

Come Walk with Me

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Lent Devotions for 2022

Written by and for SMBC

Cover Art By Mary Helen Kirkland



Mary Helen Kirkland is a junior at Ballard High and a faithful member of the SMBC youth group. She enjoys participating in church events, singing, painting, playing the guitar, spending time in nature and hanging out with friends. She is the daughter of Steve and Denise Kirkland.

LENT Worship 2022
“Come Walk with ME,’ says Jesus”
Sunday Morning Worship at 10:30 AM
St. Matthews Baptist Church Sanctuary

MARCH 6, 2022 “Come Walk with ME ... in and out of Nazareth”
“*Something Good Can Come out of Nazareth!*” John 1:43-51; Genesis 28:10-19

MARCH 13, 2022 “Come Walk with ME ... through Samaria”
“*Did Jesus Have to Go Through Samaria?*” John 4:1-30, 39-42

MARCH 20, 2022 “Come Walk with ME ... to talk with Nicodemus”
“What Does Jesus and Nicodemus’ Conversation Say to Me?” John 3:1-21

MARCH 27, 2022 “Come Walk with ME ... to the home of Mary and Martha”
“The One Thing Needed!” Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-8

APRIL 3, 2022 “Come Walk with ME ... to the Cemetery”
“God’s Last Word and Best Word is *Life!*” John 11:1-53

Holy Week

APRIL 10, 2022 (Palm Sunday) “Come Walk with ME ... into Jerusalem”
“Sometimes Love Looks Like This!” John 12:12-19; John 19:1-7, 13-18

APRIL 14, 2022 (Maundy Thursday) – 7:00 PM (Chapel)
“Come Walk with Me ... to the Upper Room”
“The Last Supper” Matthew 26:17-30

APRIL 15, 2022 (Good Friday) – 7:00 PM (Sanctuary)
“Come Walk with Me ... to Calvary”
“The Crucifixion of Jesus” Mark 15:16-41

APRIL 17, 2022 (Sunrise Sunday) – 7:00 AM (Grandview Room)
“Come Walk with Me ... to the Empty Tomb”
“The Easter Morning Surprise” Mark 16:1-8
(Breakfast to follow service)

APRIL 17, 2022 (EASTER) – 10:30 AM (Sanctuary)
“Come Walk with ME ... into Eternal Life”
“Running Through the Cemetery” John 20:1-18

INTRODUCTION

As a boy raised in the deep south Bible Belt, I never heard or thought much about Lent until I moved to Kentucky and joined St. Matthews Baptist Church. Advent either, for that matter. The celebration of both has added a richness to Christmas and Easter for which I am grateful.

Without these sacred celebrations and observances, Christmas and Easter are often reduced to one or two frantic days, both of which are usually negatively impacted by busyness and secular intrusions.

The seasons of Lent and Advent protect against that. They spread out and strengthen the observance and celebration of Easter and Christmas by adding depth, reflection and meaning. The result is greater awareness, appreciation and understanding of what God has done for us.

And so I invite you join me this Lenten season on a 47 day journey that will take us to the cross but that will ultimately end in triumph at an empty tomb. Use this booklet in any way you like: as a daily devotional guide, or as a drop-in resource to supplement other spiritual growth materials.

I am thankful for each person who has contributed. May their writings make it possible for you to more clearly hear the voice of Jesus say, "Come walk with me."

David Garrard
Finchville, KY

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

I grew up Catholic, and each year on Ash Wednesday – roughly forty days from Easter – I went to church to receive ashes. The ashes were smudged on my forehead, and the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” were whispered to me. God made us from dust (Gen 2:7), and the ashes of Ash Wednesday were a reminder of this truth.

Growing up, I was taught that Lent was a time for fasting and prayer. Over my lifetime, I fasted from many things, mostly involving food – chocolate, coffee, cheese, etc. I put down bad habits, only to often pick them back up a few days later.

It was not until I was an adult that I had the most *meaningful* Lent season of my life. (Full disclosure, this idea was not original to me.) I decided that instead of giving up something, I would *add* something. Before Ash Wednesday, I mapped out a list of 45 people who I would pray for each day during Lent. Without a doubt, I have been the beneficiary of intercessory prayer. I wanted to do the same for others.

Among the people on my list were family, co-workers, church leaders and volunteers (some of whom you would know!), students, and teachers. Some on my list were strangers. As only God knows the heart, I made no assumptions – only that they, like me, need Jesus.

Most of the people on my list never knew that I prayed for them. But the daily time spent reading God’s word and saying the names of His children gave me a genuine love for each of them. I still have the written prayers, and I marvel at the ways God has worked in some of their lives. But mostly, in mine.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Dear Lord, please find us preparing for you when you come. When we are divided, please give us the strength to break away from the world and trust You. May our lives be growing closer to You until You come again. Give us hearts to look outward and help us show Your love to others. In the powerful name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Brooke Bond, and her husband Jason, and their two sons, Jordan and Joseph, have been welcomed guests at SMBC through the years. Brooke has worked in our Vacation Bible School, and she and Jason have volunteered in our Upward Basketball ministry. Brooke always cries at baptisms!

March 3

Luke 9:21, 24:6-8

Jesus Did Exactly What He Said He Would Do!

As Christians we know that the cornerstone of our faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that Easter morning. Without the resurrection, the cross would be meaningless, death would be meaningless, and our worship would be meaningless. But thankfully it's all not meaningless, Jesus told us exactly what would happen.

Mark 9:9-10: As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

Luke 9:21: He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

And we know the story of Easter, and how things happened just the way Jesus said they would.

Luke 24:6-8: He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee. "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." Then they remembered his words.

Matthew 28:5-7: The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you.

So now what do we do with the great gift of Jesus' resurrection? I suggest trusting in our Savior — not just on the good days, but the bad also, and working to share this great gift.

Deuteronomy 31:6: Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.



Brian Mize has been at SMBC for close to 25 years. He is a widower, with two children and two grandchildren! Although retired with health concerns, Brian remains upbeat, hopeful and excited about the future of our church.

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 2:32

One of my favorite narratives of the resurrection is the report of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion have been in Jerusalem and have experienced the crucifixion of Jesus. They are heart-broken and confused as they walk toward their home. Soon, they are joined by a stranger.

What are you talking about?" the stranger asks.

The two pour out their dismay and disappointment over the crucifixion of the one they *thought* was the Messiah. The stranger rebukes them for their unbelief. Then the stranger begins with Moses and works his way through the words of the prophets to reveal several passages that speak of how all these things were to happen to the Promised One who would suffer and then enter his glory. (Can you imagine that powerful revelation of Scripture straight from the Master's mouth?)

When they arrive at the house, they invite their new friend in to have a meal. He gives thanks, breaks the bread, and hands it to them. Their eyes are opened. They recognize him! Is this because they are now facing Jesus, or because there is something familiar about the way he breaks the bread, or do they see the scars in his hands?

Suddenly, he is gone.

In reflection, the thing that impacts them most was their conversation on the road--
"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Perhaps, my friends, that is the very thing we must pray for in this resurrection season – that the words we read about our Savior be etched, not just in our minds, but that we may also experience their understanding *burn within our hearts*.



Joyce Cordell and her husband Jim sing in the choir and have been members of SMBC for 18 years. Joyce helps teach the Journey of Faith class. She has written three Biblical historic novels.

March 5

Romans 6:8-11

Spring Brings New Life, and Easter!

Spring is my favorite season. I love the feeling of newness that Spring and Easter bring—new shoes/clothes, new hats and “new” flowers popping out of the ground getting ready to release fresh, colorful flowers and smells. The smell of the sanctuary filled with Easter lilies is amazing. The newness of Spring also includes new attitudes of coming out of the winter darkness – an attitude that echoes the coming out of the tomb by Jesus – ready for a new beginning and freshness in life.

Easter comes during Spring, and celebrates new life. Lent is a solemn religious observance and journey. It is a season of spiritual preparation before Easter – a time to reflect on Jesus Christ – a time to reflect on His suffering and sacrifice, His life, death and burial.

Easter is important to me not only because of the joy it brings but also because it reminds me of these words from Romans: We are dead to sin, but alive to Christ Jesus. And because He lives, I can face tomorrow!

My days of being the Easter Bunny at Bashford Manor Mall are long gone – a fond Easter memory from years past. However, I still adore seeing the joy the season and the holiday bring. May you have an amazing Lenten journey!



Carol Chappell is a wife of 40 years, a mother to three, and a grandmother to four. She works as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. Carol joined the SMBC faith family in July of 2021.

March 6

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Forgiving and Loving Like Aunt Malissa

"When I was six, my family was visiting my Aunt Malissa in Moundville, Alabama, where she and my uncle owned a business called "Miss Malissa's Café." While in the store, I decided I would slip a couple of my favorite candy bars in my pocket and go hide them in our parked car nearby.

My father found the candy bars as we were loading up the car and asked me if I had paid for them. I ducked my head and said, "No sir."

He calmly asked me to get out of the car. He explained, "Malcolm, we don't take things without paying for them. We are going to go back into the store. I want you to give these to Aunt Malissa and tell her you are sorry that you took this without paying for it."

