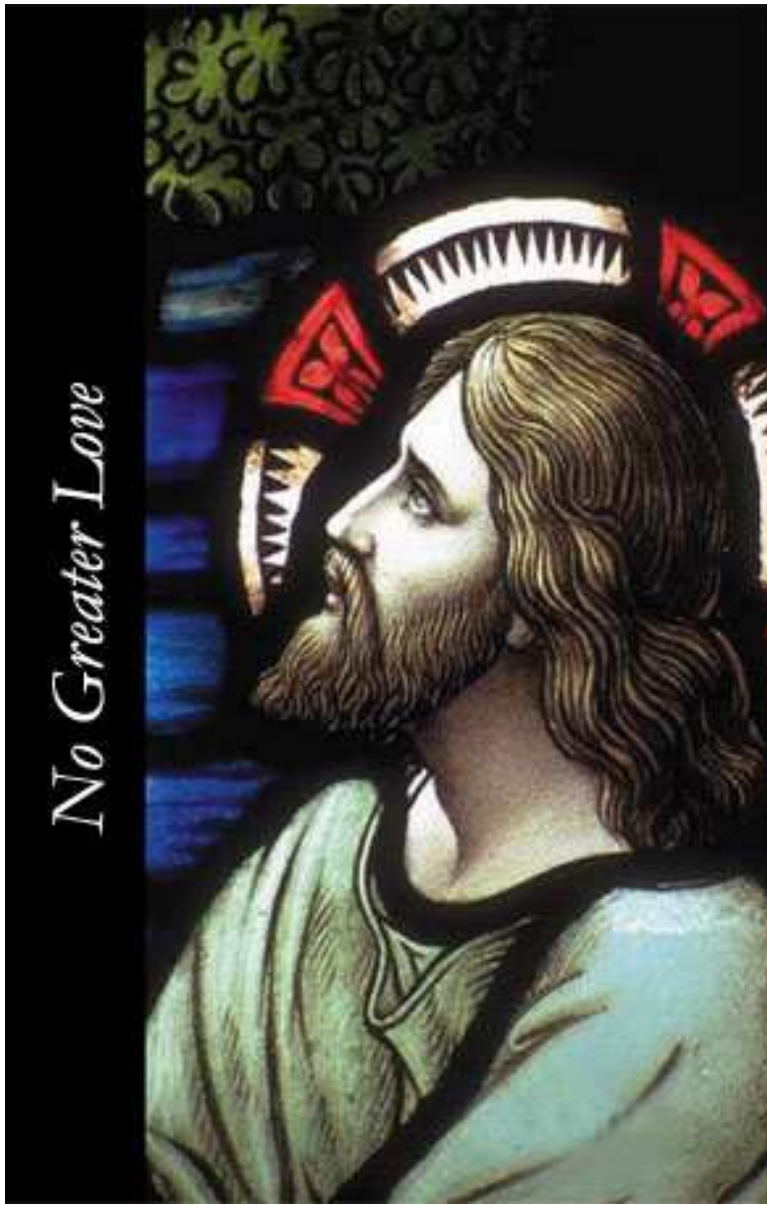


*No Greater Love*



## No Greater Love, Lenten Devotional 2009

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This publication has been edited and compiled by Pastor Chris Surber with devotional articles, meditations, and prayers written by regular attendees, members, and dear friends of First Congregational Church.

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### **Lenten Dates**

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#### **2009**

Ash Wednesday – February 25

Palm Sunday – April 5

Maundy Thursday – April 9

Easter Sunday – April 12

#### **2010**

Ash Wednesday – February 17

Palm Sunday – March 28

Maundy Thursday – April 1

Easter Sunday – April 4



## **No Greater Love**

The Lenten season is a special time in the life of the church. It is the time in which we celebrate that most pivotal of events not only in the life of the church, but indeed during the turning point of all of human history. It is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that God most fully expressed His love for His creation. It is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we see the miracles of Christ culminated and the claims of Christ confirmed.

In what follows, you will find various devotional articles, meditations, and prayers which were written by members of our church, friends of the church, and me. I have compiled them here in this Lenten Devotional entitled “No Greater Love” in an effort to bless and encourage you in your walk with Christ this Lenten season. No greater love has ever been expressed in this world than that which God has revealed in Christ.

The pages of this forty-day devotional are laid out in a format to prepare you to celebrate the passion, crucifixion, and exaltation of Christ. Perhaps you can set aside time each day to allow God to speak to you through the daily offering. Just as Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness to prepare for His earthly ministry, may these days of devotion prepare our hearts for Easter and celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Surber". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***February 25 – Ash Wednesday***

### **The Meaning of Easter—What Does It Mean to You?**

The meaning of Easter is Jesus Christ's victory over death. His resurrection symbolizes the eternal life that is granted to all who believe in Him. The meaning of Easter also symbolizes the complete verification of all that Jesus preached and taught during His three-year ministry. If He had not risen from the dead, if He had merely died and not been resurrected, He would have been considered just another teacher. However, His resurrection changed all that and gave final and irrefutable proof that He was really the Son of God and that He had conquered death once and for all.

For Christians, the origin of Easter is simply the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ about 2,000 years ago. According to the Gospel accounts, Jesus Christ, the true Messiah promised in the Old Testament, was crucified and resurrected at the time of the Jewish Passover. Since that awesome event took place, those who believe Christ as their Messiah have honored that day and often celebrated it with the traditional Passover.

Today, for million of Christians, the meaning of Easter is that of honoring and recognizing Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead and His glorious promises of eternal life for all who believe in Him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 KJV).

