



Between
the **Ashes**
and
Alleluias

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

M I S S I S S I P P I C O N F E R E N C E

I N T R O D U C T I O N



The Lenten season is a paradoxical time. As we prepare ourselves for the promise of Easter, we must go through days of self-examination and confession. This is as essential as the Israelites wandering in the wilderness before they could enter the Promised Land. In the wandering we discover things we never knew about ourselves, others and God.

This devotional guide is a tool for a wandering people. We are on our way to a perfect “dream” world, but we are not there yet. We are living “between.” Some have asked why we chose the subject of racial reconciliation. Some feel that we have talked enough about race, or that conversations about race are just too hard.

Lent isn’t about easy conversations. We don’t get to Easter without the cross. No one really wants to go back to Jerusalem for those last days. No one wants to return to the memories that remind us of our brokenness and sinfulness, but my prayer is that God will use this Lenten journey to move us closer to a place we all long for.

May you find many settings and ways to share the stories collected here. May God use this offering to invite us into concrete changes in the way we think and act. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,” we pray.

God bless your journey between the ashes and alleluias.

**Live loved,
Steve Casteel**

Ash Wednesday, February 21

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. (PSALM 51:6 NRSV)

After all these years, I remember the thing I did not do.

She got on, the first African American to ride the school bus and go courageously to the all-white public school I attended. She walked to a vacant row and took a seat. The silence was deafening.

I might have broken that silence with welcome or moved to sit with her.

I failed in the first prophetic challenge I remember. In spiritual ashes, I mourn that moment still. I would like to hit “rewind,” re-do it. I stand in awe of those who lived non-violence in face of oppression and injustice. I honor those prophetic leaders who were ahead of me and who teach me now.

During Lent, we will gather in communities across Mississippi, speaking about what we have done and what we have left undone. We will consider in these 40 days of Lent the distance we have come in the 40 years since the most violent time of the Civil Rights Movement. We will name the distance we have yet to go to reach the Promised Land. We will celebrate the faithfulness of courageous witnesses. We will hear the confession of heavy hearts. We will offer and receive forgiveness.

The Psalmist laments, “We were born guilty” (51:5). These Lenten days bear God’s gracious invitation: be created anew in the clean, fresh waters of God’s grace for holy courage and faithfulness in these days – our new opportunity to do what needs to be done.

– Hope Morgan Ward

Prayer: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.* Amen.



Hope Morgan Ward is bishop of the Mississippi Area of The United Methodist Church.

* Psalm 51:1,10

Thursday, February 22

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which interpreted is God with us.” (MATTHEW 1:23 KJV)

In the year of 1964 we had a mass meeting at a church. We were going to march to the courthouse. There were some young men who went into the street and were arrested. They were taken to the police station and made to lie on a concrete floor.

Some had been beaten and needed medical help. When we entered we were asked what we wanted. We asked to see someone of authority, not a hired hand. The chief of police came out and we asked why these people were not given medical attention. We demanded that they be given medical attention, and they were.

We are not alone during Lent. The Lord promised he would never leave us. Let us ask God to remove racism, hate, envy and other sins that may hinder us. Let us repent and love all people.

I believe that God was with me when I walked into that police station. That is the reason I used the word “we.”

They shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us...

– J. F. McCree

Prayer: O God, we pray that you will have mercy on us. Help us to love those that mistreat us as we pray for repentance in Christ. Amen.



James F. McCree of Laurel is a retired Methodist minister who was ordained in 1963, pastored in the Mississippi Conference of the Central Jurisdiction nine years and served in the present Mississippi Conference 12 years prior to retiring in 1984. He served in the United States military during World War II and the Korean conflict.

Friday, February 23

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (II CORINTHIANS 3:17 NRSV)

“Lift every voice and sing
“Till earth and heaven ring,
“Ring with the harmonies of Liberty.”

– James Weldon Johnson

As an undergraduate at a public university, I was fortunate to be a member of a Wesley Foundation, and it was in that organization that I first heard and sang James Weldon Johnson’s powerful anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Johnson, an African American, knew firsthand about the civil rights struggle in this country, so he wrote:

“We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
“We have come treading our path thru the blood of the slaughtered.”