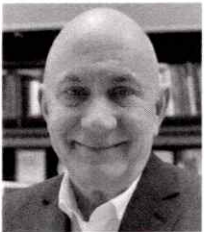
I was so embarrassed. I knew I was wrong. I feared the worst.

I walked into the store and Aunt Malissa said, "Malcolm, I thought you left." With a trembling voice and a quivering lip, I pulled the stolen candy bars out of my pocket and said, "I'm sorry, I took these without paying for them. Will you forgive me?"

She looked at my father and back at me, and her face softened. She bent down and said, "Yes Malcolm, I will forgive you. And, I will always love you." I threw my arms around her neck, and she held me close. She added, "Thank you for being honest and for saying you are sorry."

Decades later, I gave the eulogy at Aunt Malissa's funeral, and I told this grace story of how she loved and forgave me, just like God did, and does.

This Lenten season, I want to love and forgive like Aunt Malissa and God. How about you?"



*Alabama native, **Malcolm Marler** attended Clemson University on a football scholarship. After graduating from Southern Seminary and completing a chaplain residency with Dr. Wayne Oates, Malcolm served as Associate for Pastoral Care at SMBC from 1981-1989. Malcolm and his wife, Mary Bea Sullivan, currently live in Birmingham where Malcolm works at UAB as a Leadership Support Specialist. The couple has two grown children, Brendan and Kiki.*

If you are like me, certain holidays bring to mind specific and favorite songs. Christmas, July 4th, and of course, Easter. Traditionally, during the Lenten season, churches turn to *Up from the Grave He Arose*, *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*, and the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Not so long ago, Sandy Patti's *Was it a Morning Like This* and *Glorious Morning* as well as Don Francisco's *He's Alive* became favorites.

My favorite Easter song harkens to one of my earliest memories. I grew up living very close to almost all of my maternal and paternal relatives in Evansville, Indiana. Consequently, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter brought us together for big meals and all day family fun. And music, there was always singing, especially on my mother's side.

Each holiday had its own rhythm, but Easter began very early with the Forest Hills Baptist Church sunrise service on Reitz Hill overlooking the Ohio River. Still in our pajamas and snuggled under quilts in the back seat of our car, the dewy chill air wafted through the open windows as Bro. Bartels welcomed the morning. Hymns were sung, prayers prayed, and offerings received, but my favorite part was when my Uncle Bob moved to the front, turned toward the sunrise and in his beautiful tenor sang "*Last night I lay asleeping, there came a dream so fair . . . Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Lift up your gates and sing, Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to your King!*"

To this day, from my bank of fondest memories, I can not only *hear* that song, but I *feel* it on Easter morning. (By the way, the tradition has continued with Adam, Uncle Bob's grandson, singing *The Holy City* at sunrise services in Evansville.)

What song leads your heart and mind along the road to Easter?



Cinda King and her husband, Greg, have been members of SMBC for almost 40 years. She is mother to Abby and Samuel, both grown and living their best lives. In her spare time, Cinda enjoys cooking, working jigsaw puzzles, reading, and writing. The Kings attend the Crossroads Sunday School Class.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

1 Peter 1:3

The old pear tree stood in the corner of our garden. Generation after generation, I watched the seasons scroll. Spring after spring, that old tree's petals filled the air with make-believe snowflakes. In summer, older more daring children, like squirrels, would leap from treetop to treetop. They never missed the opportunity to tease those who were unable to do the same.

Time moved on, and ripe fruit was gathered each autumn. In my childhood reasoning I dreaded the bitter cold of winter, fearing that new growth could not once again penetrate the crusty-looking bark and branches of our beloved tree. I was in awe when at last I saw a trace of new growth. New birth was on the way!

That day, I began to equate my experience with the pear tree with the promised resurrection of Jesus. In my heart, I walked with Jesus on His way to the cross. His furrowed brow mirrored the agony he must have felt. The intense pain was overwhelming; however, we walked on until I could see the cross as it loomed in the distance.

Like the tree of my childhood, may each of us experience new birth and a resurrected Christ who will live forever.



Holly Collins is a native of Big Creek in Eastern Kentucky. After graduating from Lees College and the University of Louisville, she taught first grade for 34 years. She stays busy these days quilting, baking, and writing poetry and short stories.

Easter eggs. As children, we've hunted for them. As adults, we've hidden them. The delight from finding them warms the heart of both child and adult. To raise the likelihood of that delight, the adult typically "hides" them in plain sight. Nobody wants to see a child crying because they can't find any of the eggs.

Jesus did the same thing with his inner circle of disciples. As we look forward to Easter, and especially with the benefit of hindsight, their lack of understanding is almost laughable. Time and again, the Gospels record Jesus telling them explicitly that he would be arrested, turned over to the religious authorities, condemned and executed. And that he would rise up on the third day. Still, they did not understand.

Are we so different, though? We struggle to discern God's will. We search libraries full of commentaries for understanding of passages in Scripture. We labor to make sense of the world around us.

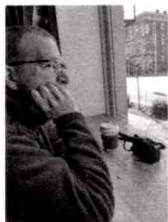
Struggle. Search. Labor. These are not words associated with delight.

God delights in His heart when His children find...understanding, answers, purpose, treasures both expected and unexpected . . . truth. Does He make it so very hard for us? Or does He hide these things in plain sight?

Moses: "This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, and it is not beyond your reach. It is not kept in heaven, so distant that you must ask 'Who will go up to heaven and bring it down so we can hear it and obey? No, the message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart so that you can obey it." (Deuteronomy 30:12,14 NLT)

Jesus: "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 5:39; 14:6 NLT)

Truth. Hiding in plain sight. High on a hill, lifted up on a cross. So we can find it, and in the finding, bring delight to our hearts . . . and to God's.



Jeff Hudgins has a Diploma in Educational Ministry from Boyce Bible School (1988). He and his wife, Danielle have been married since 2007. They are members of the Journey of Faith Sunday School Class, which Jeff helps teach.

March 10

Genesis 3:19; John 3:16

From the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond

Lent is a time of acknowledging our own mortality and also affirming our faith and hope. A pastor-friend tells of an Ash Wednesday experience.

As people came forward down two aisles, the two ministers who were leading the service imposed ashes in the shape of a cross on each worshiper's forehead and said, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Toward the close of the service, an elderly woman, about ninety years of age, was still sitting toward the back. My friend started moving toward her and then noticed her getting up. He waited at the front as she slowly made her way to him. Her age showed in her hunched posture and slow gait.

When she arrived in front of him, he stooped down to get on her level and imposed the ashes. As his thumb touched her forehead, he repeated the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The pastor recalls, "Her eyes looked straight into mine. As I finished, we held our gaze, and then she gave me a wink." Later as the pastor reflected, he said he thought the wink might have been an affirmation of her own frailty and awareness of the brevity of life.

Maybe, he thought, the wink was also a way of expressing hope, her way of saying, "I've lived a long time. I know that I came from dust, and I'll return to dust. But that's not the whole story. God has been with me through my ninety years of this life, and God will be with me at the end of life and beyond."

As we prepare for the celebration of the events of Holy Week, may we not only focus on Christ's death but on his resurrection and the hope it brings.



Dr. John Lepper retired in 2014 from his position as Coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Kentucky. He does counseling through the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center and also serves as Interim Pastor of First Baptist Church in Williamsburg, KY. John and his wife, Connie, have been SMBC members for 11 years. Connie works as one of our Administrative Assistants.

When the two Marys arrived at the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning, they found the heavy stone which had covered the opening of the tomb rolled away. When the two women entered the tomb, Jesus was not there. An angel had moved the stone. The removal of the stone was a divine act. The stone was moved, not to let Jesus "out," but to let the two Marys "in" so they could see for themselves that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus had risen!

The stone barrier at the tomb threatened to keep the two Marys from seeing the power of the resurrection. Are there stone barriers in your life that threaten to keep you from seeing the miracle of Easter? If so, they need to be removed.

The season of Lent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the Lord's resurrection at Easter. It is a season to reflect on your relationship with God. It is a time to discipline yourself and to remove the things that separate you from Him.

So as you prepare for Easter, reflect on the things that you might need to give up to follow Christ more faithfully. Perhaps you are carrying a burden that is so heavy that, like the stone at the tomb, it cannot be removed without divine help. Whatever it is, turn it over to God. Seek God's forgiveness. Let God remove that burden and continue with your Easter journey. If you do, that journey will be more joyous, and when you arrive at the tomb, you, too, will find the stone rolled away.

Like the two Marys, Jesus invites you to see for yourself that He is no longer there! He is risen! He is risen, indeed!



Ken Boatright and his wife, Ada have been members of SMBC since 1998. He is a graduate of Baylor University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a retired American Airlines Captain.

March 12

Matthew 26:56

The Saddest Verse in the Bible

Matthew 26:56 has to be the saddest verse in the Bible: "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

The very people who had been with Jesus for three years, experiencing the glow of His spirit, watching incredible miracles, beginning to comprehend His insights, receiving His love and servanthood to them . . . fled in confusion and fear. They watched the human brutality from the shadows, not even realizing that He was still teaching them – how to live, how to forgive, how to die – things of this world.