Mr. Dale Tieman

**February 26**

**Faith Filled Doers, James 1:22**

Realism is the philosophy of “do-nothings.” The realist, in his constant pursuit to see things for what they are, seldom sees them for what they can become. Pure optimism, on the other hand, is the fanciful flight of denial; it is finding comfort in the fact that one will soon plant his feet solidly on firm ground, even while falling from a twenty story building. Realism and optimism speak little to the life of the believer. The Bible, on the other hand, speaks volumes. In James 1:22 the Scripture reads, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (KJV). Here the author presents us with a much more solid resource for hope-filled Christianity. We are not to be merely hearers of God’s word, but to be doers of God’s Word.

Staunch realism tells us only how the world is currently; pure optimism is fanciful, seldom taking the facts into account. Following after Christ, listening and doing the Word of God, is a means of seeing the world for what it is, seeing it for what it can become, and changing it. The Christian life is not a one-stop destination of knowledge. Nor is it a whimsical lifestyle of pretending that everything is alright. Christians are sojourners, traveling the dusty trails of life, following after Christ. What He does, I must do. Where He goes, I must go. Our calling is to look like Jesus as He showered love on the unlovely and then to follow Him to the Cross, where we show sacrificial love to a hurting world. Where realism fails in its cynicism and where optimism fails in its denial of reality, following after Christ is a means of changing the world, one pilgrim’s step at a time.

Pastor Chris Surber

**February 27**

**The Grave**

The grave was dark.

They placed Him there

and rolled the

stone in place.

When they came back

the stone

was rolled away.

The darkness gone and

He was gone.

The grave was dark

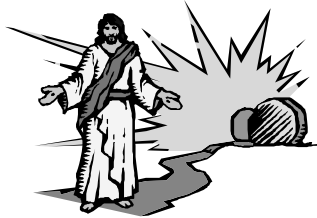
for He has risen

opening the door to a

risen Christ where the

darkness of the grave

is gone.



**February 28**



**Light of the Spirit**

Light of the Spirit

Shine on me

Light of the Spirit

Make me reflect you

Light of the Spirit

Fill my soul

with your glow

so that I might

show the Light of the Spirit

showing in me.

Elizabeth Scheutz  
Grace United Methodist Church  
La Salle, Illinois

## ***March 1 – First Sunday in Lent***

### **Let God Take Control**

Just the other day I was trying to leave the house to make it on time to an appointment. To the average onlooker, that sounds like a very small and ordinary task. However, in my house it is complicated by a few factors—a nine-month-old baby and an energetic, lap-running, you-can't-catch-me three-year old. And before I forget, you also have to get by the 150-pound St. Bernard, aptly named "Happy."

When the house door closes with the kids outside, that is the first victory! Then when both kids are buckled in their car seats and all the doors shut, that is victory won! But wait. I need to start the truck before I rejoice in triumph. Could you guess? I have no keys to start the truck! I let out a huge sigh, and go back in the house to find my keys. They are nowhere to be found, so I borrow my husband's keys and mark it as a win that at least one of us knows where our keys are!

In Matthew 5:3 we read, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule" (MSG). It is in the simple tasks of life that we see clearly that we are actually not in control. God has a plan and purpose for our lives, and it is only when we get out of the driver's seat that His will becomes clearly evident and His provision and strength are allowed to reign supreme in every aspect of our lives!

Christina Surber

## **March 2**

### **How Does God Comfort the Grieving?**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”  
(Matthew 5: 4)

As a piano teacher and church musician, I often encourage my students to learn and play special music for church services. This past summer, a young boy agreed to play for church in August. When we began working on the music in June, he said he wanted to play “When We All Get to Heaven.” I thought that was an unusual request from a child and I had trouble finding a suitable arrangement. I tried several times to get him to consider other music. He was insistent. Finally, I found an appropriate arrangement in a Peoria music store, and he learned the music.

On the day before he was to play for church, I received a call from the pastor letting me know the young man’s uncle, to whom he was close, had died unexpectedly. He wanted to play in spite of the shock of losing his uncle and he wanted to dedicate the song to his uncle’s memory. He played beautifully, and there were several moist eyes in the congregation as they heard the dedication before the music began.

I thought afterwards, this is a small example of how much God loves us: that He worked through a young boy’s heart to want to learn a song about heaven, that He worked around a recalcitrant teacher who had trouble finding the music, that the teacher made a timely trip to Peoria to accompany a friend to a medical appointment and just “happened” to stop by the music store and find the music, and that the summer music schedule worked out that “When We All Get to Heaven” was played by a

young boy of a family that very much needed to hear that affirmation as they mourned the loss of one of their own that very day. God is very much in the details of our lives, if we listen to His voice.

“Dear Lord, We thank you for caring for us in unexpected ways. Please help us to listen to Your voice, in actions both large and small. Help us to be Your arms when someone needs Your comfort and care. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Linda Brant  
Grace United Methodist Church  
La Salle, Illinois

***March 3***

Looking at my life  
Seeing the blessings from God  
Believing in Him  
Knowing His Son, my Lord



Looking for a real meaning of life  
Seeing forms of dying as darkness descends,  
Believing in regeneration, receiving, renewing,  
Knowing that for you and me, He is risen!

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

**March 4**

**God's Handiwork, Psalm 19:1**

We find ourselves in a culture that constantly seems to grow increasingly hostile to the message of Christ. Indeed, for many people, it is no longer good enough not to believe in God. Many who were once non-churchgoers, those who previously lived out of a neutral lack of faith are now insistently pursuing an atheistic agenda of ridding their private lives and—more disturbingly—the public forum of even the mention of God. Each day, I encourage you to remind yourself of the overwhelming abundant evidence of the truth claims of Christ. Not only that, but I also encourage you to stand strong on what this teaches us about the meaning of our lives. We live under the providence, provision, plan, and purpose of God that is plainly observable in the universe. In His handiwork we see His glory displayed. In our lives we see His purpose unfolding.

