April 3, 2011
Fourth Week of Lent
God's Promise
By Pastor Karen Graham

*“From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see”.*

I don't know one person, including myself, who wishes that something in the past couldn't be undone or changed. We all carry old baggage with us, so to speak. Things we have done we shouldn't have done. Words we have spoken that caused harm instead of help. Decisions we made that led us down paths of trouble instead of delight. As the old language puts it, “All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”.

And that sinning can weigh us down. With guilt. With shame. And with real consequences that still affect our relationships, our health, our financial situations, our career opportunities. And there are times when all that weight can feel so heavy we wonder if we'll ever get out from under it.

Well – we can't. Not on our own, that is. And that's the good news of today's promise: “from the past will come the future, what it holds a mystery, something God alone can see.” God has in store for each of us a future that is free from the weight of the past, free from guilt that paralyzes us, free from despair that sucks the joy out of us. That's God's promise. That's the message Jesus was sent to preach and live. We are to receive that message. Live it. And share it with others.



... HOW WIDE AND LONG
AND HIGH AND DEEP
IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

EPHESIANS 3:18, NIV

Today in our worship we are celebrating the sacrament of holy communion. During the prayer of confession we will hear these words of assurance: “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!” And during the prayer of Great Thanksgiving we will hear these words of Jesus: “Drink from this all of you; this is my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins”.

Hear and believe those words. You are forgiven. Whatever has happened in your life up to now is not, nor needs ever to be, held against you. You have a future --- a future filled with God’s amazing grace, God’s blessed assurance, and God’s tender mercy. Trust in that promise. And live into that future. For it begins again today!

April 4, 2011

Lost Command

By Linda Perry, singer/songwriter

Submitted by Heather Mullen

Lord, I feel I' ve lost command.
The ship I' ve built is crumbling in my hands.
Everything feels so unclear.
My tattered sails have all but disappeared.

There was a lightning strike right over me,
It hit so hard my ship began to sink.
And just when the sea began to take me down,
Someone reached right in and rescued me.

Lord, hear my prayer:
I know, I know that love will rescue me.
Lord, hear my prayer:
I know, I know your love will rescue me.

You realize you won' t be so alone.
When your weakness turns to strength,
You realize you' re suddenly back home.

Stranded so very, very long.
And lately, Lord, I just don' t feel so strong.
Hopeless has carried me away.
I' m on my knees and begging for Today.

April 5, 2011

Believe

By Kelsey Holland

For years I was unhappy with my prayer life. I was committed to praying every morning, meal, and night, but I felt something was missing. After some time and much needed thought, I came to this conclusion; my belief and confidence levels were low. I'm not talking about in myself, or in what I do, but the belief and assurance that surrounds one's prayers.

Sometimes you can get caught up in how often, or how "good" you're praying. Maybe you focus on your poise, or diction, or even how long you are praying, but are you really believing in the words you say? Often times I found myself praying just because, with no depth to my feelings or real certainty of the words I was speaking. It wasn't until I caught myself being bored with prayer that I realized something had to be done.

It is simply the genuineness of our heart and the confidence that God hears and will answer prayers that is important. No matter what, just saying thanks, or help me, or even just sorting through life's troubles we will always be able to depend on God to be faith-filled, and believe in his loving ones. Now, let's start doing the same. Here's a little checklist of the things I make sure to keep a part of my prayer life:

1. Humble Heart
2. Open Mind
3. Spirituality
4. Love
5. Serenity
6. BELIEF!!!

April 6, 2011

A Wish for KooKoo

By Mary Ann Kerr

Author's Note: *KooKoo is the fetal name of our future granddaughter.*

It stands for kookoroussa, Russian for "corn", soon she will be a girl. For the moment she is a kernel for the future.

Years flutter by gently.
Our mischief crinkly smiling Baby
Dirt magnet
Tester of all mysteries
Voluptuous howler
Who is quickly soothed
Has become your parent.
Astonishingly wise in worldly matters,
He found your mother and adores her,
Our third child feisty, spirited, forgiving.
Years, like breezes, vanish
We may never see you
Become an astonishingly wise woman,
But we have a wish for you, KooKoo.
Regard others as you would yourself
Treasure your friends
Share giggles, adventures, secrets
Hold them in sorrow
Love when you are angry
Seek out those less fortunate,
They will teach you generosity and courage
Venture into a world view that embraces
Samaritans, bill collectors, prisoners,
prodigal children,
and others of unique character.
Insist that your parents give you a pet
A cat, in particular, but a dog will do.
You need to snuggle, caress noses,
Share ice cream licks,
Dress ups

