

Lilies of the Field

Matthew 6:28-29 (NIV)

... See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

I was reading my Bible one day and came across the “do not worry” part of scripture that mentions the lilies of the field. I am learning that scripture uses parts of everyday life so we can relate to what God is trying to impart. I was prompted to do some light research (Wikipedia and *The New Illustrated Encyclopedia of Gardening*) to see why lilies were used in this passage above. I will not attempt to provide an in-depth horticulture lesson, but I would just like to share a few facts that I discovered. I was amazed at how many similarities I was able to tie back to biblical things.

Lilies are considered the most beautiful and ornamental of bulb plants for cultivation in a greenhouse or outdoors. They produce roots that are perennial and seem to be alive at all seasons. Some grow in shade; others in sun. There are many ways to grow them, and there are many varieties. Many countries grow them, including Japan, India, Philippines, Canada, and the United States. They produce beautiful flowers in many colors, not just the traditional white we see at Easter. The botanical name is given in Latin (*Lilium*) and Greek (*Leirion*). The flowers can be classified by flower aspect: up-facing, out-facing, down-facing.

I was reminded of the Parable of the Sower about seeds that take root and grow, referring to the Word. The roots are alive in all seasons. I see us as alive in Christ despite the season. We are unique and different, learning in different ways or growing in different ways. We live in different countries. Words in scripture are given in Latin and Greek. Finally, the flower aspect words (up-facing, out-facing, down-facing) are reminiscent of Jesus on the cross.

Dear Lord, lilies are worldwide, and the Word is worldwide. Please help us find universal unity so we can stand firm and strong in our faith and love of you.

*Lacy Haynicz
Trinity United Methodist Church*



Note: One of our proofreaders noted a correlation of Christians to the aspects of lilies: up-facing – in praise; out-facing – in evangelism, and down-facing – in prayer.

CAUTION!

Matthew 7:24-25 (NIV)

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

There we were, thousands of runners coming down the street with nothing in front of us but miles of pavement and a determination to cross the finish line. However, partway into the run you could hear the pre-recorded message blaring through speakers with a warning: “Caution runners, speed bump in road.”

The closer runners got to the speed bump, the louder the message rang out over and over again. Yet one runner with headphones on and music cranked up so loud that others could hear it totally missed the caution and stumbled across the speed bump, nearly tossing him to the ground. He had ignored what had been written in the pre-race pamphlet and again echoed at the start line: watch for speed bumps.

The apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth the same thing when he said “run in such a way as to get the prize.” The prize is not just heaven, but it is to have an encounter with Christ and to develop a relationship with our Savior each day.

Yet Jesus also cautioned us about the bumps in life that can trip us up.

Caution: Holding onto anger leads to resentment.

Caution: Worry paralyzes your life.

Caution: Unforgiveness leads to bitterness.

Caution: Judging others is how you will be judged.

Lent is a season when we learn how to run the race again by seeking Jesus to guide our lives. However, take caution: ignoring the words of Christ will certainly trip you up.

Lord Jesus, help us to not only read but understand and apply your words into our lives this day, that we might run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Amen.

*Pastor Glenn Conaway
Trinity United Methodist Church*



He wore a crown of thorns
That we might wear a crown of life.

Carolyn Owens

Tuesday, February 23

My God Is Big!

Luke 12:31-32 (KJV)

But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

My husband and I were sitting on the beach last summer. It was a lovely day, and as Bob was reading, I sat there talking to God. I told Him how I admired His creation ... the beach, the ocean, and the sky. Since I know the verse, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find," I often ask God to show me something special today – maybe a few dolphins. I had seen dolphins before many times and never tired of their graceful trek down the coast. Now I would seek ...

So I looked for a while but no dolphins. I was all right with that because the day was great anyway.

I was getting hot so I went for a dip in the ocean. A big wave rolled toward me so I turned around so the wave would hit my back. As it jostled me, I looked up into the sky. There before me was a huge cloud in the perfect shape of a dolphin! I was overjoyed! I jumped around in the waves like a kid for a good long time. I was thanking God and praising Him, all the while keeping an eye on my dolphin as it slowly floated down the coast! And it wasn't the dolphin cloud in particular that made me so happy, but the fact that God heard me. I am special to God, and we had a great day together.

If we ask, God will provide. Maybe not in the way we expect, but God knows what is best for us. If we seek, we will find. God will even help us find. He used an ocean wave to help me find my dolphin. If we knock, God will open the door so we can have a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, our Savior. God wants to bless you. Not only with earthly things, but God's good pleasure is to give you a heavenly kingdom. If God can make me feel this good with a few puffy clouds, what will heaven be like? Awesome!

Thank you, Father God, for making me feel so special! I am blessed to be your daughter. I ask that you keep me close and safe. And I ask it in the precious name of Jesus, our Savior, Amen.

*Betty-Jo Zeno
Evangelical United Methodist Church*

The True Light

Psalm 119:105 (KJV)

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

One summer evening my husband John and I walked to the end of the Ocean City, NJ, boardwalk. We stood for a while enjoying the view. Off in the distance we could see the bright lights of Atlantic City's casinos. Turning and looking out over the ocean, we saw the moonlight reflected on the waves. The full moon made a glowing golden pathway over the water. This golden pathway made it look as if it could take us right up to the heavens ... a beautiful sight!

Later I pondered the difference between the two lights. One was artificial lighting dependent on man's technology to keep the light casting its glow over the area. The other, the moon, was hung in space and kept there by God's command.

The casino lights lure people to come, take a chance, give their money and they might win some back ... no guarantees.