You see, if there is no God then there can be no universal law. Law can come only from a law giver. Randomness does not produce order. Purpose cannot exist in the vacuum of providence. In a universe without a creator, all that exists would be the product of nothing more than random occurrences, chance happenings strung together by indiscriminant forces, which we wrongly perceive as universal principals or the so-called natural laws. In a universe with no God, natural laws are little more than observable collisions of unsystematic loose energy, which are as subject to change as the blowing of the wind. Remove God from the equation and in so doing all meaning, purpose, security, and significance is removed as well. This is true not only in regard to the universe, but also in our very lives.

Psalms 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (KJV). Contrary to the increasingly popular atheistic claims of this generation, a generation that rejects any form of absolute truth, authority, or accountability in their lives, the majesty of God is expressed in the very functioning and precision of the stars, the planets, and the universe that He created. We, like the stars and celestial bodies, are the product of His divine handiwork. We stand on solid ground, planted firmly in the sovereignty of Almighty God!

Pastor Chris Surber

### ***March 5***

Looking out my front windows are two beautiful trees.

Seeing them, one is bright red, one is bright yellow.

Believing that God's hand made them.

Knowing that God made this possible for me to enjoy.

"He 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)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois



**March 6**

### **The Shepherd in the Valley**

Even though I grew up attending the Methodist church, there was a time when I really didn't give much thought to God. I was too busy raising my family and caring for my home. There was no time given to church. Then my young husband died and I was left alone with three small children and another on the way. We managed with the help of family and friends. Eventually I met and married a good man who gathered in all my children and loved and raised them as his own.

It was after our new little family moved to another community and we were settled in that we were invited to church by our lovely, little neighbor lady who brought us to the Methodist church where she attended. I was soon singing in the choir and serving on a committee and becoming more knowledgeable about God.

Several years later, a group of laypeople from southern Illinois came to our church to conduct a Lay Witness Weekend. It was an extraordinary experience. In one of our small group sessions we were sharing some of the joys and sorrows we had experienced in our lives. It was amazing to hear how person after person gave glory to God for His guidance and comfort throughout their lives. One young bachelor, still living at home, who had a successful dental career, hesitated for a moment before admitting that he had never had any "hills and valleys" as we called them. He felt after hearing our stories that his life was really rather empty. Church was an obligation taught to him by his parents.

It was then that I felt blessed for all the ups and down I had experienced in my life. A few years later we suffered the greatest “valley” we have endured. That was the death of our oldest son in an auto accident in Colorado. We never saw him again; he came home in a sealed casket. If Jesus had not stood with me throughout the long days until Greg’s interment and the days after and since, I may never have returned to church. However, I leaned on Psalm 46:1 and the knowledge that God is with me always and loves each of us dearly.

He shares our joys and sorrows with us and even though it is beyond our comprehension why such bad things happen, He will never leave us. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Micki Graff  
Grace United Methodist Church  
La Salle, Illinois

### ***March 7***

Looking up, the heavy clouds of fall cover the sun,  
Seeing them lets me know rain or snow is above,  
Believing that each in their time makes life exciting,  
Knowing that just above is the life giving sun.

“... before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain ...” (Ecclesiastes 12:2)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

***March 8 – Second Sunday in Lent***

**Friends**

“Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was” (Job 2:13). I have always loved the picture of Job’s friends sitting on the ground with him in his misery. They heard of his problems and came from their homes to comfort him. When they saw him, they cried, tore their clothes, and sat with him for a full week. Now I have good friends. One of them sat at my bedside in the hospital for a full night after I was in an accident and drove me home the next day. Another friend always reminds me to “pray about it” when I have problems. She keeps me centered on the Lord when troubles scatter my mind. But a week of sitting is a long time.

Then we read that no one spoke a word to Job. When I studied to become a Stephen’s Minister, we were taught the value of a listening presence. Job’s friends did not give him advice or tell him their own problems or scold him for his past. They just sat with him—present in their love. We all have one good friend who did give His life that we could live eternally—Jesus, the Son of God. He will always be there for us when we call.

“Living Lord, we thank you for your Son who came to live on earth that we would be saved from our sins. May we live our lives so that others will see His love in our words and actions.”

Jean Jones, Deacon  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

**March 9**

### **The Son Does Likewise**

My one-year-old son, Ephram, is an amazing little fellow. He is such a smiley happy little guy that we are often asked if he is ever upset or cries. While I assure you that there are times when he is unhappy, they are indeed uncommon! Ephram wants to do everything that his daddy does. A few days ago, I was in stitches while watching this jolly little man making every attempt to type on the computer just like dear old dad.

I was seated on one end of the couch with my laptop as I typed away writing a sermon or some other very serious activity, when I heard the growlings, gigglings, and gruntings of little barely walking Ephram who was straining to reach his small arm across my lap to the keyboard. With his arm outstretched he would get a big grin on his face, let out a contagious laugh, and then wiggle all of his miniature fingers across the portion of my laptop keyboard that he could reach, just like his dad! Ephram's desire to type just like his father reminds me of the passage of Scripture in John 5:19 where Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

In Christ we see the perfection of God's love. In Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we see Him do just as His Father does; loving an often unlovely world. In Christ we see the grace of God spelled out perfectly to us; we see the Father calling us unto Himself!

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 10**

### **Seat Belts**

I love my three sons very much. Not the least of my affection for them stems from their constant contributions to my seemingly inexhaustible supply of interesting and humorous stories about them! Recently, through his wardrobe choice, my eldest son Kurtis gave new meaning to the idea of “personal security.”

On a recent Sunday morning, I had instructed Kurtis to make sure that he was awake, dressed, and ready for church in time to help Christina make the arduous twenty-yard journey from the parsonage to the church. Before you scoff at what appears to be the small distance of her expedition, consider the wild squirrels and rabbits that dot the landscape of the church grounds, the sizable slobbering Saint Bernard, and the many inches of snow made all the more treacherous by the rest of the company that she keeps on Sunday mornings. You mustn't fail to consider the outlandish playfulness and stubborn tenacity of the two younger boys!

