

Step Out in Faith

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and 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 28:19-20 (NIV)*

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ~ *1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)*

We have all been instructed to spread the gospel wherever we are when the opportunity arises. Most of us think of evangelism as preachers bringing the gospel message to large crowds. Evangelism is not limited to preachers and places. It is anytime we, as believers, care enough to tell other people what Jesus has done in our life. We must have the courage to speak up and not wait for the other guy to do what Jesus instructed all of us to do. God will be your strength and your guide. He will help you know what to say and how to live so others can see Christ in you and through you.

Our world today is eager to criticize us for talking about our faith, but look around. Our world has never been in more desperate need to hear about hope for the future. Take time to reflect on all Jesus taught in His three short years of preaching while He was on this earth. Let's step out in faith and tell our friends and neighbors what Jesus has done for us.

*Heavenly Father, grant me the courage to share your good news with "my world."
Empower all Christians, by your Spirit, to complete our assignment to spread the gospel!*

Ruth Still

Evangelical United Methodist Church

Silence

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.
~ *Psalm 62:1-2 (NRSVUE)*

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds were gathering to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. Meanwhile, he would slip away to deserted places and pray. ~ *Luke 5:15-16 (NRSVUE)*

I find that my life is very noisy and loud. I create some of the noise myself — I listen to podcasts or audiobooks as I work or cook or clean, or the television is on as background noise. Everywhere I turn there is noise. Even when I turn off the electronic noise, there is still noise — cars on the road, the sounds of an older house, and two talkative cats. I worry that I fill my space with noise so that I am not uncomfortable in the silence.

Even Jesus found the demands of His ministry and the crowds to be overwhelming, and He would “slip away” to a quiet place to spend time with God. I think that for Jesus, prayer was a two-way conversation, time for Jesus to lay His thoughts before God. Then Jesus would spend time in silence listening for God’s response.

When the prophet Elijah sought reassurance of God’s presence, God told him to go and stand on the mountain of God, and God would pass by Elijah. First there was a loud wind, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but that was not where God was. Then there was a fire, but God was not in the fire. Finally, there was silence, and that was when God spoke with Elijah. (1 Kings 19)

This Lent I am going to start a new spiritual discipline of sitting in silence. I will make time to be in silence. I will work to not fill the silence with noise; rather I will sit with the silence so that God has the space to speak to me.

Lord, quiet my heart and mind so that in the silence I will hear your voice speaking to me.

Pastor Christine Day
*St. Paul's United Methodist Church and
Zion United Methodist Church*

Sharing the Blessing

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people. ~ 1 Timothy 2:1 (NIV)

For a long time now, my wife and I have had the habit of saying a prayer before our meals, including whenever we go out to eat. A few years ago we decided that when eating out, we would ask our server if there was something in particular that we could include in our prayer just for them. It turned out that this practice became a wonderful blessing to us in many ways.

Although we've had some who politely declined our prayer, 99 percent of our servers have taken us up on our offer and have told us something they would like us to pray for. Occasionally we would be told that everything in their life was good at that particular time, so we would offer a prayer of thanks on their behalf.

Young people tend to be concerned about future issues such as college grades, paying tuition, or job prospects. The middle-aged often ask for prayers for their children, particularly those with teenagers. And older folks often ask for prayers concerning health issues either for themselves or a close relative.

We feel especially blessed when our server gives us a warm-hearted thank you that lets us know they are truly appreciative of our prayer. On one occasion our server actually sat down and prayed with us. And there have been times when an emotional response is triggered, making us aware that they are in the middle of battling a particularly challenging struggle in their life.

As we approach the Easter celebration of Christ's resurrection, let us remember that Jesus' death and resurrection make it possible for us to personally approach God through Jesus our Savior. We can have confidence that we can ask for anything in Jesus' name and know that God will hear us and answer us. And let us remember to pray for those who cross our paths, whether friend or stranger.

Heavenly Father, please help us remember that you sacrificed your one and only Son so that all who believe may come to you in righteousness. And may we always pray for all of those with whom we come in contact.

Lee Duffield
Wellspring Church

What and Why

He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.” ~ *Mark 9:35 (NLT)*

Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. ~ *Colossians 3:23-24 (NLT)*

In my second career, I had the wonderful opportunity to lead adult discipleship ministries. At its core, the job meant coming alongside others to model and promote the disciplines of our life in Jesus. Yet most important here — what was my attitude in every job and task in each aspect of my role? After all, who was I really working for?

To understand the answer, let’s focus on what’s happening in Mark.

Jesus and the disciples had just passed through Galilee, and Jesus told them that His death — and resurrection — were about to happen. Their response out of Jesus’ earshot was typical human behavior — they argued who would be top disciple to lead after He died and left them.

Of course, Jesus knew exactly what they had been arguing about. He once again leads by example. He gives one of His greatest two-point responses: Whoever is going to be first must do two things: (1) go last, and (2) be a servant to everyone.

We don’t often see this modeled. One example that comes close was Godfrey in *My Man Godfrey*, a 1936 comedy about a socialite’s scavenger hunt to find a “forgotten man” (homeless person). Godfrey, the found forgotten man, takes a job working for the socialite’s family. No matter how rude, how mistreated, how disrespected, Godfrey consistently responds kindly, constantly with great dignity, and always with humility.