He led us into a new place where evil may reign but cannot win. For after the resurrection He exclaimed, "I am with you always!" (Matthew 28:20) The promise of eternal presence. The verse of hope!



Lou Fox and her husband, Jack, have two daughters and two grand-daughters. They have been members of SMBC for more than 40 years, and are privileged to be part of the ALIVE Sunday School Class.

March 13

John 1:1-5

Light Through the Cracks and From the Cross

As a youth at St. Matthews, I vividly remember one particular Maundy Thursday service. As was the custom at the time, we closed the service in silence and darkness. It was a time of reflective contemplation that was the culmination of the Lenten season.

During that holy silence, I looked to the front of the old sanctuary and raised my eyes to the stained-glass window above the baptistry. What I saw in that moment was the cross in the window illuminated. It was as if the only light in the room that night came from the cross.

The recently deceased songwriter Leonard Cohen is most well known for his song "Alleluia." For me though, there is a lyric from his song "Anthem" that sums up how I felt in that moment:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in*

We spend the days before Easter considering our human condition. There is reason to look at the world around us and become distressed and hopeless. We live in a world filled with conflict and strife at every level. Even more discouraging is to look to ourselves and our own brokenness and wonder if we are of any worth at all. The bells of joy and celebration of God's redemption seem far away and hollow.

And yet, during this season, we ring what we can, and bring ourselves again before God. Our offering is far from perfect, but it is the best we can do. We present our broken, cracked souls and bodies to our Creator, and hope for grace.

And it is in through the cracks, through the broken facades of our lives given to God, that God enters – first with only hints of dawn. And then on glorious Easter, our hearts are bathed with the full perfect light of the Risen Son.

That night, I stared and pondered at the glowing cross in silent contemplation. "That's how the light gets in."



Bob Fox grew up in, and was baptized and ordained by St. Matthews Baptist Church. His mother, Carroll Fox, is still an active member. Bob currently serves as the Coordinator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Kentucky (CBFKY). He and his wife, Janet, have two boys, Rob and Evan.

Easter has always been a special day – a festive day, a church day, a day for family gatherings with big meals, egg hunts and all kinds of fun.

Many years ago, after the death of my second husband, and with my children grown and gone, I attended an Easter service alone. As I sat thinking of Easters past, I found myself feeling alone and somewhat sad.

As the music started and people rushed to get the last available seats, I moved over to make more room on my pew. A lovely young woman slid in beside me. We smiled at each other. Then we shared a hymnal for the first song: *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*. As we sang, our eyes met off and on.

When the song finished, we were seated, and the room fell silent.

Suddenly, from the front left a man rose to his feet and shouted, "He is alive!" In the back a second voice shouted, "Christ lives!" Then, from the balcony: "Christ is alive!" Another voice: "Believe!" And on and on it went as people stood to their feet and shouted out Easter truth. We sat spellbound.

This happened more than 30 years ago, but I still remember. What a glorious way to celebrate Easter and the risen Savior!

Christ has risen! I believe! He has!



Pat DeReamer has been legally blind since June of 2021. She cannot see or read anything unless it is magnified many times. As an artist, Pat is trying to adjust to being without her sight. God continues to grant her the grace to do so.

March 15

John 12:44-46

A Meditation on John 12 and Matthew 28

"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." (John 12:46)

There is so much darkness in my life. I want so much for you to drive it away and light my path. But who are you? How can you claim to be able to do that?

Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." (John 12:44)

Jesus, you are telling me that you and the Father are one, that knowing you is the best way to know about God. What an amazing claim to make. You said these words publicly in the days leading up to the crucifixion.

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine." (John 12:27-28)

Witnessed by a crowd, God affirmed Jesus in this miraculous way. A few days later God affirmed the truth of Jesus' identity and his mission for all the world to witness forevermore.

Jesus said, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 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. (John 12:31-33)

Jesus, by your death and resurrection, I know you are Christ the Lord. I praise and worship you. I depend on you to drive away all darkness, to protect and guide me.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

I will trust you, follow you and seek to obey you. Thank you for being with me forever. Amen.



Rusty Hoffman and his wife Linda joined SMBC when he began medical school 50 years ago. Their children, Linda's parents and some of their grandchildren have also been part of our congregation. He has worked with children in RA's, VBS, Upward and with deacons and other ministries.

March 16

Psalm 103:1-5a

What is your Greatest Desire?

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" The term Jesus uses here could be translated as, "What do you seek?" In our day it is better translated, "What do you desire? Or to a finer point on it, "What is your greatest desire?" The disciples following that day were Andrew and one unnamed disciple. That unnamed disciple has a name, and it is *ours*.

Our first response to this unsettling question is often fumbling at best. It is an extremely disruptive, probing, and difficult question to answer. The answer that pushes forward out of our best ethical sense, even our best Christ-informed ethics, of what we think our greatest desire should be, will not do. To answer the question through examination of our bank statements and calendars is a useful exercise but is only preparatory work for heart-listening. To engage this probing question from what we most think about, or what consumes consciousness is useful, but it does not tell us what our heart deeply desires.

To know our greatest desire is to travel to the inner sanctum of the heart. There we find the Divine-human intersection with whom we live, move, and have our being. This takes a fair bit of guidance, silence, stillness, and time. The question itself, though unsettling, also becomes a friend and guide along the unmarked inner way. All the disorientation, getting lost, stumbling about on the way to the inner temple gets centered with a return to the question. It is a question that both disrupts and guides like an inner compass.

Along with your friends, you are chasing after this Jesus, who sees you (note this) and *turns* to you (note this) and *asks* you (note this), "What is your greatest desire?"



Glenn Williams and his wife, Kathy have been members of SMBC since 1994. They are the parents of Caleb (deceased) and Rachel.

When I think of Easter, it's easy to think about beloved traditions with family and good friends (who are also family), new Easter dresses, and egg hunts. Easter also reminds me of Christmas, and a baby born to redeem sinners. And, of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus. But Easter took on an even deeper meaning in 2014 when Bill and I traveled to the Holy Land.

We visited Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. We went to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up; to the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized; to Galilee, where most of Jesus' ministry took place; to Jerusalem, where Jesus taught in the temple at age 12, and where he and his disciples shared the last supper and Jesus was crucified; and to the Garden Tomb, to see the type of tomb in which Jesus was buried. I will never forget the view of the empty tomb!

Every day we were in the Holy Land, Bill and I were in awe that we were walking on the same streets that Jesus walked. More incredible than that...Jesus was born, grew up, taught, preached, healed, served, died on the cross, and was resurrected for one reason...to save the lost! The lost – that is ME, without Jesus!

But because Jesus died that horrible death on the cross and was resurrected three days later, we can be saved. God's sole purpose in sending his Son to earth to be born, die, and be resurrected was to be our Savior. I am SO thankful Jesus is my Savior!



Lisa Nowak has been a member of St Matthews Baptist Church since 1979. She and her husband, Bill, have worked with children for the last 40 years. They are the proud parents of Chris (Madison) and Erin (Trent), and grandparents to Owen and Marley.

I have always loved vacationing in the Rocky Mountains, absorbing the beauty of nature and hiking! The mountains have always been my place to relax, reflect, and think about God. It is on my hikes that I can hear God say to me, "Come walk with me for a spell." God calls me to use this time to unclutter my thoughts, listen to Him and ask, "What are you calling me to do?"

Sister Joan Chittister talks about Lent as a time to "create space" within ourselves. She says "Lent is about becoming, doing, changing whatever is blocking the fullness in us right now. Lent is a summons to life renewed."

During this Lenten season, we have an opportunity to create space and meditate on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and on how God's love compels us to be the best of ourselves for Him.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:2 NIV



Judy Lambeth has been a member of SMBC since 1999. She has served on the Master Plan, Finance & Personnel Committees, been a member of the Crossroads Sunday School Class, and a participant in Pilgrims Journey. Judy is CEO Emeritus of Maryhurst, and an avid Georgia Bulldog fan.

It was in 1974 that my Dad took the family to have Easter dinner at a local Holiday Inn. That year, the hotel had a raffle to win a Bunny rabbit. As I sat at our table focused on eating the large array of food, our cheerful lady server came over to our table to announce that ... *I was the winner!* I was then presented with a small box containing a panting puff of dyed yellow hair with pinkish hued eyes – my Bunny! I was one surprised and excited 11-year-old boy!

The dedicated women who went to Jesus' tomb after his crucifixion no doubt experienced an even greater and more delightful surprise! These Jesus followers were first on the scene and had *expected* him to still be lying on a cold stone slab wrapped in linen. To their amazement he was not there. He had **RISEN!** Now their lives would be heading in a new and exciting direction!

This is Good News for us *today*. At our lowest moments, when we feel lost and are reeling in despair, we can find Hope for our future knowing that God is *still* in the business of “big surprises”, ones that bring about newfound purpose and that take our lives in an exciting new direction. Like winning a bunny in a box, God may well have some *delightful surprise* in mind for us this year that we never expected!