Kurtis's original thought was to leave the house well equipped for his journey. Previously unbeknownst to me, my son owns a belt that was actually fashioned from the seat belt of an automobile. It turns out that among Kurtis's wardrobe choices that morning was the seat-belt belt. Though he decided to wear a different belt before leaving the house that morning, Kurtis produced and considered wearing that seat-belt belt. Talk about wearing a belt that will prevent your pants from slipping below the waistline! Perhaps he should have worn it that morning for added security.

This belt of Kurtis, while providing a bit of humor to his father and some hip fashion to his wardrobe, also gave me thought of all of the things that we do in this life to construct for ourselves outward things that will give us a sense of security. While Kurtis's intention was simply to have a stylish belt, all of us wear seat-belt belts of various sorts. Rather than placing our trust completely in the Lord for the security that we need in this life, how often do we find ourselves given over to trusting in the things of this world: money, power, strength, knowledge?

Today, I invite you to trade in the "seat-belt belts" of this life for the only true and lasting security in this world. Hear the words of Christ this day and may you, dear friend, find the eternal security that you seek. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27–29).

Our security lies not in our own strength, ability, knowledge, or any other thing of our own possession or construction. Lasting security is found in Christ alone!

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 11***

#### **A Pilgrim's Prayer**

Our feet are weary, O Lord, from the day's journey. Refresh and renew our spirits. Feed us from the table of mercy that we may find our nourishment and strength in you! Draw our hearts near to yours this day, precious Lord! Amen.

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***March 12***

One of my most unforgettable memories regarding the heat of summertime in Yuma, Arizona is that of driving in my old Ford Bronco, windows down due to a lack of working air-conditioning. Rolling the windows down in the summer in Arizona is futile at best. It is something akin to waving your hand in front of your face for cool air while sticking your head in a four-hundred-degree oven! The air blows into the vehicle as though it were air streaming out of a hot hair dryer.

One particularly hot Sunday afternoon, while driving home from delivering a sermon at a local retirement community, I spotted a sweat-drenched, sun-baked man making his way on foot in temperatures well in excess of one hundred and ten degrees. I had only just filled up the tank in my vehicle and happened to have purchased two large cold bottles of water, one of which remained unopened. I decided to stop and offer this man a ride, which he refused. As I could respect his not wanting to accept a ride from a stranger, I offered this man the unopened bottle of water. I was astonished when this man who appeared to be very near heat exhaustion refused that as well, despite my many attempts to convince him.

As I drove away in the heat I considered the way that this man had refused the very things that he needed most: a way out of his predicament and refreshing water to sooth his tired body. I have often remembered this event in my life and considered the words of Christ as found in the book of John 4:13–14, where Jesus says, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

How many people in this life respond to the offer of Christ in just the same way? How many souls, for want of receiving the free gift of refreshing water that is offered in Christ, walk down the streets of this life parched by sin, sundried by its consequence, and separated from God by their very choice of doing it their way? How often are we who know Him equally guilty of refusing the care that He offers us? Let us be among those who come regularly to the fount of eternal life. Let us accept Christ's offer to drink up the water of eternal life by constant and continuous faith in Jesus Christ!

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 13***

Looking down, a heavy layer of yesterday's green leaves,  
Seeing them does tell me that my gutters are full,  
Believing that only a few days ago they shaded me,  
Knowing that next spring new leaves will come.

"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." (Isaiah 64:6)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois



**March 14**

### **Listen Carefully**

My son, Sebastian, is many things, not the least of which is a man rather addicted to chicken nuggets! Having a rather sensitive pallet has caused Sebastian to limit the types of things he will eat. As a result, he is more familiar with the drive-through procedure at the local "Chicken Nugget Store" (as he refers to it) than I care to admit.

In the family vehicle, Sebastian's "Big Boy Chair" (car seat) is located directly behind the driver's seat. Recently the entire family loaded into the car and headed off to obtain some of Sebastian's favorite food. As I began to place the order, I noticed that to everything I said there was a distinct echo coming from behind me. Looking over my shoulder to see what from whence this sound came, I saw that Sebastian had used the power button, which I had mistakenly taken off of "child lock," to roll down his window so that he could assist in placing the order!

To make matters worse, the woman taking our order was struggling to understand the order through the already less-than-clear speaker system coupled with the echo of Sebastian's voice. She had to listen very carefully to take the order. When we arrived at the window to pay and receive the food, she was noticeably amused when she saw Sebastian roll his window down for the second time and reach out his arm, waiting to receive his chicken nuggets directly!

Just as the woman at the drive through had to listen very carefully to sort out all of the garbled sounds coming at her through the speaker system, you and I have to filter out all of

the sounds of the world as we try to hear and apply the voice of God in our lives. Whether it is the echo of our flesh struggling against our spirit or the noise of the near-constant commotion of the world attacking our senses, we have to learn to filter it out if we are to hear the voice of God. Thanks be to God that we are not alone in this task.

In John 14:25–26 Jesus says, “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” I want to encourage you today to reside firmly in the reality that God has given us the precious gift of the Holy Spirit residing within us.

Today, I encourage you to listen for God’s voice, knowing that the God who has called us is also the God who has set us apart for His purpose and empowered us by the presence of His Spirit within us. As we listen for His voice in our lives may we remain constantly aware of His presence within us, making His voice known to us!

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 15 – Third Sunday in Lent***

**A Pilgrim’s Prayer**

Almighty God, grant that as we gather to worship you this Lord’s Day, may we, your covenant people, be united in once accord by the bonds of affection of Christ’s love in our hearts that you may be glorified in us and that we may find rest in you. Be honored and glorified this day, O Lord. Amen.