Fears, tears, and troubles.
Learn that the animal kingdom
Shares our world
Wonder at their magnificence.
Be kind and respect their space.
We wish for you a love of learning,
Search for truth, and seek the honest way
Be brave when you must follow a different and lonely path.
We wish that you will know a false temptation
Even if it is cloaked in virtue and rationalizations,
And be gracious with those who don't agree with you.
We wish for you, KooKoo, the joy of nature.
Throw your head back
And feel
The mist of fresh water falls
Lie in the grass under a blanket of stars.
Climb into the highest tree tops.
Catch rain drops on your tongue
Hike through forests, meadows, and rocks
Plunge to your knees
And burrow your hands deep into fresh dirt
KooKoo, we wish for you to swim in the ocean,
Float gently down a stream
As you watch birds flit in the trees,
And the sun dance in the leaves above you,
We wish that you will love the earth
And heed her calls for help.
We wish for the whole world to be your home,
That you will respect all
Religions, cultures, and life styles,
And never lose your wonder
At the strength of humanity.
Do your best to keep peace.

*Much Love,
Grandma and Grandpa*

P.S. Welcome to the world Elsa Belenkaya Kerr, born February 20 !

April 7, 2011

Love Notes

By Shelly Crocker (Bridgett Emerson's mother)

“And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought...and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”
(Isaiah 58:1, KJV)

You and I have a garden deep within each of us, my friend, that is nourished in much the same way as the growing things around us. Our gardens draw their life and energy from God-given love that is poured on them like gentle, steady rain. As I have become aware of my own inner **garden, I have discovered God's mysterious seed of life there too, energizing me moment by moment.** He also comes to my garden walking and sharing with me in the cool of the day, as He meant for it to be.

Sometimes we experience a period of drought. Our dry souls find it hard to believe in the source of our energy, and our gardens begin to grow over with weeds and die. If we remain steadfast in our faith and prayer, even when we feel no progress, we will be rewarded. In times of drought the Lord pulls up unwanted roots and heals us in ways we may not understand. He makes room for the healthy growth to take over and sends His rains again to energize and nourish us.

We tend our gardens and keep them healthy when we remain patient in trying circumstances, forgive our enemies, show kindness to others, and share our faith with them. The success of the work in your garden is not measured by something you produce, Christian, but by how open you are **to your Lord's invitation to love. Let go of the controls, open the gates of your garden, and let the gentle rains of love energize and grow His seed there.**

April 8, 2011

Promise Meaning

By Beverly Holland

Have you seen the billboard sign *'Promise Made, Promise Kept'* by one of the insurance companies? I don't remember the name of the company, whether it is life insurance, health insurance or auto insurance; but the message goes on to say you are guaranteed with the promise made. I would like to know if the promise made is a blanket promise—which covers everything---or is there any fine print, any disclaimers or “only ifs.”

I wonder if it is like the guaranteed blanket “assurance” we receive from the Lord! After all we know that assurance from the Lord is like insurance—a pledge; a guarantee; the state of being assured and secure that all is taken care of. That's the claim for most insurance companies.

Life insurance for me is an “assurance” of my salvation in Christ. I hear life insurance with a company comes only if you pay your premium; no excuses if you

April 9, 2011
The Waiting Room
By Lin Williams

As a child, I had much more patience/hope/excitement with what I could not see. The anticipation, belief and trust in what I understood of God were usually sufficient to help me look forward with eager anticipation.

The waiting room was an exciting place.

As an adult, laden with the usual adult concerns, worries and doubts; those waiting-room periods are often filled with angst and uncertainty. I have a different vision of and relationship with God – far more complex – and have to remind myself to be patient enough and quiet enough to follow that inner voice that leads me through uncertain times.

The waiting room is sometimes dark and scary.

As a child, life was pretty simple. My directives and obligations were clearly spelled out by my adult caretakers; I was not burdened by the challenges of truly living a Christian life.

*The waiting room had crayons, books and games –
all I had to do was sit tight and occupy myself with myself.*

As an adult, I am weighed down with experiences, memories, successes and failures - struggling for a deeper relationship with God and the meaning of a Christian life choice. So many considerations ... so many obstacles ... so many decisions

The waiting room can be confusing and frustrating!

As a child, the seeds of my faith were planted and nurtured by those who loved me.

Time passed quickly in the waiting room.