The golden pathway reflecting the moon reminds us of God's constancy – that He made and flung into space the sun, moon, and stars to benefit the earth ... nothing left to chance.

God promises to provide for our needs, and His Word is sure and true. He tells us He will light the way before us.

Which light do we trust to help us find our way in life and meet our needs?

Thank you, Lord, for the light that illumines our path as we meditate on your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Mary Lou Stetser
Zion Community Church*



Growing by Grace

I am not what I ought to be.
I am not what I wish to be.
I am not even what I hope to be,
but by God's grace and Christ's love,
I am not what I was!

Natalie Sanders

Thursday, February 25

Being Thankful

Psalm 118:1, 24 (NLT)

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. This is the day the LORD has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

I am so glad to see the light each day and rejoice that our Lord has given me another day. I have COPD, but because of my love of the Lord, I refuse to sit in a chair and say, “Oh, poor me.” There is so much more to do, and I am thankful for each day to do more. He helps me keep going, and I am so happy.

There are friends and church family to check on; I am not good at this, but I can send cards and make calls. The Lord has blessed me with so many things I love to do. I love to cross stitch, and I love to knit for the church and my family (by the time you read this I will have a new grandson). I love to sew, be it mending, crafts, or toys for my grand kitties, or doll clothes for my great granddaughter. Of course I do take a little time to cook, which I enjoy, and clean (not my best talent). And let us not forget time to read the Bible and do devotions.

On top of this, I now have exercises I must do and also meds in the nebulizer. This all takes time. How in the world can anyone be bored when there are so many choices and so much to do? Is this not a reason to give thanks and praise?

I am also so thankful for the love which is shown to me by my church family, friends, and my family – they all make my world go round. Many of you think it’s nothing, but there are those who drive me, open doors for me, take me to doctor appointments, run my errands, and even just share a smile. Every one of these things is a huge help to me. God has put all these folks in my life, and how can I not praise and rejoice and be happy?

What a JOY to share each day with our Lord who loved us so much He gave His life for you and me.

May we give thanks and rejoice each day for all the Lord has given each of us. I am so unworthy, Lord, but I praise you and thank you.

Jane Pape

Pitman United Methodist Church

If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand.

John Wesley

A Walk in the Park

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I love taking my dogs walking at my local park. My dog Jesse can hardly contain his excitement as I tie up my sneakers. But there was a time not too long ago when I could barely walk myself, let alone walk my dogs.

A year ago my husband Jim passed away suddenly, after many years of health complications – years of dealing with rheumatoid arthritis, surgery upon surgery, bladder cancer, and finally developing a sepsis (blood infection), which ultimately took his life in January 2015.

I was suddenly thrust into an emotional whirlwind. To cope, I began making To Do lists upon To Do lists, something I could control when everything else around me was so chaotic. Those first lists consisted of planning a funeral, ordering flowers, making numerous phone calls, facing financial decisions, all between bouts of uncontrollable tears.

To make matters worse, insomnia came over me, continuing for days with no end in sight. Sobbing one night, as I stared at the ceiling, I realized that I hadn't prayed, not even once – that I hadn't thought about God, or even opened my Bible since Jim left me.

Why was I trying to do this by myself? God wants nothing more than to be involved, hold my hand, and walk with me – if I would just let him.

Why hadn't I thought of Philippians 4:13? That verse had been repeated over and over numerous times in my life. Christ asks us to call upon His strength. I needed to do this when I was anxious before a job interview, sitting in waiting rooms, and doubting my abilities when I suddenly had to become a caretaker of my husband.

This past year was a difficult one. I still have occasional sleepless nights, and I still make my lists. But I start my mornings with a strong cup of coffee and with pen and paper in hand. In all capital letters, I write GOD, followed by the list of things to do.

By keeping God first on my list, the rest is a walk in the park!

Lord, we so often try to do things without you. Help us to ask you first, instead of last, and to keep you at the top of our list every day. Thank you for being there even when we forget.

*Lorie Nagle
Trinity United Methodist Church*

The Blessing of a Good Deed

Philippians 4:19 (NASB)

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

It was a bitter cold day. As I left the mall and headed to my car, I noticed a van pulling into a parking spot. I watched as the driver, a gentleman in a wheelchair, lowered the ramp and exited his car. As I walked by, I noticed he had a slow leak in one of the rear tires on his van. I said to him, "I think you are getting a flat tire. It is too low to drive on. I have an air pump that will plug into your cigarette lighter. Would you like to use it?" He was very appreciative and said yes, but then he realized the lighter in his van did not work. I said, "No problem, I will use my car and we will pump it up, so you can drive somewhere to get it repaired."

The wind was blowing across the parking lot, and it was bitter cold. As his tire was being filled with air, he and I talked. I told him to go on into the mall, where it was warm, and that I would finish pumping the tire. He did not want to leave me to finish the job, since I was helping him.

He finally agreed that he would go on his way, but before leaving he said, "I have always had my needs met in life – not all of my wants – but, see, God sent you to help me with this deflated tire when I was in need. I really appreciate what you have done for me."

As he went into the mall, I felt I was the one who had received the blessing! Once again, God will not put you in a situation you cannot handle. Trust in Him, and He will meet all of your needs.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. When we feel we are in a difficult situation, if we will only trust in you, you will see that "all of our needs are met." Thank you for this man's willingness to give you the praise! In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Fred Tomlin

Glassboro First United Methodist Church

If our devotion is to the cause of humanity, we will be quickly defeated and broken-hearted, since we will often be confronted with a great deal of ingratitude from other people. But if we are motivated by our love for God, no amount of ingratitude will be able to hinder us from serving one another.

Oswald Chambers