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 16**

### **You Did for Me**

“The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). How do we know that what we do is really serving the Lord? Is it as simple as delivering a meal to an elderly shut-in? If so, there are about seventy of us in this community who do just that week after week, in all kinds of weather, and we do it willingly in LaSalle, Peru, and Oglesby. We deliver Mobile Meals.

Mobile Meals is a program that provides meals to persons who, for whatever reason, cannot cook for themselves or who have a particular dietary need. Each meal is designed for the individual and each individual is served two meals: one hot, one cold. My husband and I deliver once every two weeks; he drives and I deliver. It is rewarding to knock on the home of a lady who is disabled, open her door, and call out, “Hello, it’s lunchtime” just to let her know you have brought her meals. Usually I am greeted with a cheery response and a sweet smile.

Occasionally the people we deliver to need a little help, like holding a cat while some medicine is dropped in its ears or looking up a phone number or mailing a letter or just chatting for a minute or two. Sometimes they need just the touch of your hand or a hug—simple things really, a small service. It is also an opportunity to speak to them about Jesus or offer to pray for them, just to let them know that God has not forgotten them.

Some of our clients never fail to say thanks for volunteering. They worry about whether I am dressed warmly when it is cold or have boots on when it is raining. One lady always calls out, “God bless you” as I go out the door. It is a rewarding service that costs us nothing but a little time, but we are helping to look after God’s special people. For some, we are the only contact they have on a daily basis; they don’t have families to help them and look after them.

Are we doing what Jesus asked when he said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me?”

Micki Graff  
Grace United Methodist Church  
La Salle, Illinois

***March 17***

**A Pilgrim’s Prayer**

Gracious God and King, plant me firmly this day, upon the sure footing of your Holy Word, so that as I trod through this life, my dusty-sandaled feet may tread upon the security of truth amidst the stony places of lies, which obstruct the journey of this life of following after Christ. Glorious Maker and Redeemer, grant that my calloused hand may have a strong grip on my walking staff, that it may aid me in warding off the attacks of the devourer of my soul, that I may be able to walk simply as a disciple of the way of mercy—the way of peace, the way of my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 18**

**His Love Endures!**

A few years ago my husband, our then six-month-old baby, and I went to the wedding of my friend of over 25 years. She was married on the most gorgeous of beaches in St. Augustine, Florida. The day after the wedding we woke up to the beautiful beach sunrise and took a walk. Days later I looked at the photos and saw something so extraordinary; I could not believe that in the moment, I missed it. Walking on the beach that morning was my family and me, the newly married couple, the bride's sister—a mother of two adopted sons, and the bride's mother. I saw the amazing love of Christ passed down from one generation to the next.

In Psalm 100:5 it is written, "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." At Calvary, Christ was faithful in His obedience to the Father. In the same way, the bride's mother was faithful in her relationship to Jesus Christ, and she passed the love and passion for Him to her children. Her love and passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ instilled in her children a desire to walk with Him. Their walks look different—from her eldest daughter's selfless act of adoption to her youngest daughter's desire to enter into a marriage covenant—but at the core, the family stands firm on the foundation of faithfulness that was passed to them from previous generations.

May we likewise pass on the love of Christ that has been passed on to us!

Christina Surber

**March 19**

### **Alien Forces United**

Recently, as I walked from the sanctuary to my office after the Sunday worship service, I noticed several strange documents, which had been posted all over the hallways of the church during the service. The signs read “Alien Forces United.” I later learned from the father of the artists that they were skillfully handcrafted by two brothers who were marketing their own sort of campaign during the most recent election season. The posters of these two boys reminded me of a rich biblical truth, though I suspect that was not entirely intended on their part.

Followers of Christ are aliens united in this world. Though we are in the world, we are not of the world. In his first epistle, the apostle Peter tells us that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood belonging to God. He goes on to urge us to live lives that are reflective of our status as aliens in this world, strangers in a strange land. We are aliens united on a mission to share the love, mercy, and radical grace of the cross of Jesus Christ to a hurting world. Every act of mercy given at our hands is but a sign that we are not of this world in which strength and physical power are honored.

We are a part of an “upside-down” kingdom, where rather than seek honor, the King dies for His subjects. In this kingdom, the King’s glory is expressed most fully in His sacrificial death for His subjects, not in His prideful decrees or scornful pronouncements. Fellow pilgrim, be reminded today of the beauty and uniqueness of the kingdom of God. Our citizenship in the kingdom of God is of matchless worth!

It is like nothing that this world has to offer. Indeed, we who follow Christ are aliens united on a mission of grace!

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light ... Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Peter 2:9, 11–12)

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 20***

Looking across the corn field is at rest,  
Seeing dirt that provides basic needs of life,  
Believing that it is all part of a great plan,  
Knowing that the farmer helped feed his neighbor.

“Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.”  
(Hosea 10:12)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

**March 21**

### **The Sight of Injustice**

Perhaps you can recall the curiosity of childhood. When I was a young child, I remember being amazed at nearly everything. I was a very inquisitive boy, always looking under rocks for buried treasure and inside of bushes in hopes of discovering a new species of insect life. The world was buzzing with wondrous things to discover. As I got older and turned over more rocks, it became apparent that lurking under some rocks, certain things were better left undiscovered. Hiding beneath many of the rocks of this life are less beautiful things, ugly things that are easier to ignore than to view. We live in a world that is chock-full of injustice. Everything from domestic violence; unwanted pregnancies; abused, ignored, and neglected children; and the horrific violence of war cries out to our eyes, longing to be given audience with our vision. These things are far less wondrous indeed.

Once our eyes have been opened to the more detestable things hiding deep inside the bushes of this world, they can never go back to the blissful innocence of youth. Once our eyes have been opened to the realities of injustice in this life, we have only two choices in response. We can pretend that our eyes were not privy to such things and in so doing, ignore the plight of injustice where it is found. This will allow injustice to continue. But having seen the injustice and turning away from it does not remove the stain of what we have seen. Injustice ignored is a poison that creeps into our minds by way of our eyes and eventually contaminates our very souls, even as the stain of what we have seen sears our eyes with blinding fury. Before you think of me as a painter of bleak portraits and

of my observation as being overly dismal, allow me to offer you a better option to blind indifference.

