

Contemplating a Way Forward for St. Paul's UMC



*Weekly Meditations
for Lent and Easter*

2019

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On February 26, 2019, the Special Session of the General Conference voted to maintain the United Methodist Church's stance that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching." The Conference also adopted stricter enforcement measures to ensure clergy and leaders comply with this view.

This decision affects not only Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) United Methodists but all current members and constituents of St. Paul's UMC as well as those not yet affiliated who seek a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is a decision that affects our own generation and those that come after.

How to use these devotionals

These devotionals written by members of St. Paul's UMC accompany meditations, Scripture, prayers, and questions to ponder during this season of contemplation, sacrifice, and repentance. Each week touches on a unifying theme that 75 members of St. Paul's identified during a Way Forward Workshop in May 2018.

As you walk through this Lenten journey, you are encouraged to fast each week. Let the pangs of hunger remind you to prayerfully contemplate the week's question. During Holy Week, we will come together to break our fast, pray, and discuss the most important question before us:

What kind of church does Christ call St. Paul's to be?

Sunday, March 10 – First Sunday in Lent

Theme

God is love.

Scripture

1 John 4:16 – “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

Meditation

God has given us all the greatest gifts in life, including love. Our job as children of God is to spread his messages, whether this is as a reverend or by simply holding a door open for a stranger. John writes that “God is love.” God is love and God is all around us, even inside us. In the past the Methodist Church has not supported the LGBTQ community. It has turned gay members away from being married, away from being ordained, away from our church. Is that love? If God is love and he made each and every one of us, don’t you think he loves each and every one of us equally? When you shake a fellow church member’s hand at passing the peace do you question if they are worthy of peace or not? No. Because God gave us peace and the opportunity to spread it. He gave us this same calling for love. We now have an opportunity to reflect upon our church’s past actions and decisions about how we have treated people. God gives us countless opportunities to spread love, so the next time you have the opportunity, greet our LGBTQ community members with the gift of love.

Prayer

God, help us to spread your greatest message: the message of love. Let us take it upon ourselves to learn what love truly means, to love with our heart and minds openly. As our church community comes to a decision help us to stay positive in light of the situation. Thank you for opening our eyes and helping us change this problem. God, you have loved us and we will always be thankful for the love that you have given to us, now help us to give the gift of love to all people. Amen.

Questions

How have I been touched by God’s love and what can I do to spread it? Is the love that I have in my heart reaching everyone and, if not, how can I become more loving toward others?

Melanie Morford

Sunday, March 17 – Second Sunday in Lent

Theme

The Bible is the Word of God.

Scripture

Psalm 12:6 – “And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.”

Meditation

Who of us can count on one hand the times we have failed to keep our word? Likewise, who of us has not been on the receiving end of unkept promises of others? Thanks be to God that the words of the LORD are flawless, indeed unbreakable! What strikes me in this passage is the word *crucible*, a container that can withstand extremely high temperatures. A crucible can also be defined as a severe test or a situation in which things mixed together produce something new. In Hebrews 4, Paul says that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow.” God’s words of life penetrate the very depth of our being – what can be closer than soul and spirit, joint and marrow? When we feast on the Scriptures, we ourselves enter the crucible whereby God produces something new within us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, open the eyes of our hearts to see more deeply your great love and mercy. Teach us your ways that we may walk in your truth. As we journey through the uncharted waters ahead, help us to seek your guidance and take you at your Word. We ask this in the name of your Son, our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question

How open am I to the tutelage of the Spirit when reading God’s Word?

Meg Baker

Sunday, March 24 – Third Sunday in Lent

Theme

Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience illuminate our faith.

Scripture

1 Corinthians 2:13 – “When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths.”

Meditation

John Wesley taught that the church’s traditions and our own experience and ability to reason stand in support of Holy Scripture. The Bible is first, but all four count. They illuminate our faith as we discern it with each other at St. Paul’s. As together we seek the way forward, the Holy Spirit lives in us. The Holy Spirit speaks.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, live in me. Please speak to me. My need this Lenten season is great. Sometimes I am so sure of myself. Sometimes I just don’t know. Open to me the ways of understanding and temper my sure confidence that my way is the only right way.

Question

With what words can I express my own understandings about the way forward for St. Paul’s Church with gentle confidence, while listening to the understandings of others with sincere openness?

Bill Butz

Sunday, March 31 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

Theme

Worship reaffirms our faith.

Scripture

Psalms 40:3 – “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”

Meditation

When I worship, it's with a song. My grandparents, parents, and I all grew up in the same country church. The songs we sang are the same ones you sang, from an old worn out copy of the 1989 United Methodist Hymnal. You might remember when that version was introduced. It was controversial. In it God was no longer male; “men” became “people;” phrases like “white as snow” were purged; and Spanish, Asian, African American, and Native American songs and poems were added. Our faith in and understanding of Christ's grace hadn't changed, but our community of believers had and the Hymnal needed to reflect that.