As an adult, my garden of faith is more mature, complete with weeds and requiring constant attention.

The waiting room is a place where I examine myself.

I am not alone though! Jesus, a superb gardener, is sitting here right beside me with trowel and pruning shears.

April 10, 2011
Fifth Week of Lent
In Our Doubt There is Believing
By Pastor Karen Graham

“In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity; in our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity”.

One of the strange truths about faith in God is that it is big enough to include doubt. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. The opposite of faith is indifference. The opposite of faith is self-reliance. Having all the answers is not faith. Doing all the right things is not faith. Religious doctrine is not the same as faith. Faith is a relationship with God. An honest relationship. A mutual relationship. And none of us has God all figured out. There are plenty of things about God we don't and can't understand. So it's okay to ask questions. It's okay to doubt the things that sound like absolutes but make us wonder anyway. We are created to think, to reason, to explore, to question, to investigate, to communicate, to evaluate, to search, to delight, to wonder.

Here are a couple of quotes by others to stimulate your thinking about doubt:

I'm glad to be part of a church (United Methodist) that makes room for theological diversity as well as intellectual exploration. I'm glad that it's okay in our church to ask questions, and to search for answers. I'm also glad that it's okay to admit when we find answers to be lacking, or when we get to the place where no answer is sufficient. There must always be room in our faith for doubt, for uncertainty, and for mystery.

What this part of the hymn is saying, is that even in our doubting there is believing, because the meaning of God is present in all aspects of our living. Our questions, our doubts can't undo God's presence in the world or in our lives. Whether we can know something for certain or not is not what matters most. What matters most is God.



April 11, 2011
Love Notes

By Shelly Crocker (Bridgett Emerson's mother)

"He is not here, he has risen..." (Mat 28:6, NIV)

The Easter event is the single most significant event in the Christian faith, and in the history and existence of mankind. Everything before it in the Bible is prelude and preparation, and everything after has been **commentary, as this column is. Forget the secular world's insistence that it was a mere accident, a mistake, an isolated incident, or just another event in history with many others like it.** My friend, from the moment the apple was eaten in the garden, the shadow of the cross appeared in **the pages of the Bible. From that moment on our Lord's plan was put into action, and was fulfilled in the emptiness of a borrowed tomb in Jerusalem.**

Our Lord knew His son would die on a cross. He planned it. Jesus knew He was the sacrificial lamb. His ministry and His life were aimed at the empty tomb. He put into motion the political wheels that carried Him there. He even told the Pharisees that the purpose of His life would be fulfilled only on the third day after His death.

It was not the soldiers who drove the nails through His wrists, or pierced His side, who killed Him. **It was not Pilate's decision or Herod's lack of one that killed Him. It was not the mob yelling "crucify" that killed Him.** It was not Judas, the betrayer, who killed Him. It was not His dear friends, who fell asleep because they did not understand, and ran away because they were afraid to share His fate.

It was His love for you that killed Him. It was the ultimate act of compassionate love by our Creator, who would not give up trying to save His children. He could have turned away from you, but He would not. He gave up His only Son, before He would give up on you. Through that act He saved your soul.

You were first on Christ's mind. Even in that difficult time when there were so many heavy things to be dealt with, you were on His mind. Even when He went to the Garden of Gethsemane for the last time, the garden where He loved to go and talk with His Father, you were on His mind. Even when He knew that one of His own would betray Him within hours, and when He asked that such a horrible, humiliating fate be **taken from Him, and the answer was "no," you were on His mind.** You were His passion. His final prayer was for you. He asked that you would feel His Father's love as He does, and that it would be in you, and that He, Himself, would be in you. His prayer was granted. In the moment of His words **"thy will be done"** He made His decision: He chose to go through hell for you, rather than to be in heaven without you. Even in His agony on the cross, he spoke again for you. He was concerned that you would not be held responsible for something you do not understand.

Now, because of what happened in Jerusalem, because of the empty tomb, you and I can lay claim to an eternal home with our Father, the Creator of the Universe, who loves us more than we can ever truly understand

April 12, 2011

My Father's World

By Cathy Lipton

Last week our Disciple I Bible study guide directed us to focus on the lyrics to familiar hymns. Each one seemed better than the last, but the words to “**This Is My Father's World**” took me back to my childhood. My family attended a small community church in our little town. The little brick building is viewed as quaint now; I remember it as being just a little rundown. The organ was old and the organist older. I often saw my father cringe as she would pound out yet another slightly off-key hymn. Nevertheless, we were a “singing church” and we sang with Christian enthusiasm, Sunday to Sunday, about 7 different hymns. “**This is My Father's World**” was one of them.