In the Gospel of Matthew the story is recounted of two blind men who asked Jesus to have mercy on them. “Lord,’ they answered, ‘we want our sight.’ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him” (Matthew 20:33–34). Have your eyes been damaged by the sight of injustice? Has your soul been touched by the blight of indifference? My dear friend, may I suggest to you that our only recourse is to bring our wounded eyes to Jesus that He may bring healing to the vision of our souls, and in so doing, He will restore unto us the clear vision necessary to no longer turn away from injustice, but to act; to no longer be tainted by the stains of indifference, but to embrace injustice, as did our Savior—with sacrificial love—on Calvary’s cross. In so doing, may we restore the wonder of our youth and the hope of our innocence!

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 22 – Fourth Sunday in Lent***

**A Pilgrim’s Prayer**

Almighty God, we give thanks for Your goodness. We praise You for the provision of your mighty hand. Great is Your faithfulness! Greatly are You to be praised! You have gathered us out of the lands and we have cried to you in times of need. In times past You have been faithful and even unto this very day you sustain us! Glory to Your name, O Lord! Amen.

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 23**

**Never Too Busy To Pray**

If you stood before the Lord right now would He say this to you, “Well done my faithful servant, but I had so many more blessings for you. You did what you were supposed to, you were kind, giving, and true but when it came to living life, it was almost always about you?”

“You accepted my Son as your Savior. My grace was new for you each day, but so many times I would tell you I needed you to pray. There were many others who needed prayer, but you were “too busy” that day.

“You see, what you didn’t realize was I wanted to give you true peace. You wouldn’t take the needed time to hear my spirit speak.”

So if this is where you are in life and if the Lord is convicting you, take the time to really listen—hear what He wants from you. Find the peace, say the prayers, and love to live each day. Always, always help others. Never be too busy to pray.

Jeanne VanSchaick  
Spring Valley, Illinois



**March 24**

### **He Will Wipe Away Every Tear**

Recently I heard that a friend's daughter had just miscarried her first baby, and the family was devastated. I was immediately taken back twenty-two years ago to my miscarriage. We also were devastated and we couldn't understand why this would happen. My husband and I had both waited so long to marry and were more than ready to start a family.

I endured many thoughtless comments such as "Well, you can always have another one." Even someone very close said "It's not like you were very pregnant." Is a mother's love determined by the difference between eight and forty weeks? A close friend turned and walked the other way to avoid having to say anything to me.

Eventually, though, our tears turned to joy with the birth of our daughter a year later. She has been a true blessing to us. In the book of John, Jesus says, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me ... Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:19, 22). God is faithful. He did not leave or forsake my husband and me. Our joy was complete with the gift of our daughter. Though our friend's daughter is grieving now, someday I'm sure that her joy will be complete!

Ellen Marincic  
Oglesby Union Church  
Oglesby, Illinois

**March 25**

**Yield to the Princess**

I wonder what people think of their former Marine Corps Staff Sergeant—now a local church pastor driving a very masculine Chevy Suburban that happens to be adorned with a pink rear license plate which reads, “Yield to the Princess!” While I commonly refer to my wife as “princess,” it is more than just a nickname. Some number of years ago it occurred to me that as we are all children of our heavenly Father, the divine King of the Universe, that meant that I am married to a princess, a daughter of the King!

Titus 3:7 reads, “So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” Be encouraged this day, child of God, you are not only God’s creation, but the very child of the King!

**March 26**

Looking near, the winter birds are back

Seeing cardinals, juncos, jays enjoying their feeder,

Believing that birds of summer are safe a thousand miles away,

Knowing that God’s plan is amazing and renewing.

“We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.” (Psalm 124:7)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

**March 27**

### **Holiness Lived Out**

An old legend tells of two men who entered the celestial portals. The white robes of the first one were stainless, and when asked by the warden where he had come from and how his garments were so clean, he told how he had just passed a poor, struggling traveler on earth, whose cart had become entangled in a swamp. The traveler had begged him to help him get it out, and he explained with what difficulty and pain he had escaped the urgent call in order to keep his garments spotless to meet his Lord.

The second pilgrim followed. His robes were soiled with mire and grime. Flushing crimson and shame, he explained that he had tried his best to keep his garments clean, but that he could not refuse to put his shoulder to the wheel when a struggling wayfarer was trying to get his cart out of the quagmire. "So," he added, "the marks are still on my once spotless robes." The angel smiled and said, "My brother, these stains will not hinder your welcome here, for even as we speak, they are transformed into jewels of glory as the badge and recompense of that love which is the highest glory of our sanctity and the brightest jewel in our crown."

Let us not only climb the Mount of Transfiguration with the Master, but let us live the transfigured life of love here below. Holiness is not something that we gain by keeping our robes white and clean. Holiness is something that we experience as we live out our faith within the context of our daily lives and in the framework of the real world!

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 28**

### **Gripped with Christ's Love**

Infections are often very difficult to get rid of. A couple of years ago my family had a very bad cold that seemed to hold an iron grip upon us all. The cold started as an ear infection in Sebastian, then moved to a bad cough in Christina, and before it was over, I had a very painful infection in my eye! By the end of a period of a couple of weeks, even Happy the Saint Bernard was obviously not feeling herself; her interest in chasing cats had been severely diminished!

When infections of this world get a hold us, it seems as though we are caught completely in their grip. Some infections are very hard to fight. Some infections are deadly once they get inside of your blood stream because they begin to take over and destroy healthy cells, causing your body not to function the way it was intended. So it is with the other things of this world. When we allow the pleasures and temptations of this world to take a hold of our life, they actually destroy us from within. They change the way our spirit is supposed to function.