Paul Brown and his wife, Debbie, joined SMBC in September of 2017. Paul works as Operations Manager for a Global Office Services company. The Browns are a blended family with three daughters, one son, one grandson and three granddaughters! Paul teaches the ACTS 29 Sunday School Class.

March 20

Psalm 68:3-4

Balloons Belong in Church

Okay. I'm a Children's guy. I don't just admit it, I revel in the fact that God called me to minister, teach, learn from, and grow with kids, their parents, and their leaders.

Kids will tell you, if you're going to have a party, you need balloons. They fill a space quickly. They provide an explosion of color. They're fun. They're relatively inexpensive. They make you happy. They say: "Celebrate! Let's have a party!" You can use them to decorate. Some of them can fly. You can use them to play all kinds of games. If one pops there may be a moment of surprise or feeling startled, but it's okay, there are always plenty more. They weigh almost nothing but deliver tons of enjoyment.

Every year we look forward to, and celebrate, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We tell the stories and sing the songs. We may place special flowers or banners in our churches. We sometimes celebrate with special worship times.

The truth is Christ followers are pretty good at celebrating His resurrection. After all, we do it every week. We join together on Sunday mornings or at other times and worship together. We celebrate Christ the King.

This is especially true during the Easter season. As sad as Good Friday is, we celebrate Resurrection morning in an explosion of joy. So for a child, or for this Children's Minister, balloons are a wonderful image of that celebration. We say, "Balloons belong in church!"

Pray that God will remind you daily of the joy that is yours through Jesus.

*The righteous are glad; they rejoice before God and celebrate with joy.
Sing to God! Sing praises to his name.*

*Exalt him who rides on the clouds—his name is the Lord.
Celebrate before him.*

Psalm 68:3-4



As a seminary student, **James Hargrave** and his wife, Sharon, were members of St. Matthews Baptist Church where he was the Children's Ministry Assistant. James eventually spent 25 years serving churches and children through Lifeway Christian Resources.

Walking is a daily activity for most of us; an activity one seldom links with holidays such as Easter or Christmas. Having the topic of *Come Walk with Me* for these Lenten devotionals, the refrain from the old hymn *In the Garden* comes to mind. The refrain starts: *And He walks with me and he talks with me . . .* Some of you are singing this refrain in your head now!

Jesus walks with us *daily*, not just during our high, exciting, mountain-top life events or our low, gut-wrenching life events, when we are in the valleys. He walks with us daily. Are we open daily to His presence?

I enjoy walks several times a week in my neighborhood when weather permits, or in a nearby shopping mall during inclement weather. While walking has been shown to be beneficial to one's *physical* well-being, helping with heart, bone, and muscle functions, I walk more for the *mental and spiritual* wellness aspects. I utilize my walks to spend some time talking with God.

I talk and think about situations and people who are heavy on my heart as well as things that are difficult or hurtful. I ask for guidance in matters where my thoughts are jumbled and tumbled. I thank God for things I notice along my walks, sometimes things I see every day, but often take for granted without thanking God for their presence in my world. These include flowering trees, cool breezes, shade and workers who make my walk smoother and more comfortable. I think about how kind I feel when folks offer a word of thanks to me and then I think how much more our heavenly Father welcomes hearing thanks from us! As much as we appreciate chatting with folks, think about how much our heavenly Father LOVES chatting with us – on ANY day, at ANY time!

Thanks to God for redeeming us through his only Son so we can walk with Him!



Cheryl Basham has been a member of SMBC for 27 years. She is retired from JCPS where she was a project manager for the Computer Education Support Group. Cheryl and her husband, Roger, have one son, Christopher, who is engaged to be married this fall!

I was taken to church for the first time by my best friend and her family. I was in the first grade. I came home determined to learn everything I could about this person named Jesus. That same year my public school teacher, Mrs. Drake, had our class memorize the Christmas story from Luke 2. Since that time, I have lost count of the number of times I have read His story!

Each year I ask God to give me a fresh thought during the Lenten season. This year's thought is a carryover from Christmas 2021: Why was Jesus not known by the town of his birth? You may have noticed that He was most often called "Jesus of Nazareth," not "Jesus of *Bethlehem*."

Joseph, Mary and Jesus were able to live peacefully for a while in Bethlehem . . . until some special visitors came to honor Jesus. God, of course, protected His Son from King Herod's rage, and made a safe place to live in Egypt. Eventually, Joseph moved the family back to his hometown of Nazareth where Jesus lived most of His earthly life.

I am fascinated by John 9 which records Jesus healing a blind man. Jesus is just called "Jesus" in the story, and one of the synagogue leaders' arguments against the blind man's testimony is "but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (v. 29, ESV). The blind man insists his healer is from God.

Matthew and Luke confirm Jesus' Bethlehem connection. Jesus was and is fully divine and fully human. He has to be divine to be the sinless sacrifice. He has to be human in order to die. If I knew Jesus in person, I wonder if I would have accepted Him as readily as I did at age 11. I thank God for all who told the story and passed it on to me.



Brenda Clark joined SMBC in March of 1975. Having retired from the printing industry, Brenda stays busy serving others, and still makes time for Sanctuary Choir and endless Bible study.

Easter is a time of new beginnings. It is spring, and the flowers are blooming, the birds are singing, and the sun is shining!

When I was a young girl, I always got a new outfit to wear for Easter Sunday. We were taught to always wear your best clothes when you went to God's house. As much as I enjoy new clothes, sunrise services are probably my favorite Easter tradition. I have attended services in a cemetery, by the river, in the park, and at church.

The women probably went to the tomb around sunrise. They had followed Jesus' body when Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped him in linen and took him to the tomb. The women had to rest on the Sabbath, but early on Sunday morning they went to the tomb, carrying spices and perfumes to anoint Jesus' body.

I wonder what they talked about as they walked. Did they discuss how they were going to move the rock from the entrance to the tomb? Did they divide the jobs that awaited them? Did they remember stories of their time with Jesus? Did they wonder where the men were?

Imagine their surprise when they found the tomb was not only open, but empty! And that's what Easter is for me – the empty tomb! Yes, the cross and the other stories are important, but the empty tomb is all I need to know!



Madeline Grieb is wife to Werner, mother to Samantha and Jacob, "Oma" to her grandchildren and a retired RN. She has been a member of SMBC for more than 50 years, and teaches the Shepherds Sunday School Class.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Psalm 27:1

Psalm 27 has long been a favorite passage of mine. I grew up on a farm where the darkest nights were filled with animal noises of every kind. The howls of coyotes, the wind blowing barn vents open and closed, and all sorts of other noises made the darkness a very scary place. I had a little, white Bible that I slept with for a long while. I held it close to me and recited the first few verses of this chapter over and over until I fell asleep.

As an adult, I often find myself facing a completely different type of darkness. The work that I do as a chaplain and as an educator in our CPE program offers me the opportunity to see some beautiful moments of God shining in our world, and to bear witness to truly beautiful, blessed moments. However, I also often see terribly dark moments of the human experience. I feel a wave of despair move within me when I witness families tear each other apart, or souls die alone because of COVID.

Those moments take my breath away; I am afraid. My fear is for the parts of our world that cannot find the light I have known, the light that Christ gives me in the darkest moments. In my fear and my heartache, I hear the final two verses of Psalm 27 reaffirm my faith and the strength God has ignited within me. The words from my little white Bible are still close to my heart, and I find the light of hope again: *"I believe that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" Psalm 27:13-14*



Kate Anderson has been married to Chip for 18 years. She is mom to Georgia (16) and Shelby (14). Kate is a CPE Certified Educator Candidate at St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center's Parish CPE and a staff chaplain for Hosparus Health's Inpatient Services. She holds a BA in voice from U of L, an MDiv from Baptist Seminary of KY, and a DMin in Christian Spirituality from McAfee School of Theology.

These weeks of reflecting on Christ's walk to the cross have always made me think about grace.

Growing up in a Christian home, I often heard about the grace God provided to all persons through the gift of Christ on the cross. Even though I made a profession of faith many years ago, I must admit that it wasn't until I was standing before my SMBC *Living Faith Sunday School Class* a few years ago that I truly acknowledged understanding God's grace.

For years my family has carried the journey of my younger brother's struggle with drug addiction in silence. As one decade after another passed, we seldom spoke to family members or friends about this heartbreaking challenge. As the years waned on, I experienced long periods of being very angry at my brother. Although I worked in social ministry for years and knew the reality of addiction, I felt very little compassion for my own brother. I even had moments of growing jealous that he always had my parents' attention so much in our adult lives.

One Easter while I was preparing our Sunday School lesson, I remember this realization hitting me up the side of my head like a flying rock! It was God nudging me and asking, "What makes *you* more deserving of my grace than your brother?" The answer to that question was, "Absolutely nothing!" Each person has their own journey, filled with failures and inadequacies. Yet God is present daily to remind us that His grace is afforded to us *all*.

There isn't any aspect of our lives that God doesn't know about. But as 2 Corinthians 12 says, "*My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.*" (MSG) Once I heard that, I was able to let it happen.

As we walk to the cross this Lenten season, may we be reminded that God's grace is available to all, and it is all we need.