When we sang these words in our segregated campus, we thought we knew what Johnson was saying. It was not until we sang them with fellow students at Tougaloo College and Rust College that we could even begin perhaps to know and to feel what the composer was describing.

This song has informed and inspired many, including the nationally known fabric artist Gwen Magee of Jackson who designed and constructed a series of quilts entitled “Lift Every Voice” which depict the pain and optimism of Johnson’s lyrics.

Since those undergraduate years, the song “Lift Every Voice” has been a part of me. It has reminded me of injustices and encouraged acts of reconciliation especially in matters related to Clyde Kennard, who was denied admission to a public college and sent to prison on false charges. Only recently was he exonerated posthumously.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” was in my consciousness when Oseola McCarty, an African American laundress, gave her life’s savings to make possible for others the education she was unable to enjoy.

We are indebted to James Weldon Johnson for his poetry which reminds us of our past and points us to a better future.

“Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
“Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
“Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
“Let us march on till victory is won.”

– Aubrey K. Lucas

Prayer: God, help us sing your song of justice and freedom. Amen.



Aubrey K. Lucas is lay leader of the Mississippi Conference.

Saturday, February 24

Jesus...asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." Jesus said, "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you." (LUKE 18:41-42, NRSV)

I can see my aunt's face – leaning close to mine, eyes large and loving but fearful and very sad all at once. I was 5, and I had been told I could go outside if I stayed in my yard and didn't talk to strangers – especially African Americans. (The term used was much more graphic.)

I asked, "Why?"

"They hate us."

"Why?"

"Because" – she looked near tears – "because of what we have done to them."

I went out, carrying the family legacy of fear and guilt with me. Of course I went out of the yard. I had an adventure walking down the city sidewalk. Near the corner, I turned to go back. An elderly African American man was walking toward me. I was caught! The man looked kind, but I was terrified.

I looked for a place to hide. I got behind a little tree with a trunk about four inches wide. I bent my head and closed my eyes tight and stood frozen until the man passed by, because I thought if I couldn't see him, he couldn't see me.

Fifty-nine years later, I see myself and that man on that day.

– Andrea Kersh Johnson

Prayer: Loving God, we give thanks for seeing those things in ourselves that we hide from, trusting in your healing light of love. Amen.



Andrea Kersh Johnson was born in Jackson, and her family has lived in the state since the early 1800s. She was ordained an elder in the Mississippi Conference in June 2006 and serves as pastor of Kilmichael Parish.

Sunday, February 25

First Sunday in Lent

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.” (MATTHEW 13:16 NRSV)

When I was in the third grade, the Jackson schools made “freedom of choice” their standard for desegregation. Theoretically, any student could choose to attend any school in the system. In my experience, it was two more years before three black children “chose” to attend fifth grade at Boyd Elementary School. Two years later, the federal courts created a more thorough desegregation plan, and in the middle of my seventh grade year, students were moved around en masse according to the court-ordered plan.

I remember those days as chaotic but peaceful. The national news people camped out at our schools seemed vaguely disappointed when there were no acts of protest or violence. In six years of attending the desegregated Jackson Public Schools I never once saw an act of violence or ugliness that was racially based. I graduated from Callaway High School in 1975 with a class of almost equal numbers of black and white students.

I know what my experience was, and I know that my experience is a valid view of those days. I was there. I saw it. I lived it. I have always known that another person might have had a very different experience of some of the same events. However, it is only in the last few years that I have come to discover just how narrow my field of view was.

I could report honestly and accurately on what happened at my schools in those days, but I had little clue what was happening in Philadelphia or McComb or even in other parts of my own city. A wall of fear and silence kept us from knowing so much that was beyond the limits of our own sight.

It is only through the study of history that I have discovered what was hidden from me at that time, starting with Florence Mars’ *Witness in Philadelphia*. My study continues today with Charles Marsh’s *God’s Long Summer*.

I know my remembrances are true and valid, but I also know that they are but one tiny part of the story. To work for true reconciliation, I must be willing to read the chapters that have been so long hidden from me, no matter what joys or horrors they may contain.