1 John 2:15–17 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” Today, I encourage you to be gripped with the love of Christ rather than consumed by the many infectious pleasures and temptations of this world!

Pastor Chris Surber

***March 29 – Fifth Sunday in Lent***

Looking around, everywhere is God's handiwork

Seeing it, causes me to stop, think, rejoice.

Believing all around each of us God wants in

Knowing that His help is always near.

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:11)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

***March 30***

**A Pilgrim's Prayer**

O Lord, you have supplied all of my needs in this life and prepared a place for me in the life to come. It is not the strength of my hand that keeps me secure but the assurance of your presence near me. The edges of my portion are wide between one another. The depth of your provision far exceeds the depth of my need. I will cry out to God, who has never failed me. I will bless the name of the one who has always supplied my need according to His grace and tender mercy! My heart will at times sing the praises of my God and King. In your presence there is fullness of joy! My heart extols the Lord of all creation; the Lord of my life! Amen.

Pastor Chris Surber

**March 31**

### **He Came Unto His Own**

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once sought to describe the incarnation of God in Christ. He used this simple illustrative story: A certain king was very rich. His power was known throughout the world. But he was most unhappy, for he desired a wife. Without a queen, the vast palace was empty. One day, while riding through the streets of a small village, he saw a beautiful peasant girl. So lovely was she that the heart of the king was won. He wanted her more than anything he had ever desired. On succeeding days, he would ride by her house on the mere hope of seeing her for a moment in passing.

He wondered how he might win her love. He thought, I will draw up a royal decree and require her to be brought before me to become the queen of my land. But, as he considered, he realized that she was a subject and would be forced to obey. He could never be certain that he had won her love. Then, he said to himself, "I shall call on her in person. I will dress in my finest royal garb; wear my diamond rings, my silver sword, my shiny black boots, and my most colorful tunic. I will overwhelm her and sweep her off her feet to become my bride."

But, as he pondered the idea, he knew that he would always wonder whether she had married him for the riches and power he could give her. Then, he decided to dress as a peasant, drive to the town, and have his carriage let him off. In disguise, he would approach her house. But, somehow the duplicity of this plan did not appeal to him.

At last, he knew what he must do. He would shed his royal robes. He would go to the village and become one of the peasants. He would work and suffer with them. He would actually become a peasant. This he did. And he won his wife. So did God consider how He might win humankind. God in Christ became one of us. He took upon Him the form of human flesh to dwell among us. Paul says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

Dear Saint of God, at this season of Easter as we celebrate the incarnation of Christ, let us recognize fully the work for which He came into this world: to reconcile us to Himself. In order to most fully express the glory of God, He became low, even unto the form of a man, so that in dying we might live; so that in living we might bring glory to Him!

Pastor Chris Surber

***April 1***

Looking within convinces me, without Him life is empty

Seeing within continually shows me the way,

Believing that years ago when I opened the door

Knowing He did come in to help full my store.

"But no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler." (Job 31:32)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

***April 2***

### **The Sight of Injustice**

What do our prayer lives say about us? What do we pray for? What do we pray about? I'm reminded of the pious old gentleman of an earlier generation who used to get up regularly at prayer meeting in his church to pray, "Use me, O Lord, use me—preferably in some advisory capacity!" In Matthew 6:5–7 Jesus said, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."

In this passage Jesus is telling us that prayer is not a time for seeking God's favor upon my life when the foundations of my life are self-seeking, self-exulting, and selfish desires. Prayer is a time of intimate connection with God where we are able to find strength for the battles of this life. Prayer is much more about listening for God's voice and learning to discern His will than it is about any of the words we speak. Prayer is preparation; prayer is our connection to God.

My wife Christina has many friends and some of them know her better than others. There are many who have laughed with her in fun times, cried with her through difficult circumstances they have faced, and while all of them know her, I would suggest that it is not possible for any of them to know her as well as I know her.

Christina and I live out every day of our lives together. We know all of the unique things that make each of us who we are. We know each other better than anyone else because we are intimately connected to one another. So it is with our relationship with God. Those who spend more time with Him are more likely to know Him in deeper and more relevant ways. The longer I live with Christina, the more intimate our connection becomes. The longer we walk with God, the more in tune with His plans and purposes for our lives we become.

My friend, may you be encouraged to seek the God who has revealed Himself to us through Jesus Christ our Lord through a regular and consistent prayer life. Talk to God often; listen for His voice even more often!

Pastor Chris Surber

***April 3***

Looking back, the clock on the wall, time is passing,  
Seeing that tells me to continually look to him  
Believing He will always be there, He did arise  
Knowing if I know Him, He will never let me go.

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?" (Job 38:22–23)

Malcolm Whipple  
Waltham Presbyterian Church  
Utica, Illinois

***April 4***

### **Great Work, Wrong Test!**

In one of the early classes during my formal preparation for the ministry, I learned a lesson that will not soon be forgotten. For this particular theological class, the final assignment was, or so I believed, to prepare a paper of twenty pages in length that covered the ten areas of study from the class. My paper was twenty pages in length with a two page section on each portion of the class. I stayed up late at night working on this paper for a full week, ensuring that it was to be a perfect paper!

A few days after submitting the work I was shocked to receive the grade – F! In the instructor comments the professor had written, “Great work, wrong test!” You see, the assignment was not to write two pages about each portion of the class but to pick one portion of the class and write a twenty page paper on it! While I am pleased to say that I received an A grade on the resubmitted assignment, I believe there is a valuable lesson contained in my blunder that we all may learn from.