“**This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.**”

I think about those words, and I hear my family's voices praising God's wonderful handiwork. I hear my grandparents and parents singing God's promise to us. God's grace will prevail during our darkest and most difficult times. God is with us even as spring with chirping birds and beautiful flowers will surely follow these past cold and dark weeks of winter.

“The Lord is King; let the heavens ring! God reigns; let the earth be glad!”



April 13, 2011

Seeds of Stained Glass

By Mary Ann Carlson

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree

As a kid, going to church many times during Lent was assumed. In the elementary grades the nuns expected us to be in the pews for lots of hours during Friday Stations and Holy Week. Getting to church always included a mile walk to a bus, then a half hour trip. Later, probably about 7th grade, I initiated going for Stations of the Cross, mass on Holy Thursday and waiting during Good Friday afternoon were activities. In looking back I am not sure why I did this.

I do remember at least one time sitting in the church and delighting in the colors the sun and stained glass played across the altar. I remember this with a feeling of calm and contentment. Then I had a long period of dormancy. Going to church, even thinking about God was dead. As I came into my mid-forties I began to have a glimmer of

April 14, 2011
The Waking Year

By Emily Dickinson

Submitted by Judy Isaacs

A lady red upon the hill
Her annual secret keeps;
A lady white within the field
In placid lily sleeps!

The tidy breezes with their brooms
Sweep vale and hill and tree!
Prithee, my pretty housewives!
Who may expected be?

The neighbors do not yet suspect!
The woods exchange a smile-
Orchard, and buttercup, and bird-
In such a little while!

And yet how still the landscape stands,
How nonchalant the wood,
As if the resurrection
Were nothing very odd!

April 15, 2011
Love and Flowers
By John Wesley Tiedemann

The wonder of life can be found
In a flower so free
Its grandeur expounds
For our wondering eyes to see.
Then comes the day
When it shall wither and fall.
But alas my friend it's not over,
The flower still fills its call.
When this flower died
It dropped a tiny seed.
A life radiant in beauty
Was now silently freed.
Then came spring,
A new flower was in bloom
Like the eternal love of Christ
As He arose from the tomb.

April 16, 2011

Something God Alone Can See

By Forest Ratliff

It has been a long and snowy winter here in Cleveland. It seems an eternity since that first blanket of white came down, hiding from our eyes a carpet of green beneath. “Out of sight ... out of mind” is how one old saying goes and it’s sometimes too easy to forget that just because we can’t see it now, doesn’t mean it’s not still there.

As a child growing up in the suburbs here, snow was a good thing and something to look forward to in the fall. Snow men, snow angels, snow ball fights ...

SNOW DAYS !!! (A short vacation from schoolwork ... yay!) Now, the same substance is little more than an annoyance making driving difficult and blinding the eyes to some under-lying truths in God’s creation.

Winter has always been my least favorite time of year. Fall is my favorite. Relatively long days with temperatures neither too hot, nor too cold. Harvest time in Dad’s garden. The color of the changing leaves and the rustle of fallen leaves underfoot. The sights, sounds and smells of autumn hit me where I live. Give me fall. Let it be fall all year round I say. Fortunately for us. God knows better.

In His infinite wisdom, God Almighty has set season to follow season. It always has been and always will be so. It is evidence to these eyes of one of the Creator’s promises to us ... His special children! Seasons change, and so do we. But our Heavenly Father remains faithful and constant in His undying love for His people.

Just as surly as the colorful moonlit nights of fall are followed by the dark and dismal days of winter ... the welcome warmth of spring will come and bring with it the promise of life anew. Spring also heralds the Lenten season. A time when Christians worldwide choose to symbolically dedicate themselves anew to lead a Christ-like life.

“Hope springs eternal” is how another old saying goes. One that is taking on new meaning for me this year. This year as the coming spring feels close enough to touch but still too far off to see, the words of a Lenten hymn speak comfort to my spirit. Everything in God’s creation is, “unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.”



April 17, 2011
Sixth Week of Lent
Easter People
By Pastor Karen Graham

*“In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see”.*

Well, here we are at week 6 of our Lenten journey. Today is Palm Sunday. Today begins the week referred to as “Holy Week” – for this is the week of the Christian year that we recount the events of the last days of Jesus’ life – the entrance into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, his arrest in the garden, his trial, and his crucifixion. We will meet together as a congregation several times this week – it is always one of the most meaningful weeks of our lives as Christians.