It's not 1989 anymore and we're due for a new Hymnal. In fact, a Revision Committee has already been tasked with scouring the Wesleyan world for new poems, prayers, and tunes to enrich our worship. Remember John Wesley's instructions for singing: “Sing in time... keep with it... Do not run or stay behind.” For 30 years we've been singing from the same sheet of music. I hope you'll join me in learning some more.

Prayer

Dear LORD, you gave us hands to clap and voices to sing! Give us the courage to learn a new song! Amen!

Questions

What do I like most about worship at St. Paul's? When have I felt Christ call me to try something new? How did I respond and how did it make me feel?

Travis Stalcup

Sunday, April 7 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Theme

We aspire to exhibit love and compassion.

Scripture

Luke 10:36-37 – “Which of these was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

Meditation

Earlier, this story begins with a lawyer testing Jesus’ knowledge of the Jewish law. He asks: What must I do? Who is my neighbor? Fundamentally, this question is looking for some certainty about how God expects us to behave. Who exactly is my neighbor and where do I need to focus (and therefore, who can I safely not focus on)? Jesus answers through this familiar story: Everyone, everywhere. Being a neighbor means supporting someone in need especially when it costs you time, comfort, and money.

In this parable, Jesus sets up an important contrast. On the desolate, barren, dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, it was not uncommon that Samaritans, who the Jews disdained, would have themselves been the bandits like the one that assaulted the victim in this story. Both the priest and the Levite were prominent, respectable members of Jewish society. Deeply educated in religious law, they would have been expected to both follow it strictly and exhort others to do so. Yet, faced with the reality of helping someone at great inconvenience to themselves, these two men focused on the portion of Jewish law that stressed they must remain pure rather than be moved with compassion for another person. They may not even have given a second thought to the choice they made as they progressed on to Jericho, knowing that the law was on their side. It is especially by setting these characters in contrast, then, that Jesus helps the lawyer who poses the question very clearly see what it means to extend neighborly compassion. It is the Samaritan who offers help, at great cost to himself. He serves his neighbor without expectation of recognition or reward.

Prayer

LORD, when I encounter someone in great physical, emotional, or spiritual need, remind me that person is my neighbor. Please help me remember this even, and indeed especially, when the person in need is not like me. Grant me compassion strong enough to override my own discomfort. Do not allow me to use your teachings to justify anything I do, or fail to do, that might deepen someone’s despair. Instead, may I confidently know the actions to take and words to say that best represent your love for your people.

Questions

How can I be attuned to seeing a “neighbor” in need? What behaviors might signal they are feeling loneliness or pain? Is it more comfortable to ignore it? What is one thing I could say or do to recognize a neighbor’s pain and begin to heal it?

Emily Sama-Miller

Sunday, April 14 – Palm Sunday

Theme

We should love, welcome, and accept all people.

Scripture

Galatians 3:26 – “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to his promise.”

Meditation

“There is neither Jew nor Greek; neither slave nor free; nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This was written many centuries ago and yet, the message behind it remains just as relevant today. What matters is not the differences that divide us, whether that be sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, or socioeconomic status, etc. What does matter is our shared faith in Christ Jesus. Let us all try and remember that as we continue to go about our daily lives, especially during this season of Lent.

Prayer

Dear LORD, help us to remember who we are and whose we are. Remind us to pay more time and attention to what it is that unites us, rather than the arbitrary divisions we impose upon ourselves and others. Focus our hearts and minds on You and our relationship with You in the week to come. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Question

In what ways might I be able express to others the idea that our labeled differences aren’t as important as our shared faith in Christ Jesus?

Jay Codner

Sunday, April 21 – Easter Sunday

Theme

We are representatives of Jesus Christ.

Scripture

2 Corinthians 5:20 – “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”

Meditation

Today is Easter Sunday, a day of rebirth and new hope. After Jesus was resurrected and ascended back into heaven, however, the disciples felt helpless, understandably so. Without the son of God on earth, what are we supposed to do as Christians? Where do we look for guidance? This passage from 2 Corinthians has the answers, and it is still valuable for us today. When we choose Christianity, we choose with it a responsibility to live a Christian life, to strive on to perfection, as Wesley said. We should live as God intends us to, and always represent the grace, mercy, and love that He shows us.

Prayer

Dear God, as this Lenten season comes to a close and we remember the resurrection of your son Jesus Christ, we ask that you help us use the spiritual discipline and contemplation that we have observed during Lent and continue it throughout the year. Give us the strength, guidance and patience to truly be ambassadors of Christ to the world and live the way you would have us live. Amen.

Question

What are some ways that I personally can be an ambassador for Christ?

Evan Gaalswyk

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The seven unifying concepts identified in these devotionals were developed from the workshop “A Way Forward for St. Paul’s,” held May 2018.

Read more here: stpaulsk.org/community/the-way-forward