Some day you and I will stand before the throne of God and give an account for our lives. I wonder how many people will hear from God, “Great work, nice boat, beautiful house, excellent savings account, wrong test!” The test of our lives this Easter season and beyond is not the test of what we do with the opportunities for success that this life brings us but what we do with Christ! “... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***April 5 – Palm Sunday***

“Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’ ” (John 18:33–37)

On Palm Sunday Christ was hailed as a king. Less than a week later the crowds would cry out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Indeed, Christ is a king. He is the king of an upside-down kingdom where the king, rather than exalting himself to His rightful status, rather than demanding worship, laid down His life for the life of those He loves: you and me. The truth that Christ testifies of is the truth of His very nature and His divine kingship authority.

Dear Saint of God, if you are found alive in Christ through the gift of faith, your ultimate citizenship is not of this world! You and I, those who have been redeemed by the very blood of our King, are not of this world. We, like Jesus, are pilgrims through this life on a mission to testify to the truth of which He spoke to Pilate—the truth that Christ is the sovereign Lord of our lives just as He reigns supreme over all of creation!

Pastor Chris Surber

### ***April 6 – Monday of the Holy Week***

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ‘Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.’ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ‘Leave her alone,’ Jesus replied. ‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.” (John 12:1–11)

Mary's offering of “sweet perfume” was an expression of devotion. Mary proved that she had given not only all that she owned, but also all that she was to Christ. What offering do you have to bring to Jesus as you reflect on the week of His crucifixion? What “sweet perfume” do we have to pour out to our Savior? Whatever it may be, let it likewise be a symbol of our total devotion to the one who gave His life for us!

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***April 7 – Tuesday of the Holy Week***

“ ‘But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this “Son of Man”?’ Then Jesus told them, ‘You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.’ ” (John 12:32–36)

In Christ’s obedience to the will of the Father, our eyes gaze upon what is at the same time an amazing demonstration of divine providence and the supreme example for us to follow as believers. When Jesus refers to being “lifted up,” He is alluding to the work that He would soon do on the cross. Jesus is saying that His death on the cross would provide a means of God drawing all humanity to Himself. Christ’s death on the cross was a wondrous demonstration of the inadequacy of man to deal rightly with God. In Christ, God’s mercy broke into the world and humanity placed Him on a cross. The blood that flowed from Christ is the blood that bought us back from the bondage of sin into communion with God the Father through His Son’s obedience and sacrifice.

In Christ we also see our mandate to obey the will of God lived out in the life of Christ. As we imitate the obedience of our Lord may, we encounter a similar kind of death as we die to self so that we may live in the light of Christ!

Pastor Chris Surber

### ***April 8 – Wednesday of the Holy Week***

“After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.’ His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, ‘Ask him which one he means.’ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. When he was gone, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.’ ” (John 13:21-32)

While it is easy to cast judgment on Judas for his betrayal of Christ, perhaps it is the better part of wisdom to consider the ways in which we identify with his betrayal. Let us cast our gaze inward toward our own need to confess our betrayals in this life, rather than consider only the failure of Judas. While the view may be more difficult to acknowledge, its rewards are everlasting, for the prayer of confession is a road to greater freedom from the bondage of past sin!

Pastor Chris Surber

### ***April 9 – Maundy Thursday***

“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus replied, ‘You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ ‘No,’ said Peter, ‘you shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’ ‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’ Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.’ ” (John 13:1–17)

“When he was gone, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’” (John 13:31–35)

At the cross Jesus paints for us a clear picture of how it is that we may fulfill the command of Christ to love one another just as Christ has loved us. At the cross we see Jesus love the unlovely with a sacrificial kind of love that knows no boundaries. To the men who spat upon His face, He showed love. To the men who drove nails into His hands and feet, He showed love. To all of the people who mocked Him, Jesus showed the radical grace, love, and mercy that are characteristic of no other person placed in such an unjust and unfair position. At the cross hung a man who had committed no crimes before God or man, yet He hung on that cruel tree as God’s love embodied in human flesh.

What kind of lives are we living today? Is Jesus glorified in us or is He glorified in spite of us? Does our love for one another demonstrate the love of Christ to the world? Are our lives reflective of the kind of sacrificial mercy that Christ demonstrated at the cross? Dear friend, hear the words of Christ this day and be renewed in your commitment to allow Him to love the world through you as you are empowered by humble devotion to the one who gave Himself for us!

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***April 10 – Good Friday***

“When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ ‘I told you that I am he,’ Jesus answered. ‘If you are looking for me, then let these men go.’ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me.’ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’ ” (John 18:1–11)

On Good Friday Jesus drank the cup of condemnation for sin so that you and I might one day drink from the cup of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ! Just as Jesus commanded Peter to put away his sword, so too He now commands us to put away the powerful things of this world in favor of the greatest power of all—the eternal love of Christ!

Pastor Chris Surber

***April 11 – Holy Saturday***

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:3–11)

Through faith in the Son of God, each one of us identifies with the death of Jesus Christ. This biblical truth has many applications and implications for the Christian. Its chief relevance is in our understanding that you and I have died to sin and been made alive to God. Though we remain locked in imperfect flesh, we are now enabled to worship God completely in spirit and in truth. Though we remain within the confines of this imperfect and fallen world, we are empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us for godly living. We who were once dead in trespass and sin have been made alive through the perfect sacrifice of Christ! What we could never have done for ourselves, He did for us!

Pastor Chris Surber

## ***April 12 – Easter Day***

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ‘Don't be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ’ ” (Mark 16:1–7)

Easter morn has broken and the tomb is empty! The work that Jesus came to accomplish is now fulfilled and complete. The victory of sin and death has been won. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the crux of all Christian doctrine and it is the centerpiece of Christian faith. In rising from the dead Jesus confirms His truth claims and divine nature. Were Jesus merely a wise teacher or even a great prophet, the end of the story would have been at the cross where He died. If Jesus had only been yet another wise teacher, His disciples would not have subsequently been willing to suffer and die for the truth, that they had seen Him raised from the dead. This Easter Sunday, I encourage you to place your trust fully in the radical truth that Jesus is alive, alive indeed, alive in us!

Pastor Chris Surber