Brina Stephens has been a member of SMBC for more than ten years. On Sunday mornings she can be found with the *Living Faith* or 3/4th Grade Sunday School Classes. She loves teaching, running, and traveling with family. Brina is blessed to be the mother of Navarre and Kayden, wife of Tanya, and daughter of Jodie Stephens.

March 26

John 3:16

The Most Confuddling Verse in the Bible

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

When I reflect on John 3:16 I am *confuddled*. Confuddled seems to best capture how I feel when I reflect on what God did for me – what God the Father, God the Son did for *me* – for *all* of us – for *the whole world*. The idea of being loved so much that God would sacrifice his Son for me . . . I find it difficult to comprehend such a love as this! As I approach the Easter Season, I always reflect on this verse, and I think of how much God loves me, and how much God loves us.

There is a children's story book Bible that tells this story, the story of how much God loves us. The storytellers paraphrase John 3:16 this way: Jesus said, *'God loved the people of the world so much that he gave his only Son. So that anyone who believes in him will have eternal life and never really die.'*

The storybook writers carry this theme of God's love throughout their book, from start to finish, and tie many of the Bible stories they tell back to this one thought: No matter what, in spite of everything, God loves His children with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love!

My prayer for you during this Easter season is that you, too, will experience this confounding, *confuddling* love of God – a love that *No Matter What, In Spite of Everything, loves with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.*

Amen, and Amen!



Dodie Huff-Fletcher has been married to David for over 28 years and has 3 children, 2 grandchildren, 1 cat and 1 guinea pig. Her home is full of activity! Dodie has been a member of St. Matthews Baptist Church for 23 years. She loves spending time with her family and texting her sisters.

March 27
Faith, Hope and Love

1 Corinthians 13

As we walk with Jesus through these special days, we recognize that, seen in the light of eternity, **the Cross of Jesus did not mean defeat**. It means **Jesus defeated sin and death**. God used the manner of execution reserved for the meanest criminals to show His Power to resurrect human life.

We often think of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection for what it means about our future salvation. But **when the Resurrected Jesus returned to the earth, those who believed in Him found that God changed their earthly lives**. Paul trumpets it in Galatians 1, **"But God who is rich in mercy, . . . even when we were dead through our trespasses, has made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him."**

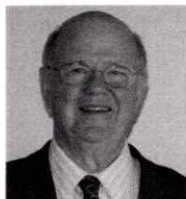
Paul witnesses to the transforming power of God for our here and now. He experienced that resurrection power himself, and he saw it in the lives of other believers. And that's the work God is still in – the business of resurrecting and changing people's lives.

In our years at St. Matthews, we saw that happen again and again – **God's resurrecting power for individuals and families and an entire church** – all lifted up, transformed, and brought together in a beautiful family of believers.

So, what distinguishes believers' lives when they experience this resurrecting power? Paul reflects on this question throughout his writings. But in one place, he gives his ultimate answer. **Christians are distinguished most by Faith, Hope, and Love** (1 Corinthians 13).

That's what we experienced with St. Matthews, **living examples of believers whose lives were marked by Faith, Hope, and Love**. . . those with faith who were dependably faithful. . . those with hope who were positively encouraging. . . those with love who did not draw circles to keep some people out, but who enlarged their circles to bring all people in.

Today as you walk toward Jesus' Cross and Resurrection, will you examine your own Faith, your Hope, and your Love?



Altus Newell served as pastor of SMBC from 1975-1982. He and his wife, Diane, are retired and living in Charleston, SC.

Throughout my life I have always loved solving puzzles, so one of the things that I always looked forward to around Easter was the Easter Egg Hunt. It felt a lot like Christmas. I would get up really early in the morning – at least compared to my typical Sunday routine – walk downstairs, and eagerly wait for mom and dad to tell me I could start the hunt. My brother, Tucker, and I would each get a list of egg colors; then we would race around the house searching for our eggs!

Sometimes they would be hidden in plain sight, other times they would be hidden in obscure places. But without a doubt, every time I found an egg, little celebratory fireworks would go off in my head, motivating me to go and find the next one. At the end we always would go back to the dining room table where we would find a little surprise waiting. Sometimes it was a stuffed animal; other times it was a snack; but it was always really special to me.

As we approach the Easter season, we begin our own Easter Egg Hunt. No matter how young or old we are, each day is like an egg that we can open and learn something new that leads us towards the resurrection. Each day is an opportunity to serve those in need. Each day is an opportunity to reflect and strengthen our relationship with Christ. Every day brings excitement and motivation to pursue the next stage of our Easter journey. Then, when Easter finally comes around, we get to wake up and celebrate the most special surprise of all!



Luke Payne is a sophomore at Centre College where he studies physics and math and runs cross country and track. He grew up in La Grange with parents, Mike and Kelli, and brother, Tucker.

March 29

Luke 9:51-62

Wanderers in the Season of Lent

"When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem..." Luke 9:51

Lent calls to Christian pilgrims. There is a path, and a destination. Jesus is resolute. Off towards his destiny, he calls us to follow – even if we may, Luke shows, have to leave what we think is right and important and change what we assume are the correct ways of acting in this world. There is a path, and a destination.

I'm a bad pilgrim.

In my literal and metaphorical walks, I'm inclined to the side paths, more to looking around than focusing ahead; more to the journey than the goal. And, frankly, as I travel along, hitting me head on with all of the traditional pilgrim's words and interpretations and advice hurts more than it helps.

I'm encouraged, therefore, to read about Christians from centuries ago, from Ireland and Britain and elsewhere, who were called "wanderers." These faithful ones set out from their homes, families, communities, with no set destination – sometimes in a boat with no rudder or oars, or on foot with, at best, only a general sense of destination. Weird? Foolhardy? In a way, yes. Yet they wandered off for the love of Christ. (See Sara Terreault, "The Eschatological Body: Fleeing the Centre in Pre-Modern Insular Christianity and Post-Modern Secularity.") They left what they knew of Christ for the sake of Christ, and the love of God.

And so, a word for us wanderers in Lent. Perhaps your thoughts about the cross, death, resurrection, and discipleship ramble all around. You feel a little odd. Maybe high-sounding churchy-words don't connect, and you need to roam your own way to some new ones. Perhaps you'll even have to leave, painfully but faithfully, a place of comfort because Jesus has set your face to a journey whose route you won't know until it shows itself to you. This year, you may question the familiar, pray with new words, serve uniquely, and be faithful differently.

Don't worry. J.R.R. Tolkien assures us, "Not all those who wander are lost." As always, we *find* Jesus by *following* Jesus, and wanderers and pilgrims will all be together when the Easter sun rises.



Joel Wetherington and his wife Carol have been part of the SMBC family since 1993. They are the proud parents of Sarah and Adam and are happy to report that being grandparents to their first grandchild, Olivia, is every bit the blessing they were told it would be!

I have always seen Easter as the season of hope. It may be due to a song that was always part of Lenten worship at the church I attended in Waco during my days at Baylor. The song, whose lyrics were written by Andrew Peterson was called "In the Night."

The song reminded the listener of stories – from Jacob wrestling with the angel to the prodigal son to the woman waiting to be stoned. Each story described a moment of hopelessness that culminated with deliverance by God. Each verse of the song ended with the phrase "My hope lives on." Peterson continues to the story of Jesus on the cross, leaving the listener with the feeling that all hope was gone on that Friday we call Good.

The song was a build-up to Easter Sunday. As a listener you could place yourself in the shoes of Mary and the disciples, thinking that the one that should have delivered us all was gone . . . but on Sunday, all hope was restored. Through Christ's resurrection, "hope lives on."

All of us can think of moments from the past year where we have asked God to reveal his presence, or remind us that he truly is with us. The season of Lent and Easter have been those reminders for me. Easter brings the reassurance of the ever presence of God with us, and reminds us that when all seems lost, God is still at work, and all will be revealed in its own time. It is a remaking of what was old into something new. The world changed on Easter Sunday when the tomb was found open. It was a statement from God, "All will be well, I am here."

Hope lives on.



Rev. Allison Rodgers grew up at St. Matthews Baptist Church. She attended Georgetown College in Georgetown, KY and George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University. Allison is currently serving as a Staff Chaplain at Baptist Health Hardin in Elizabethtown, KY. She finds peace and joy being outside with her German Shepherd mix, Daisy, and being an aunt to her nephew and niece. She is the daughter of Barry and Linda Rodgers.

March 31

Luke 22:42, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Romans 12:2

No Matter What Life Brings

Walking with God is my everything. Walking with God is what keeps me from being miserable when many things in my life have not gone the way I expected or wanted.

At thirty-one, I figured I would have taught public school for several years, be married with kids, and volunteering occasionally in the children's department at church. God had other plans. I am still single, no kids, I teach part time at St. Matthews Baptist Preschool, volunteer weekly with the youth, and I am a deacon.

It would be easy for me to live in despair, but Jesus didn't always get what He wanted either. Walking with God, or rather God walking with *me*, keeps my mind on the focus of His will. Going to church, actually going and sitting in worship, studying the Bible, intentionally praying, being mindful about the music I listen to, and having Christ-focused people to depend on are all part of keeping God at the forefront of my life.