– Giles Lindley

Prayer: God, we thank you for opening our eyes, our ears and our hearts to see a world in need of divine healing. Amen.



Giles Lindley is East Jackson District superintendent.

Monday, February 26

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (MATTHEW 16:18 NRSV)

Growing up on a northeast Mississippi farm near Shannon, I had not had much experience in politics or social policy. However, in the summer of 1963 at Boys State at Hinds Junior College, I was exposed to a level of racism and political hatred that I had never experienced before.

I had just completed my junior year in high school. This being 1963 the event was, of course, whites only. That was unfortunately not unusual for the era, but what was unusual for me was the overt racial hatred and hatred of John and Robert Kennedy. From the leadership of Boys State there was a constant barrage of hate speech and reminders that we were a “Christian state being undermined by racial mixing, liberals and communism.”

I experienced a real disconnect between the racial hatred being proclaimed at Boys State and the message I had heard in my family and in the scripture and in worship at Pleasant Grove Methodist Church. I had grown up amidst the doctrine of segregation. In fact we had one preacher who had annually preached a sermon justifying segregation, but there is a power in the Biblical story that undermines all hatred.

It is out of this struggle that I heard God’s call on my life to enter the ordained ministry and be part of a church that teaches one to read the Bible and to hear its story as a word of judgment against all forms of hatred and oppression. May we continue to be a church that tells the story in such a way that all forms of hate are exposed and judged.

– Richard Robbins

Prayer: God, may we as a church embrace your story and share it. Amen.



Richard Robbins is the pastor of Parkway Hills United Methodist Church in Madison.

Tuesday, February 27

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (LUKE 23:34 NRSV)

During my pastoral ministry at St. Paul Church, Laurel, in July 1966, I experienced one of the most memorable incidents of my life.

My wife, son and I had retired for the evening when we heard approximately 15 shots being fired into the parsonage. My wife and I were frantic, wondering if any of the shots had struck our son who was in a room closer to the line of fire. After checking and finding Henry III had slept through the entire incident, I made telephone calls to the Laurel Police Department and the FBI*.

The shooting happened several days after an incident at a fast food restaurant where a burly white man insisted on my going to a side window where “colored” could be served. I refused to go to the side window and reported it directly to the Laurel Police Department. The same man, who was not an employee, stepped aside when I returned with the assistant police chief. However, he pointed his finger at me and said, “Sambo, I am going to get you.”

After the shooting, the mood was very tense, but my congregation and the black community were very supportive of me. Two white ministers also came by and expressed their concern. There was a special black group who wanted to retaliate on my behalf. I refused and counseled against it because it was against my Christian teaching.

The lesson I learned from the incident is that it is better to forgive than to hate. The words of Jesus from the cross, “...Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing,” have a special meaning for me.

– Henry C. Clay Jr.

Prayer: God, we thank you for the power of forgiveness and the healing that it brings to this world and our souls. Amen.



Henry C. Clay Jr. is a retired elder of the Mississippi Conference.

*FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

Wednesday, February 28

Guilt is banished through love and truth; Fear of GOD deflects evil.

(PROVERBS 16:6 THE MESSAGE)

The Unthinkable happened. Someone brought a friend who didn't happen to be white to church. And the phone lines melted down that afternoon. As expected, the congregation was gracious and kind to the stranger, but the unvoiced question hung in the air: "How shall we crucify this church member who did this to us?"

The visitor was the talk of the town that day and item No. 1 at the administrative board meeting that evening. The discussion was lively and spirited. The momentum swung back and forth across the room like a great match of serves and volleys at Wimbledon. Then, an elderly man stood up and cleared his voice.

The old man was a former board chair who didn't usually attend board meetings anymore. But when he spoke, people listened. He addressed the room, saying, "You all know me. Know what I've stood for and some of the things I've done in the past. But I'll tell you this: I'd rather have negroes in my church than hatred in my heart," and sat down.

And the issue, just like that, was resolved. The controversy was over. It didn't have any teeth anymore. God had used the old racist to diffuse an explosive situation. His hardened heart was softened, and he was exactly what the room needed at that precise point in history.