And what it leads to, of course, is next Sunday – Easter Sunday, the Day of Resurrection. Even as we re-tell the story of Jesus’ death, we know the outcome. We know the story of Jesus’ life does not end with his death. We know that after his death came his resurrection, that after he died, he lived again.

And he still does live again. In our hearts. In our minds. In the life of the Christian church all over the world. As Christians we are Easter people. We are people who sing the resurrection song.

I have the holy privilege of presiding at funerals and memorial services and graveside committals. And I almost always rely on the church’ s great tradition in speaking the words of commendation and committal:

April 18, 2011

God's Promise

By Tanya Alvis

Within the last ten years of my teaching career, I have noticed a significant change in children as they cope with learning and life. This particular year has proven to be quite challenging for me.

Children are faced with such problems as abuse, neglect, dysfunctional families, poverty, and the disappearance of good Christian values in the home. Sometimes the classroom seems like a battleground. Education versus life's issues.

I walk into the classroom each day ready to teach with wonderful plans and interesting activities, so I think. Then one or two of my children show up **with anger from last night's house argument, or a new living arrangement** not to their liking. This is when I need God to walk right into my classroom and relieve me of my duties.

It doesn't take long to remind myself of prayer and the hope that God promises to answer when we are in need and feeling weary. Through prayer I ask for **God's help to find words of comfort for my students, patience and understanding** to move towards a positive change. Not so much a change in them but a change in me.

In God's time I see the answer to my prayers, each time I return with a new way to comfort, an alternative view to a problem, and a heart full of hope and faith that he will continue to make a way.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. John 15:7

April 19, 2011

thank You God for this most amazing day

By e. e. cummings

I thank You God for this most amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(I who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings; and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any - lifted from the no
of all nothing - human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eye of my eyes are opened)

April 20, 2011

He Lives

By Mary Hopewell

This song is full of meaning and memories for me. When I read it I hear the music and the words together. From years of hearing it, I'm sure. Since childhood I've heard this song sung. Sung in the three different churches I have attended, each for a long period of my life, including Redeemer.

I can't read the words without hearing the music. When I read and listen I remember the people I loved and still love in those churches even though we are no longer together for reasons of life or death.

He Lives

Verse 1

I serve a risen Savior, he's in the world today.
I know that he is living, whatever foes may say.
I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer,
And just the time I need him, he's always near.

He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, he lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

Refrain

Verse 2

April 21, 2011

New Every Morning

By Susan Coolidge

Every day is a fresh beginning,
Listen my soul to the glad refrain.

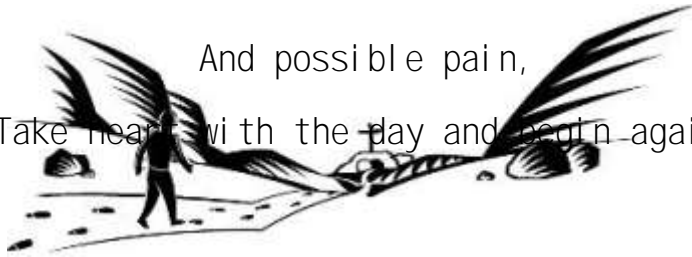
And, spite of old sorrows

And older sinning,

Troubles forecasted

And possible pain,

Take heart with the day and begin again.



Promises

By Sydney Ball

Promises are red,

Promises are blue,

Promises are happy

April 22, 2011

A Ballad of Trees and the Master

By Sidney Lanier

Submitted by Bridgett Emerson

Into the woods my Master went,

Clean forspent, forspent.

Into the woods my Master came,

Forspent with love and shame.

But the olives they were not blind to Him;

The little gray leaves were kind to Him

The thorn-tree had a mind to Him

When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,

And He was well content.

Out of the woods my Master came,

Content with death and shame.

When Death and Shame would woo Him last,



April 23, 2011

Sunrise Promise

By Mary Hopewell

We stand here together
in the dark and cold,
singing praises and
praying,
in community together.
Children in pajamas,
parents with coffee
cups,
children in their arms.

Old and young we wait.
We listen to the quiet,
to the rustle of people,
the pastor's prayer,
the sermon shared.
Alone with our

We sing hallelujahs,
as we watch the sun
rise.

We see the light come,
and the darkness fade.

Our doubt and our
fear,

less for a time,
with the promise of
hope,

in the newness of



Easter !



ALLELUIA!

CHRIST IS ALIVE!