This doesn't mean I am always joyful with my own life. In fact, sometimes working with other people's kids makes it harder on me not having my own. But I have learned it is okay. I can be sad for things not being the way I want, but still be happy with the life God has given me. It is okay to allow myself to feel that grief, but still be thankful for this time of singleness. It is okay because God is right there with me, feeling my hurt and my grief and my disappointment, and He's got me, no matter what life brings.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16



Stephanie Bell teaches Weekday Preschool at SMBC. She also volunteers with youth, serves as a Deacon and heads up Branching Out, a ministry to our singles. Stephanie can also occasionally be seen being sawed in two or locked in a box by David Garrard!

Since I have the privilege of serving as editor for this booklet, and since I have been watching, studying and performing magic for more than 50 years, I simply could not resist writing the devotional for April 1 – April Fools Day!

Like a good magic show, the Bible is filled with “no way!” moments – times when eyes fly open, jaws drop, and words fail because you simply cannot believe what you are seeing or hearing. We find one of those moments in Acts 12 with Peter’s miraculous escape from prison. When Rhoda tells the disciples that Peter is standing at the door they respond with, “That’s crazy! No way! You’re out of your mind!”

We see another “no way!” moment on a lake in Galilee, when Jesus appears out of the darkness, walking on the water in the midst of a raging storm. The disciples simply cannot believe their eyes! In Mark’s words, “They were completely amazed!”

And we find a quieter “no way” moment at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:28 tells us that when Jesus finished teaching, “The crowds were amazed at all he had said.” They could not believe their ears. It was like nothing they had ever heard before.

But the Bible’s biggest and best “no way” moments happen on Easter morning as word gradually begins to spread that Jesus is alive. First, the women at the tomb; then the disciples; Thomas; a lakeside breakfast; two men walking along the road to Emmaus; and finally, a crowd gathered on a hillside staring up into the skies.

He is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

No way!! No fooling!!



David Garrard and his wife, Stephanie, live in Finchville, Kentucky where they grow grass (the legal kind!) and enjoy being retired. David served as Minister to Children at SMBC for 42 years. They are members of the Journey of Faith Sunday School Class.

April 2

Romans 5:1-5

Easter Lilies and Easter Hope!

When thinking of Easter, my thoughts turn back to a tradition my family had early in our lives. My grandfather on my Mother's side of the family loved gardening, and raised daylilies of all varieties. In fact, as we moved from one location to another, we always dug up and replanted bulbs that we had saved from his garden. We began buying Easter Lilies to celebrate this special time of the year, and also as a remembrance of my grandfather as well as the lives of others in our family. As the lily flowers faded, we planted the bulbs in our garden, expectantly awaiting their rebirth in the springs to come.

An Easter lily begins life as a modest bulb, and after three years underground, blooms anew into a fragrant flower. Similarly, Jesus began life as a mere human who, after death spent three days in a tomb before arising anew on Easter. There are theories that Easter lilies grew where Jesus' tears and blood fell from the cross. The flowers are often referred to as "apostles of hope," the trumpet shape of the bloom sounding the message that Jesus has risen.

Loss of a family member, COVID, loss of a pastor, economic setbacks, the threat of war, etc. are difficult challenges we face, but the Easter message of Hope sustains me. Knowing that there may be tough periods in our lives, whether they be in our personal lives, church life, or in our world, we are uplifted realizing that God's life and love will strengthen and guide us through these hard times.

We journey together in partnership with God and with each other, for the Easter message gives us hope to face the uncertainties of the future. As Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*



Jan Shockley has been a member of SMBC since 1984. She and her husband, Norris have two grown children and four grandchildren. Jan loves spending time with family, traveling (especially to the beach!) and volunteering with God's Designs.

April 3 Pascha and Cuaresma!

Romans 12:9-13

I live in Kyiv, Ukraine with my husband, Gennady. We are CBF missionaries. In Ukraine, Eastern Orthodox Christianity recognizes a different date for Easter because they follow the Julian calendar, as opposed to the Gregorian calendar in use by most countries today. *Pascha* means Easter in Ukrainian.

In Ukraine people decorate with *pysankys*, which are hard boiled eggs that have been decorated for Easter using beeswax and red dye to symbolize the blood of Christ. Good Friday is also called Mourning Friday because it is the day when Christ died. People are supposed to fast and go to church. You are not supposed to do any manual labor or laugh on that day. On Easter Sunday people greet each other with the phrase "Christ is risen," and people respond, "He is Risen indeed!" This is repeated 3 times.

I grew up in Mexico and in Mexico, *Cuaresma* means Easter! As a child my favorite Easter tradition was *Capirotada*, a bread pudding eaten only during Lent. The ingredients have profound symbolism. The bread represents the body of Christ; the cinnamon sticks, the cross where Jesus was crucified; the cloves, the nails on the cross; the syrup (made with sugar cane), the blood of Christ; and the white cheese, the holy shroud. Nuts, raisins, peanuts and multi-colored sprinkles are sometimes added to represent the joy of the resurrection. Fiesta time!

Lent is a time to turn towards God, a time to repent. Practicing Lent traditions helps us focus on our sins, and on what Christ did for us on the cross. It also reminds us of the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ! And so during this season, I encourage you to find some ordinary items, like the ingredients I mentioned above, and put them somewhere in your home where they will be easily seen during Lent. Let them remind you daily of this important time of repentance, consecration and soon, celebration!

The Lord is Risen! He is Risen, indeed!



Mina Podgaiskaya, her husband Gennady, and their 3 children, Bogdan, Mark and Ana Maria, were part of St. Matthews Baptist from 1998-2002, while studying at Southern Seminary and preparing to go to the mission field. The Podgaiskys have been serving as CBF field personnel in Kyiv, Ukraine since 2002.

Easter bunnies, family egg hunts, chocolates, jellybeans, frilly dresses, and attending church. These are things the before-9-years-old me thought of with Easter. But at age 10, my twin sister and I were baptized at a Catholic church at Easter Vigil, a midnight service. When the priest poured the water on us, we were filled with the joy and laughter of the Holy Spirit, to the displeasure of my parents and others.

Easter has since become for me a time to reflect on Jesus and his sacrifice for us. In college I cried watching *The Passion of the Christ*, witnessing Jesus' pain and agony through the trials, beatings, and as he walked and stumbled, carrying the cross on which he would be crucified. Jesus did this for me, and for all of us, so that we could be in complete relationship with God, forgiven of our sins. This was God's plan from the beginning.

In Luke chapter nine, Jesus predicts his death. Then he tells the disciples that if they want to follow him they should first deny themselves (seek humility) and take up their own crosses daily. For me, some of those crosses are infertility, childlessness, and depression.

Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and Paul with his thorn of flesh, I have pleaded and prayed for God to take them away many times, and yet they remain. God's answer to Paul can be found in 2 Corinthians 12:9 "My (God's) grace is sufficient for you, for my (God's) power is made perfect in (your) weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Jesus' perseverance in walking towards the cross was accomplished by God's strength. That can be the same for us as we remain in relationship with God and walk with him. I have found my strength in walking with God daily through prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship.

Have you thought about what your crosses might be? In what do you find your strength?



Kelly Barnes is wife to Brandon, twin sister to Shelly, aunt to nieces Katie, Megan, Allie and Mary, and receptionist at the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center located at our church. She is super-competitive and enjoys games of all kinds— especially beating Brandon in Hearts!

April 5

Lamentations 3:22-23

A Family Miracle at Easter

I must confess that when I was growing up, I probably gave more thought to my new Easter outfit than I did to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. *Easter Parade* was a popular song, and I can remember a black velvet dress with a white lace collar that my mother made, with shiny black patent Mary Janes to go with it. But the only Easter Parade in town went up the steps of the First Baptist Church in Hodgenville!

As Easter approaches this year, I remember an early one which could easily have been my last.

I was about seven when my worried father pulled me out of a pick-up truck that was overturned and lying on its side in a ditch. Broken eggs were scattered in the cab. I was crying and still clutching my empty Easter basket. My parents thought I was hurt, but when they found out it was about my broken Easter eggs, they laughed with relief.

We had driven through a light snow on our way to Barren County to pick up my mother's mother, who still lived at the old home place. The family dinner was to be at the home of a newly married aunt. My young uncle, who made it his business to teach me things like frog gigging and snipe hunting, asked if I wanted to ride with him in the truck. He was to lead the way. My parents and grandmother would follow in the car. It was one of those rare Easter snows in Kentucky. I can remember my mother being concerned that the snow might turn to ice.

And so it was that on a gentle, uphill curve the truck went out of control and ended up facing the other way, on its side, in the ditch. You can imagine the prayers that went up from the following car as they had to watch this near tragedy play out.

That's all I can remember about that day except that my uncle was not injured either. I cannot imagine how he got out of the truck, or what kept me from landing on top of him when we overturned. There were no seat belts back then. But I think my uncle learned a lesson about the dangers of driving too fast on ice, and I learned not to cry over broken eggs!