Any of us, and each of us, can be a useful tool to the Holy Spirit. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

– Tom Potter

Prayer: God, we praise you for your ability to work through us, in spite of us. Amen.



Tom Potter is pastor of Ripley First and Blue Mountain United Methodist churches in the New Albany District.

Thursday, March 1

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (MICAH 6:8 NRSV)

Anger and fear. I learned how destructive these two emotions can be during the strife-filled years of 1965 and 1966.

I had just graduated from Millsaps, married my college sweetheart and joined the staff at Galloway Church in Jackson. At first it was “normal” in this busy church of 3,000 members. Yes, there was talk of boycotts and sit-ins, but I wasn’t worried. Then I began to see church members start to back away and find fault with inconsequential things. They were confused and angry and felt they had lost control of their world. Then Rev. Bill Selah’s words from the pulpit: “There shall be no color bar in the church.” As the message hit home, these unhappy people withdrew – all 600 families of them – from this community of worshippers where they felt they no longer fit.

The morning we came to work to find the 600 letters from Galloway families requesting that their names be removed from the rolls, I, too, was afraid. This place I had grown to love was falling apart. What would we do, how could we continue to worship and have Sunday school and MYF* in this turmoil? Everything, it seemed, was in disarray.

Oh, young woman of little faith! What life-changing lessons I learned that year about God’s faithfulness and about the people we call Methodists. As word spread, phones began to ring: “What can I do?” “Where do you need me?” People who had never taught a Sunday school lesson took classes of active children and youth; parents with few coaching skills took over youth basketball teams; and I still remember the father of two teenage sons who volunteered to help with the nursery and kindergarten classes. There he was on Sunday mornings, sitting on the floor, reading books to the children!

I saw a different kind of leadership at Galloway – leadership from those who loved God and who wanted all people to be welcome in God’s church. I watched these faithful Methodists come into the sanctuary each Sunday morning and greet one another with a warm smile and a hearty handshake. I witnessed their faith as they witnessed to those around them.

Forty years later, many of the faithful men and women who kept this great church strong and vibrant during a time of trial and testing have gone on to their heavenly rewards. A few remain, and the light of their faith and the goodness of their lives still shine bright – every day!

– Kay Barksdale

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for those who made sacrifices so that all your children can feast at your table together. We pray that we continue the work so that their sacrifices will not have been in vain. Amen.



Kay Barksdale was the youth director at Galloway during the mid 1960s. She is director of church and parent relations at Millsaps College and is vice president of the conference United Methodist Women.

*MYF – Methodist Youth Fellowship

Friday, March 2

World Day of Prayer

With the LORD on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me? (PSALM 118:6 NRSV)

During my college days in the '60s, I was active in testing public accommodations, including attempts to worship at our local First Methodist Church. In all of these trials, the most challenging two incidents included the time I was jailed during a voter registration drive in a neighboring county and the greeting of “you can't worship here” at the local First Methodist Church by a fully dressed Mississippi Highway Patrolman with weapon each Sunday morning.

On each of our trips, prayer was always present for a safe and successful effort. We were always reminded of the possibility of physical danger. Fear for our own well-being and for the well-being of those with whom we worked and traveled was ever-present in our group. In praying for our protection and for the deliverance from fear, these words from the hymn “How Firm A Foundation” came to me vividly as if they had been penned for me and my comrades in the movement:

“Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed,
“For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
“I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand...”

As I shared these words my fear was removed, for God continued to protect, and these words gave me a new determination in my civil rights activities. In time, the citizens of the neighboring county no longer needed outside help to register to vote. The fully uniformed Mississippi Highway Patrolman turned out to be my neighbor, even though it took 20 years for him to speak to me. About six months before his death we had the pleasure of attending a noonday service at the local First United Methodist Church where we ended up being seatmates, the beginning of a period of reconciliation and respect.

I find prayer is a two-way communication. Sometimes because of problems or challenges, I find myself praying, “God, I cannot pray. Give me the words I need.” God provides and keeps communication open at all times, even through songs, such as Amie Johnson Flint's “He Giveth More Grace.”

