

Monday April 7, 2025

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

“If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.”

One of the phrases Jesus is known for is, “the poor will always be with you.” It is interpreted in different ways. Some think it means we will never eliminate the issue of poverty, and some think it means if we are followers of Jesus, we will always be with those who are poor. Jesus did have this expectation, that we will always be with those who are poor. There is so much to learn from those with little means. So often, the most generous people are those who have very little.

My very first trip to South Africa was in 2006. I visited a group of women called, “gogos.” This word means “granny,” in the Zulu language. These women were all raising their grandchildren. They were also raising other children. I asked if there was something I could pray with them about and one of the women asked if I could pray that they might have enough food to feed the children. I stopped the discussion and prayed this need would be met. Late, as I was preparing to leave, the woman who made the prayer request, came running up to me with an apron full of avocados. She had heard I loved avocados.

It was so difficult for me to receive her gift. I understood the avocados to be food, food that should be directed to the children. She understood the avocados to be her gift, a gift that she had to bring to our relationship. She was so full of joy when I accepted her gift. The woman who was driving me home said, “you made the right choice. Your choice honored that she was worthy of receiving and worthy of giving. You honored her as a fellow human.” I have never forgot that gift. It was as generous as the woman’s gift of perfume poured out on the feet of Jesus.

For your reflection:

1. What was the most generous gift you have ever received?
2. What is the most generous gift you have ever given?
3. Who has taught you something about generosity?

Prayer:

Spirit of the Living God,

You are full of generosity. You shower us with blessings all day long. We, in return, so often hold back in moments where generosity is needed. Thank you for all you give us O God and grow within us similar spirits of generosity.

Amen

Tuesday April 8, 2025

Matthew 25:35

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.”

This scripture reminds us that Jesus is hidden within the human bodies that occupy this earth. We honor Jesus, when we honor those, he calls us to share life within our midst. Jesus does not allow us to “other” people. Jesus reminds us that we dishonor Jesus when we dishonor others, and we honor Jesus when we honor others. We are all part of the community of the children of God.

Years ago, Josh Bell was playing his violin in L’Enfant Plaza in Washington DC. People walked by having no idea who he was. Tickets for his performances sold for hundreds of dollars and they were simply walking by him, having no idea what they were missing out on. Several people did stop and a child noticed his greatness, but most of the crowd walked right by him. I love this story because it teaches us something about the importance of “noticing.”

Jesus is especially skilled at noticing. He notices the great need in the world, notices those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, down on their luck, and those who need forgiveness. Jesus notices the great need in the world and wants us to notice too. Who are we if we dishonor people because of their socioeconomic status, their race, their gender, their background in any way? We are people in need of Jesus’ great forgiveness in these moments. Jesus desires that we see his very presence within the eyes of the poor. It doesn’t surprise me that a child noticed the greatness of Josh Bell. Children, like Jesus, teach us about the importance of noticing.

For your reflection:

1. Have you ever been surprised by the presence of Jesus in your midst?
2. Do you struggle to see the face of Jesus in those around you?
3. Sit for a bit in silence, listen for any direction from the Spirit in your life.

Prayer:

God of us All,
You are the God of creation. Your handiwork is evident in every human being, rich and poor. Soften our hearts O God, that we might live more fully in your love. Forgive us for the moments when we stray from your ways. Allow us to see others through your eyes. Remind us that we serve Jesus when we serve those who are hungry and thirsty in our midst. Use us O God, to bring healing to this world.

Amen

Wednesday April 9, 2025

Hebrews 6:19

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

Where we are anchored makes a difference. If we are anchored in the love of God, we live in that love. This scripture reminds us that even in challenging times, we can live with hope, knowing that Jesus goes before us in all things. It is not just our finances that we invest in the Kingdom of God, we invest our very lives. We do this knowing that investment in what is right and true, is an investment in God’s hope for the world.

One of the things that I love to do is to journey with young people as they discern their call into ordained ministry. I serve as a mentor for our District for those going through our candidacy process and I serve with the Board of Ordained Ministry. I had the distinct privilege to stand with a young man as he was getting ordained a couple of years ago. This young man was in a middle school bible study I taught in Tampa. I used to call him, “Chaplain,” because he was the one all his friends went to for advice. Today he is a Chaplain in Durham, North Carolina. He serves at Duke University Hospital.