Thank you, Lord, for letting me survive all the close calls, known and unknown, throughout my long life.



Elaine Akin was born just two miles from the Lincoln Cabin in what is now LaRue County. She is a graduate of the University of Kentucky and a poet who has authored five books – if you count one that was typed on an old Underwood typewriter and duplicated with carbon paper! Elaine has been a faithful member of SMBC for 21 years.

April 6
The New Has Come!

Matthew 6:25-33

Growing up in a Christian family, going to church on Easter was a special time. We dressed in our new Easter best, and attended sunrise service in a beautiful sanctuary, had breakfast at church, attended Sunday School and then a second service before we left to enjoy lunch with grandparents and extended family.

With five children in the family there were lean years when we could not afford to have new Easter best. As a child, I remember feeling embarrassed that I might have to wear a hand-me-down, or last year's Easter outfit again.

When I worry about what to wear today, I am reminded of a portion of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, "And why do you worry about clothes?" (Matthew 6:28) He talks about the lilies of the field and how God provides for them. God knows that we need food, clothing and shelter, and God will provide for us. Jesus follows with, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

I do not have to purchase a new Easter outfit this year. Christ has purchased one for me. Through the grace of God, my life is renewed daily. I put on new Easter best every day. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, and the new has come."

As we worship together this Easter, I may be wearing my old clothes, but I will be a new person in Christ. The gift of resurrection allows me to begin refreshed and new each day, becoming the person God wants me to be.



Carla McCormick has been a member of SMBC for 21 years. She is the Team Leader for the Grand Viewers and enjoys working with this team planning activities. She has two children and three grandchildren. Carla loves her family, and her church family!

April 7
Oh, How I Love Jesus!

John 21:15-17

Oh, how I love Jesus is a familiar refrain to most of us. But the question remains: **How much?** How much do we love Jesus?

Do we roll over for a few more winks and watch the Sunday morning service in our PJ's? (I'm guilty.) Or do we remind ourselves of Hebrews 10:25, which says, "Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . .?"

Would I be willing to sell my home and my precious possessions if led to do so by the Holy Spirit? Hmm . . .

Here's a big one . . . Would I be willing to sacrifice a loved one, like Abraham did?

We KNOW how much God loves us. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we were healed." (NIV)

Let us spend time during this Lenten season strengthening our love relationship with Jesus!



Linda Durand is the oldest of 5, and a retired schoolteacher. She is a graduate of Kentucky Southern and also has an honorary degree from Berea College. Linda has been a member of SMBC since 1972, and has served our church in many ways, including chairing our Building and Grounds Committee. For years she personally cleaned out the bed around the church sign in preparation for Easter Sunday!

April 8

Ephesians 1:15-20

The What and Why of Easter

Every spring we begin looking forward to Easter. We notice the rainbow of colors everywhere. The flowers in our garden start to bloom and their colors match the bright attire we pull out of our closets to wear. And in the weeks prior to Easter, we see holiday baskets of all different kinds stocked on store shelves.

I enjoy the Easter tradition of filling those plastic multi-colored Easter eggs with candy or other small treasures. My son loves to gather and pop them all open excitedly after his Egg Hunt. I also love Easter times when my family gets together. My home is filled with smiles and laughter. And my favorite part, is taking pictures of everyone, including the dog, Buddy!

With Easter just around the corner, we need to remember *why* we celebrate. While we are filling those plastic multi-colored eggs with treasures, let's remember that God gifted us with so much more. Romans 12 lists those gifts— preaching, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, and helping others.

Jesus knew he was going to suffer and be betrayed by Judas. Judas sealed his fate of betrayal when he accepted 30 pieces of silver from the Chief Priests and planted a kiss on Jesus' cheek. All this happened right before Jesus was arrested. God's promises to us in 1 John 4:10 tell us that *this is love* – not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us, and sent his Son to be the expiration for our sins. All that we believe about God's forgiveness, salvation and transformation depends on Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus Christ suffered, died, and was buried, but on the third day he rose from the dead. This makes up *the what and the why* of our Easter celebration. In Philippians 3:10 Paul writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in death." And so any suffering for Jesus' sake provides *proof* of our fellowship with Christ.

Ephesians 1:17-18: I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the glorious father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be the hope of his calling.



Heather Kaiser hails from Staten Island, New York. She has been a member of SMBC since November of 2021. Heather has 19-year-old twin daughters and 18 and 7 year-old sons. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, studying the Bible and journaling.

I remember waking up Easter mornings to scratchy dresses and uncomfortable shoes; then piling into the car and racing off to church breakfast, where I hurriedly looked for my friends. Pure togetherness: the excitement of confetti eggs in Sunday School, and the anticipation of coming home to find what the Easter Bunny had left.

After the service, we always went to my aunt's house, where dip-dyeing kits and family occupied the garage. Our day continued as the adults hid our art projects and we kids peered through each blade of grass in hopes of uncovering every last one. Once our baskets were filled, we piled into the front yard and pelted each other with the pastel-colored hard-boiled eggs!

These fun festivities are now cherished memories. Throwing hard-boiled eggs at one another may seem meaningless, but this non-traditional tradition brought smiles to faces and allowed for moments of pause in our otherwise hectic lives.

When we are young, much of Easter focuses on material possessions. We are awaiting chocolate rabbits and plastic chicks. As we grow, the focus shifts, and we can more fully recognize the true meaning of the holiday. We begin to process the miracle of Christ's resurrection.

This Lenten season, as we remember God's promise, let us thank him not only for Jesus, but for all he has done – the communities he has provided us with, our cherished family and friends. Through this gratitude, reach out. Do not remain stagnant in God's love; use it to fuel your growth and the growth of others.

It is a great thing to celebrate Easter, but the celebration is only made better by sharing it in the fellowship of our neighbors. So as we look back on old memories, let's commit to making new ones as well. This year, look towards a different kind of gift.



Mary Helen Kirkland is a junior at Ballard High and a faithful member of the SMBC youth group. She enjoys participating in church events, singing, painting, playing the guitar, spending time in nature and hanging out with friends. Mary Helen painted the picture that adorns the cover of this booklet. She is the daughter of Steve and Denise Kirkland.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" ... At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. John 12:13, 16 (NIV)

Recorded in each of the Gospels, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem begins the journey to the Cross, a journey that includes crucifixion, darkness, death, silence, burial, and resurrection. In between our Palm Sunday "Hosanna!" and our Easter Sunday "He is risen!" – Jesus suffers unimaginable pain.

Jesus reverses all understanding of kings and kingdoms. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem wasn't one of brute force and power. He came into the city on a donkey, a symbol of the ordinary becoming extraordinary. While each gospel records the triumphal entry, John's gospel makes reference to the disciples not comprehending what was happening. I wonder if I had been living in the midst of this unfolding story if I would understand. Would I believe? Would my vision be accurate? Incomplete? I don't know. I do know that my life has been shaped by the Biblical story of Jesus, his life and ministry, his sacred journey to the cross, and his resurrection.

On Easter weekend 2018, my parents invited me to accompany them to the funeral home as they made preparations for their funerals. Having decided to make these end-of-life decisions themselves while being healthy and able to do so, I supported them in the midst of much anticipatory grief. While choosing caskets, vaults, and reviewing funeral plans, I felt sad; I felt grateful. I'm thankful I still have our earthly relationship, and I find comfort that death is not the end of the story.

Death takes on a completely different meaning when understood in the context of all of that happens during Holy Week. Palm Sunday invites us into this sacred journey with Jesus. May we begin this day ready to fully experience the journey!



Mary Ellen Yates was a member of SMBC for 27 years, and served on staff as our HUGG Minister for 15 of those years. She and her husband, Lee moved to Lebanon, Tennessee in December 2020 to be closer to their families. Mary Ellen is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapy in private practice.

April 11

Romans 5:6-8

Love Lifted Me . . . and You!

It was a beautiful day in the Spring of 2019, and I decided to take a morning walk. I had just turned left out of the drive and was starting up the hill when I heard commotion coming from the Cottrell farm on the right. Their sheep and lambs were over on the roadside of the lake, and I had already taken a picture of them, but the noise was coming from the other side of the lake.

When I got where I could see, there were two young girls down by the edge of the lake. One had a net in her hand. They were frantic about something in the water, but I couldn't tell what. I shouted, "Do you need help?" and they shouted back, "Yes!"

I ran around the lake and down the hill to where they were. A baby lamb was out in the lake, and they were trying to rescue him! He was trying to get to his mother who was on the other side of the lake near the road. The shortest distance between two points being a straight line, he had just plunged into the water!

As I ran up into the yard my neighbor's elderly parents were out there watching this little drama unfold. They told me the sheep and lambs never go in the water . . . mainly because they can't swim. If the little guy drifted any deeper into the lake he would drown.

I ran down to the water, took off my socks and shoes, waded in and hauled him out!

This happened during Holy Week. Thinking back on it all later, it was not lost on me that during a week that a Lamb saved me, I had the privilege of saving a lamb! The famous hymn, *Love Lifted Me*, suddenly had new meaning for me . . . and now perhaps also for you!