“His power has no boundary known unto man;
“For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
“He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!”

– David L. Beckley

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for a mind and heart of reconciliation so that we may make your world a better place for all of our children. Amen.



David L. Beckley, president of Rust College in Holly Springs, was active in the Civil Rights Movement in Marshall and Benton counties as a college student in the 1960s.

Saturday, March 3

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. (PSALM 121:1-2 NRSV)

It is wonderful to live in the world today, but we must continue to walk with open eyes, a loving heart and kindness for others.

I remember as a teenager running home during race riots and not understanding the full impact of what was going on. But as I matured and experienced first-hand others' indifference, because I was black or a woman, I can now appreciate all that was done many years ago in the name of civil rights.

I want to salute all that have stood for and still continue to work for those who struggle through adversities of life. We feel more secure in today's world, but if you look around you can see many of the same situations emerging again but under a different name.

We must continue to use any means possible to ensure that we continue the fight against all inequities that we know harm others, oppress or stagnate the growth of individuals to pursue happiness in their life.

Through it all I try to remember that God is in control and I continue to look to the hills from where I know my blessings come and pray for those individuals who feel the need to oppress others in order to succeed in this world.

– Dorothea Garrett

Prayer: God, we thank you for being a way maker. We ask that you continue to protect us from the snares of the enemy. Amen.



Dorothea Garrett is a member of Greer Chapel United Methodist Church in Flowood.

Sunday, March 4

Second Sunday in Lent

“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (MATTHEW 5:44 KJV)

I was a neighbor of the late Medgar Evers. His beliefs were my beliefs: Treat those who would do evil to you with respect and continue to work for justice. Not only was Medgar a civil rights leader, he was also a friend of mankind. I, therefore, was a friend to him.

When Medgar’s car was in the shop for repairs, the work was delayed to impede his progress. At that time, he used my automobile to make trips across the state. I was warned by some people that I was endangering my own life by doing this, but I thought that that was the least I could do to aid in the struggle for equal rights.

Medgar was a Christian man. As we talked and fished together, he never made a disparaging remark about anyone. He would always say, “Boss, don’t have any fear; God protects his children.” Coming from a Christian family, I followed his doctrine and God’s word to give me strength in my daily life.

My mother always read to her family II Corinthians 4:8-10: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.” So was the life of Medgar Evers.

His struggles for justice and equality for all God’s children, along with the teachings of my parents, have been a catalyst in my life for helping others.

– George C. Washington

Prayer: God, we thank you for the living examples of your Word and how you empower us to proclaim your message into the world. Amen.



George C. Washington is a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Jackson and a past president of the conference United Methodist Men.

Monday, March 5

“Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good...” (GENESIS 50:20 NRSV)

It was a warm summer night in June 1963. My husband and I sat outside in the dark, talking with a couple who was visiting us from a neighboring state. Suddenly we heard the blast of gunfire in the background. I ran inside to see if my two children were safe, and I huddled near them. Fear gripped me, for this was the height of the turbulent Sixties in Jackson, Mississippi.

Our back yard faced the back yard of a neighbor who lived next door to Medgar Evers on Guynes Avenue (now Margaret Walker Alexander Drive). Screams came from the direction of the Evers' home, and we feared the worst. You know the rest. The sound of those screams will forever be embedded in my memory.

I like to compare Medgar's death to the forgiveness scene in Genesis when Joseph told his brothers, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.” It has been a long and arduous journey toward improved race relations in Mississippi since Medgar's death, but great strides have been made. We pray that from this day we will not take one step forward and two backward.

– Dora S. Washington

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us of our transgressions, teach us to love our neighbors and grant us strength to continue the struggle for human rights. Amen.



Dora S. Washington of Jackson is a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church and West Jackson District lay leader. In addition to district and conference responsibilities, she serves on both the jurisdictional and general church level.

Tuesday, March 6

“God bless those who are persecuted because they live for God, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

(MATTHEW 5:10 NLT)

It was really by accident that I had the experience. The conference needed a bus driver for the Journey Toward the Light event in Jackson. I was free, so I volunteered. We visited several sites. Ed King shared commentary and insight as we traveled. It was a powerful series of stories, but there was one that overwhelmed me.