Who are you when no one is looking? Are you working for Christ in your interaction with a gas station attendant, on the phone with an insurance company representative, or in your interaction with the people sitting behind you in church?

Both my job attitude and who I was working for has actually never changed in my life. May each of us always know, with God’s help, we can be a servant who remembers who we serve and why we are called to serve.

Gracious Father, fill our lives with gratitude so we have no space for self-promotion. Keep our focus on how any help we offer adds to building your kingdom. Give us a servant heart in all we do, through Jesus Christ in whom we can do all things.

Deb Mongiardo

Shehawken United Methodist Church

God Gives Us Rest

Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
~ *Matthew 11:28 (NIV)*

The Lord replied, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”
~ *Exodus 33:14 (NIV)*

For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. ~ *Hebrews 4:10-11 (NIV)*

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength” ~ *Isaiah 30:15 (NLT)*

I always knew that I needed rest, but as a straight-A, perfectionist kid growing up, I equated productivity with my worth. Meaning, rest equals laziness and less worth. But God has been teaching me about rest.

During this past year, I’ve gotten back into baking, and it’s brought me so much joy. It’s also brought me closer to God. He’s been teaching me things about Himself and about me when I’ve been in the kitchen.

Did you know that dough needs to rest during the process in order to increase its flexibility, make it easier to work with, and allow it to rise to the level it needs to? Without letting dough rest, it can become tough, hard to knead or roll out, may not rise properly, and could lose its flavor.

Even in baking, rest is necessary.

God designed us to need rest, so like the dough, we can work or operate better, do what we were made to do, and be shaped into the person God planned for us to be. Without rest, we become tough (stubborn, burnt out, irritable, etc.), and we can’t grow the way we need to.

One of God’s commands is to rest. It’s not a suggestion — He created us to *need* rest. Without it, we cannot operate properly. Though it’s not just any type of rest, like watching TV or scrolling through your phone.

God promises that *He* gives us rest. That’s the rest we need: true rest. The kind only God can provide.

Resting in God will change your life, and you might learn things you never would have if you hadn’t.

Heavenly Father, thank you for helping us to understand the importance of rest.

Kayla Harrison Kessler
Fellowship Alliance Chapel

Miracles Do Happen

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

~ *Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

It was July 29, 1990, and my in-laws were moving to North Carolina. We were at their house helping to load the truck. People were everywhere — in the yard, in the house. Our 2-year-old daughter was playing with her dolls in the fenced-in yard. I came out carrying some furniture and looked around, and I didn't see her. Everyone immediately started looking and calling for her.

She had climbed the fence and was in the neighbor's pool! We pulled her out, and she wasn't breathing and had only a faint pulse. They flew her to Cooper Hospital but wouldn't let me ride with her. I rode in the car and looked up for the helicopter, but I didn't see it. Instead, I saw two giant hands cradling a tiny child! I have never seen anything like it.

She was in PICU (pediatric intensive care unit) in a coma for three days. The same thing had happened to the boy in the bed next to her. He suffered some brain damage and had lost his motor function. I spent a lot of time during those three days on my knees in the chapel praying. The third day she woke up cheerful and was evaluated and found to be perfectly fine.

Before we left the hospital, the doctor looked into my eyes and said, "This just doesn't happen."

But, you see, I know it can because our God is stronger and more powerful than anything on this earth. This experience made the resurrection story a personal reality for me. Don't ever lose hope and you'll see miracles do happen.

Father in Heaven, we thank you for the assurance that no matter what circumstances we face, we can always have hope in you.

Connie Norton

Pitman United Methodist Church

Easter Eggs

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 Christ from the dead. ~ *1 Peter 1:3 (NIV)*

I was watching a fictional murder mystery show on television. The plot involved the theft of a beautiful original Fabergé egg. It brought to mind the beautiful eggs we create at Easter. I wondered if there was any religious significance to this practice. I searched the topic online and to my surprise, I discovered there are several sites with information.

One of the earliest records is from the Mesopotamian Christians dying the eggs red to represent Christ's blood at the crucifixion, which also spread to Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

In Greek Orthodox tradition, the red eggs are exchanged and used in a game called *tsougrisma*, where the players tap the eggs together to reflect Christ's victory over death.

In addition to the red eggs, the eggshell represented Christ's sealed tomb, which was supernaturally opened when He rose from the dead. This supported the idea of hope, new life, and salvation.

Another way to look at this is to see ourselves locked in the eggshell. We can get so caught up in the emotional struggles of living in this contemporary world or enticed by some of its trappings that we forget who we are and cannot break through the eggshell. This may leave us feeling hopeless.

Lent is a time for somber reflection and a time for us to do some serious self-examination. Are there some things we need to change that are impeding our spiritual growth? If there are, we need to present them to God and ask for the help we need to make adjustments even though this can be so hard for us to do.

Dear Lord, help us to see the beauty of the resurrection and gratefully accept the hope, new life, and salvation you freely offer.

Lacy Haynicz
Evangelical United Methodist Church