I was sinking deep in sin . . . but love lifted me. Thanks be to God!



David Garrard and his wife, Stephanie, live in Finchville, Kentucky where they grow grass (the legal kind!) and enjoy being retired. David served as Minister to Children at SMBC for 42 years. They are members of the Journey of Faith Sunday School Class.

April 12
Let it Be

Genesis 1:3, Matthew 26:36-39

*When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me,
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
And in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me,
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
Let it be, let it be,
Let it be, let it be.
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.*

(Paul McCartney)

In the beginning God said, "Let there be..." and it was so. When the divine plan came to fully identify with the suffering of humanity it required the consent of the chosen. The "let it be" of creation now found its expression in the incarnation, and Mary's profound consent to the angelic annunciation, "Let it be as you have said."

In his hour of darkness, Jesus chose to "let it be" the Father's will over his own. When at the cross and humanities great darkness Jesus chose consent to the Divine will over reactivity; he chose grace over retribution.

From incarnation to resurrection, the way of Jesus is a self-emptying way (Philippians 2). And it is in following the self-emptying way of Jesus that we are paradoxically filled. The old vessel must be emptied of its old wine before new wine can be poured into new wineskins. This requires our consent.

And so, as the Divine plan crosses over into our plans, "let it be." To die before we die is the paradoxical power of transformation. "Let it be" according to *Your* will O, God, not according to mine.

In the end, "Let it be" is not passivity or resignation. It is *active consent* to the flow of Divine will and initiative. It is, after having pondered all these things in our own hearts as well as in the heart-filled prayer of Jesus, consenting to the Divine will. It is self-emptying and Divine in-filling.

Let it be.



Glenn Williams and his wife, Kathy have been members of SMBC since 1994. They are the parents of Caleb (deceased) and Rachel.

April 13

John 19:1-18

My Earliest Easter Memory

I have forgotten most of my early childhood life – the days before our family moved from the US to the mission field. However, one of my earliest and most vivid surviving memories surrounds my first remembrance of Good Friday.

I don't know how old I was – maybe somewhere around the age of five. I remember my mother was in the back part of the house sewing while I was watching television. I don't know what the movie was. It must have been a dramatic representation of the life of Christ from the 50s. I remember being engrossed in the movie until the crucifixion scene. Upon seeing that representation of the death of Jesus, I remember being distraught and dismayed. I remember running back to my mom crying: "They killed Jesus! They killed Jesus!" I don't remember any of the ensuing conversation, or the consolation my mother would have provided. Just my overwhelming grief and sorrow.

To this day, Good Friday is still a difficult day of remembrance for me. I can't watch movies like Mel Gibson's *"The Passion of the Christ."* It's too real, too visceral, too disturbing. The cruelty and inhumanity that we are capable of inflicting upon each other, let alone upon God incarnate . . . The cruelty and suffering willingly endured by Jesus because of my sin, my transgressions . . . A day that came at a great price for the Son of God. A day that I am soberly mindful of, and yet eternally joyful and grateful for.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, thank you for having mercy upon me, a sinner!



David Fletcher moved to Louisville in 1987 to attend Southern Seminary where he met and married Dodie Huff. God has blessed the couple with three children and two wonderful granddaughters, all of whom have been gifts of grace and mercy, and the source of life-shaping lessons from God. David teaches the Branching Out Sunday School class.

A single, brief mention of a poignant moment near the end of Christ's crucifixion is as familiar as if it had appeared in all four Gospels and not just John 19. Its telling in *The Message* reflects comparable moments in our own lives.

"While the soldiers were looking after themselves, Jesus' mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross."

Having crucified Jesus, and having divided His clothing, fulfilling scripture by casting lots for His robe, the soldiers were no longer interested. Other persons were still there, attentive – a family, gathered near someone who is actively dying. Crucifixion is an especially violent act, one intended to inflict blinding pain and to create overwhelming hopelessness.

"Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her." Jesus saw – an action verb – two who were especially important to Him.

Jesus *spoke* – another action verb – we imagine, softly, tenderly. He said to his mother, *'Woman, here is your son.'* Then to the disciple, *'Here is your mother.'* *"Take care of each other. Forge a special relationship."* This was a forever commission.

I have borne witness, within my own family, and as a hospice volunteer, to such statements by someone who has but few breaths left in this life. It is a somber moment, this conferring of a new lifelong bond. It is a donning of great responsibility to and for another.

"From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother."

The disciple *accepted* – an action verb! Testimony! The Commitment was kept! A familiar Spiritual comes to mind.

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

A lifetime of preparation, holding values that enable us to follow not only Jesus' path, but also the path of His Mother, and that of the disciple He loved, enables us to keep such commitments to each other, just as they did long ago. They were *there*. For Him, and then for each other.

In this, I find a profound blessing of Easter.



Bruce Quick has been a member of SMBC since December of 2012. He is married to Mitzi.

The use of punctuation in assuring the effectiveness of a message has always been of interest to me. Separating and clarifying words with certain marks make their proper placement (or misplacement!) critical. Periods, commas, colons, etc. have an impact on meaning and intent of what is being understood.

With apologies to grammar experts everywhere, here are some definitions. A period (.) concludes a thought. A comma (,) indicates a pause. A question mark (?) requires a response. A colon (:) is used when what comes next is directly related to the previous statement. An exclamation mark (!) is used to convey excitement, to make a strong point.

Thus, my take on announcing to the world the breathtaking message of what occurred on that Friday to Sunday Easter would be:

It is finished: He is risen!!! Hallelujah!!
(Friday) (Sunday) (Forever)



Jack Fox is married to Lou, proud father of Heather and Jill and glowing grandfather of Ruby and Frances. The Foxes have been SMBC members since 1980. Jack has served as a Deacon, Bible Study Teacher and Voice Over Dude!

More

To a little girl, Easter is baskets and bunnies and bows. To *this* little girl, Easter was all of these, and *more*. Each year at Eastertime, I would ask, "Is Daddy leading the service? May I go? Please!"

My father, who was a Baptist pastor, helped lead a sunrise service at the local cemetery. The property was immense – especially to a little girl. In the very back of the cemetery was a garden and a replica of Jesus' tomb. To this little girl, with no sense of place and time, *this was it!* This was the place where they lay the body of Jesus. *This* was where an earthquake rolled back the stone. *This* was where an angel spoke to Mary saying, "He is not here. He is risen, just as he said."

Fast forward a few years (let's not say how many!) . . . I still live in the community where I grew up. The sunrise service is still led by ministers on a rotating basis. But I no longer wait to find out if my father will be leading it. My *Heavenly* Father is, and so I go.

I see the place that represents where Jesus' body lay. I see the stone rolled back. I see the angel statues. And I hear, once again those words – words that brought wonder to a little girl: "He is not here. He is risen, just as he said."

After the service, as day continues to dawn, I walk through the garden. I imagine what it was like for Mary to hear her name called by Jesus. I listen for my name to be called . . . and it always is. "Deborah, come walk with me." And I do.

I walk beyond the baskets, bunnies, and bows to the *more* that is my own resurrection – no longer a little girl, but ever childlike, I hope, to the wonder of it all.



Deborah Garrard is Executive Director and Lead Coach of the nonprofit wellness initiative, *be(e) well serve well*, serving those who serve. She lives in Atlanta, where she enjoys walking, cycling, swimming, gardening, reading, and serving others. Deborah is the sister of David Garrard.

April 17

Matthew 28:1-10

Resurrection Morning: Let's Roll!

The beautiful thing about Jesus' Resurrection is that it transforms our hopelessness, our discouragement, and our despair into the dawning of the New Creation. Even as Jesus did with the two on the Emmaus Road, He comes to us still, transforming our darkness into dawn.

My friend, as you and I make our way through this terror-infested world, the Resurrection reminds us that, whatever things look like to us, God's love and God's power are more than sufficient to redeem and to restore us and the very Creation itself. The Resurrection is a firm place to stand when everything around us seems to be going to pieces.

Verlin Kruschwitz liked to say that Jesus made four things from the wood of Calvary's Cross: (1) He made the balance beam for a scale that shows the infinite worth of every person, made in God's image; (2) He made a coffin in which to bury sin and death; (3) He made a ladder that takes us to heaven, a ladder let down from the top; and, (4) He made a throne upon which He will reign for ever and ever as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Further, the Bible tells us that Jesus endured the *agony* of the cross for the sake of the joy that He gained through it (Hebrews 12:2). And what was gained through the cross that would not have been available without it?

The message of Resurrection Morning is that *God so values you that Jesus endured the cross to gain the possibility of spending eternity with you. God wants to spend eternity with you, and God wants you to bring as many others with you as you can.* My friend, the Tomb is Empty. We have been Redeemed. Let's Roll!



Dave Stancil served SMBC as Minister of Pastoral Care from 1987-1989, and as Associate Pastor from 1996 - 2001. He has also served as Pastor of First Baptist Carlisle, KY, First Baptist Bristol, VA, and the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD. Dave has been married to Jill for almost 50 years. They have two grown children, Nathan and Anna. The Stancils have retired to the mountains of southwest Virginia, where they attend a small Episcopal church.