We visited the Medgar Evers home. From the outside it was ordinary enough, but our guide began to describe the unique architectural features of the home. The windows were mounted higher, and there was no front door. The reason was simple – to prevent easy shots into the house. The kids’ mattresses were on the floor. There were so many rules and routine acts that were a constant part of this family’s everyday life just to help keep them alive and safe. I had never had to live like that. What would it have felt like to be a child in that house?

As the story unfolded we were taken into the kitchen and there they were: bullet holes. The guide carefully helped us see the trajectory of the shot. There was a bullet hole in a family’s kitchen...in the USA. This family had tried to live a safe life and the result was a bullet hole in the kitchen.

I tried to imagine the terror of being fired upon in your own home by a faceless enemy. Then the story got worse. Our guide quietly retold the details of Medgar Evers’ assassination. With all the precautions, all the thoughtfulness, all the preparation, he still was murdered. Why didn’t I know the whole story? I realized I have so much to learn to truly begin to grasp the price some paid to help our country face a powerful truth about the prejudices that separate us.

I used to wonder about the relevance of the passage in the Beatitudes about persecution. I always thought in terms of other lands and ancient times. My bus trip through Jackson reminded me that we still need this blessing. Until the kingdom comes, those who challenge the evil of this world will have to think about their safety and sometimes lose their lives for our sake. But, the kingdom only comes as brave people stand in the face of the wrong around them like Jesus did, like Medgar did.

– Steve Casteel

Prayer: O God, bless those who faced persecution during the Civil Rights Movement. May we be faithful to their kingdom cause so that no family will have to specially build their home to protect their family and so that one day we might taste Heaven on Earth. Amen.



Steve Casteel is the director of Connectional Ministries for the Mississippi Conference.

Wednesday, March 7

Rescue me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me and from out of the deep waters. (PSALM 69:14 AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

In the Civil Rights Movement a major issue was recognition of others as persons, but many labels can divide us, not just “black” and “white.”

Montgomery, Alabama, was the scene of the emergence of the nonviolent mass movement with Mrs. Rosa Parks and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. In the spring of 1960 I was there helping with the college student lunch counter sit-in demonstrations. Many were arrested.

With a black Methodist pastor, the Rev. Elroy Embry, I was arrested. We were both beaten by police. Jails were segregated. My friend was placed with sympathetic black prisoners; I was placed with white prisoners encouraged by the guards to further torture me. They announced they would kill me during the night.

Finally I was allowed to retreat to my steel bunk where I made a pillow out of my bloody shirt. I pushed the clerical collar aside and placed my Bible under my rags. After long silent prayers I pretended to fall asleep.

A man approached with a long knife, a prison-made weapon. He had watched earlier as another man broke my teeth with his kicking. I feared, almost hated, them all. The armed man sat on the floor beside me. Nothing happened. He remained there till dawn then told me, “Preacher, I don’t know what you done with them n....rs, but I know we really don’t treat them right. And I knew I couldn’t let you be killed, so I just got in the way.”

– Edwin King

Prayer: Lord, help me serve you in others; help me receive you from others. Amen.



Edwin King, retired, is a white native of Vicksburg and Crawford Street United Methodist Church and served in the former Central Jurisdiction conference and in the Mississippi Conference. He lives in Jackson and attends Galloway Memorial United Methodist Church.

Thursday, March 8

“And whoever gives even a cup of cold water... truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

(MATTHEW 10:42 NRSV)

Rev. Elroy Embry and I, sentenced to an Alabama prison work gang, went out in black-and-white-striped convict uniforms in fierce summer heat. Armed white guards on horseback made sure the civil rights prisoners did not talk together. Finally a water barrel was opened and one tin cup given to white prisoners to share and one cup to the blacks.

Guards threatened anyone who shared his cup with me. Whites laughed. My black comrade reached for the “colored cup” to share with me. The guards shifted their shot guns and ordered the black prisoners not to give the cup to either of us. All these other prisoners were “real” criminals, not “gentle” civil disobedience demonstrators.