God is rising a generation of young leaders that will continue the work that was begun in the generations before them. Witnessing them follow their call gives me such hope and reminds me of the work we are called to. We are called to surround the young people in our lives with love, prayer, and support. We are called to build a community where they are included and empowered. Jesus entered the world around him and lived the ways of the Kingdom of God. Jesus goes before us and calls us to do likewise. May we continue to let our anchor be the love of God.

For your reflection:

1. What about the Kingdom of God realities gives you hope?
2. Who are the young people you can commit to in your life. How can you be a part of embracing them in our community?
3. How might you live more fully in this hope that is an anchor for your soul?

Prayer:

Jesus,
You go before us in all things. You are the symbol of love. Bind us together in the community of your triune love and bind us together in this work of partnering with you to bring the Kingdom of Heaven right here to the earth. Keep us in your hope.

Amen

Thursday April 10, 2025

2 Corinthians 12:9

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

This is a powerful scripture. It reminds us that when we rise and when we fall, we are held in the grace of God. There is nothing more that we need. We are drawing close to the beginning of Holy Week. We are meant to enter Holy Week with a deep and abiding sense of humility. The closer we walk to the ground, the more effective we are at being an instrument of God. If you engaged in a fast-during Lent, there is no doubt you recognized the struggle to stay on the journey. The struggle teaches us the importance of our commitments all year long.

Years ago, before there was a group called United Women in Faith or United Methodist Women, or Methodist Women a group of women were meeting in Boston, Massachusetts. Their hope was to organize together to support mission work in other parts of the country where conditions were desperate, where children and women did not have access to education or proper medical care. You can track their stories in a book called, *Grace Sufficient*. These women had nickels to their name, but together they have organized for great change in the world over the years. The legacy is astounding.

God does not ask us to know the outcome or to have all the answers. God only asks that we trust that with God and each other, we will have enough to make our own difference in the world. When we worry about our abilities, God’s words to us are the same, “my grace is sufficient for you.” These words have been enough for generations of Christians. Imagine how many who have gone before us have doubted in their own abilities. God has proven time and time again that his power is indeed made perfect in our weaknesses.

For your reflection:

1. What in your life is God’s grace sufficient for? What seems to big?
2. Where do you recognize weakness in yourself?
3. Spend some time in quiet, that God might be able to meet you with whispers of grace.

Prayer:

God of Grace,
You have worked through humanity over generations of time. You have used the frail, the broken, and the weak to be messengers of your love. In the moments when I doubt my abilities to do the thing that is before me, that you call me to do, remind me that the light you call me to shine is yours. May I always know that your grace is sufficient for me.

Amen

Friday April 11, 2025

Philippians 4:12-13

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength.”

I don't have any memories in my life of being hungry because of a place of need. I wondered if there was ever a time when my parents did not have enough to feed us. When I asked my mother about this, she asked me if I remembered eating pancakes for dinner. When we were little, my mom often made us pancakes for dinner. It was great fun, and we loved it. She shared with me that she would make pancakes for dinner when she was running out of money toward the end of the month. It was her way of keeping us from the reality that we were in a place of need. My mom came from a large family and knew how to make things stretch and we had neighbors that would sometimes share resources too.

When I was living as a missionary in South Africa, there were a couple of weeks when I had no resources come into my missionary account. When someone from home learned about this, she chastised me wanting me to know that no one wanted me to go hungry for my service. I said to her, “that would never happen. The people here would never let me go hungry.” This is when we know we have found true community, when they won't let one among them go hungry. My years in South Africa are years when I had so little and so much at the same time. They were years when I understood more than ever what it means to rely on Jesus to give me strength.

I am always amazed at the faith that lives within people who have very little. I should not be, because I know that it is true, that you rely on God most, when you are aware of your need. Yet, I still am always amazed when I am in the presence of someone whose life circumstances give them every reason to be angry with God and they choose instead to live with a gratefulness and thanksgiving. I heard this scripture at the Mercy Me concert I attended last weekend with my sister in Orlando. The lead singer, Bart Millard, shared this scripture and some of his struggles in the middle of the concert. His story was electric. He was meeting so many in the room with a wakeup call. It was as if he was asking us, “Do you really believe Jesus has your back?” It is good for us to check our belief from time to time, to be sure that we really do remember from where our strength comes.

For your reflection:

1. Do you remember a time when you needed food or were struggling to make ends meet?
2. If so, how did your story resolve itself?
3. How might you imagine the table in your own home as a meeting place for people in need of company and community? Or maybe it is a group who is community for one another.

Prayer:

God of Wonders,

You are our rock and our salvation. You are the place where we find refuge and strength. When we live with doubts and fears, meet us in our unknowing and make us sure of the reasons we can place our trust in you. Help us to live with an ever growing awareness of those in our community. In the moments that we feel we lack strength to see us through, remind us that our greatest strength is in you and the people you call us to.

Amen

Saturday April 12, 2025

Lamentations 3:22-23

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say.”

There is such beauty in the gift of each new day. As the sun rises over our beautiful island, we are gifted the chance to start over, to begin again. God meets us in the sunrise and in the sunsets of our days, with mercy and grace. I love walking along our beaches because they remind us of the endless waves of mercy that God washes over us. It is humbling to remember all the ways that make up God’s love for us. God’s love is a message that echoes through generations and time, reminding us that we are not alone. We are held in a love that is both tender and triumphant. God’s love for us is constant, sure, and true.

Barbara Walters has been a correspondent for several major news channels. Many don’t know that she began as a writer and producer for the Today show before she was a member of the cast on air. When she joined 20/20, she was known to be the correspondent that made people cry. Her questions went straight to the heart and left those she questioned vulnerable in a way that often revealed the best stories of themselves. It became common for those she interviewed to say, “now you’re not going to make me cry, are you?” The result would be an interview that left a grown man or woman in tears, and a beautiful story revealed. I loved watching those moments when she was able to walk with those in front of her in their very own story.

There is something beautiful that happens when we walk the beach, reflecting on the constant waves of God’s mercy in our lives. There is something about the crispness of the air, the hum of the ocean, and the gentle music of the birds, that makes us a bit sentimental and more in touch with our own story. One of my favorite memories is walking the beach with a young girl. We had been on a mission trip together. She was invited by a friend, but didn’t really understand Jesus. We sat on the beach, and I talked to her about my Jesus and eventually she began to weep. “I’ve done so many things wrong,” she said, “do you think Jesus could really love me?” “Yes, he can,” I said, “and he already does.” At the end of our talk, I took the cross that hung around my neck and placed it around hers. I sat on the beach afterwards reflecting on the beauty of God’s grace in my life and the story it is for me to tell young people like her and all the world. Our stories are holy.

For your reflection:

1. If possible, spend some time at the beach today. If you can’t, search for an image or video footage of a beach scene and sit with it for a minute. Reflect on the many, many waves of grace that God has washed over you in your life.
2. Don’t hold back in your reflection. Interview yourself like you were Barbara Walters, let the tears fall. Be in touch with the vastness of God’s love for you and the world around you.
3. What moments along the way feel like a story that is your gift to others? What is your answer to the question, “Tell me about your Jesus?”

Prayer:

God of Creation,

You are with us on the mountains, with us in the valleys, and with us in the ordinary days in between. You invite us to live in our stories, so that they are alive in us, and ready to tell all the world. Help us to be ready in the moments when someone needs your light and hope, to have the words that will open your love for them. Remind us O God, that your mercies are new every morning, and you paint your love for us in the creation that is all around us.

Amen

Sunday April 13, 2025

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40 (NRSV)

Today is Palm Sunday. As Jesus makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we follow the crowds, and Jesus. Palm Sunday is the beginning, of what is known in the Christian tradition, as Holy Week. As we travel through this week, we travel with Jesus to the cross, waiting through the week expectantly for the arrival of Easter morning. As always, I am grateful to be...with you on the journey.

Reflect on the scripture for this morning. Ask the questions we have been living with:

1. What does this scripture teach me about the nature of God?
2. What does this scripture teach me about the relationship between God and Humanity?
3. What does this scripture teach me about God and all of God's created order?

A poem from me to you...

Waves

God of creation
We meet you in the stillness
Of the beach
Where the water
Waves and waves

We meet you in the
Rays your sunbeams
Cast upon our face
Gifting us with your
Presence and your grace

We meet you in the
Crowds waving branches
In the air
We participate, though
We know more than they know

We meet you waving
reminded of the end
Death will soon meet him
and we will wait for Easter morn
to wave with exuberance once again