A black prisoner held the cup before him, walked past a guard, and said to me, “Reverend, please have a sip from my cup. I can see you worked like all of us and is hot and tired.” The white guard spoke, “Boy, you know what you doing? He’s an agitator.”

The convict firmly replied, “Yes, sir, but this white man is thirsty,” and let me sip the water of life. The white guard lowered his gun and rode to the back.

– Edwin King

Prayer: Lord, help me serve you in others; help me receive you from others. Amen.



Edwin King, retired, is a white native of Vicksburg and Crawford Street United Methodist Church and served in the former Central Jurisdiction conference and in the Mississippi Conference. He lives in Jackson and attends Galloway Memorial United Methodist Church.

Friday, March 9

But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. (HABAKKUK 2:20 NIV)

I long for peace in a world that has not been able to offer peace, love and hope. Our world, nation, community and even the church offer up too much that resembles the way it was. At age 50, I live in a space that still judges people by skin color, age, sex and physical ability.

While I have embraced God's grace and mercy for myself, my people and the larger society, there is still pain, hurt and suffering that weaves its way into our daily lives. This pain, hurt and suffering are the remnants of what used to be, what someone else thinks ought to be and, yes, sometimes it is what we might even accept to be. Habakkuk calls on the people to acknowledge that God is above all things, people and places in the universe.

In our acknowledgement of God's awesomeness, Habakkuk invites us to be silent before God. I have found that in this world, with its multicultural needs, and this society, with its many forms of pain, hurt and suffering, it is only by being silent before God that there is peace of any kind. In silence before God, I have been reminded and blessed by God's awesome love through Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, reigning with God right now.

Habakkuk's call for silence before the almighty God is a reminder that no matter what befalls us, God is still the creator, giver and sustainer of life here in my community, home, church and neighborhood. I am invited to be renewed daily through this time apart with God, time held in check by my silent witness to God. Amen!

– Elbrist Mason

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be silent so that we may clearly hear your voice. Amen.



Elbrist Mason is pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Brandon.

Saturday, March 10

Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. (PSALM 97:10 NIV)

“Will you refuse to honor the invitation which you previously accepted to preach the Baccalaureate Service for Neshoba Central High School this Sunday, now that your life has been threatened?”

The questioner was the chairman of the county school board. It was 1966. My response sounds bolder than I felt at the time, “The invitation was extended in good faith, and I intend to keep it in good faith.” I had been called on Friday afternoon and told that substantial threats had been made; namely, that if I left home to go to the school I would not arrive alive and if I did the school would be bombed while the graduates, families and friends gathered for the service.

My response to the chairman of the board was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted me to withdraw. They knew that if they ended up having to make a decision they would be cast in a “no-win” circumstance. For two hours on that difficult Saturday morning we struggled.

What this board did not know was that at 6:30 that Saturday morning I called my bishop, Edward J. Pendergrass. I confessed to him that I was at the end of my rope. The tensions and recurring trauma of Philadelphia, Mississippi, for the past two years had gotten to me. When asked what I should do, Bishop Pendergrass simply stated, “Tell them the invitation was given in good faith and you accepted it and intend to keep it in good faith. If they withdraw the invitation (which they did) then let it be.”

Thank God for those witnesses that call us to faithfulness even in the most difficult times!

– Clay F. Lee

Prayer: God, we thank you for helping us to be faithful to your call, even in difficult circumstances. Amen.



Clay F. Lee served pastoral and administrative appointments in the Mississippi Conference for 38 years prior to being elected a bishop of The United Methodist Church.

Sunday, March 11

Third Sunday in Lent

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

(MATTHEW 7:7 NSRV)

Last October, I returned to the University of Mississippi campus. My previous visits had been around sporting events. On this occasion, I wanted to visit the newly dedicated monument in recognition of James Meredith’s contributions to both Ole Miss and the Civil Rights Movement.

I found a rather simple monument located directly behind the university’s most historic building, the Lyceum. It consisted of a life-size bronze likeness of Meredith striding toward a limestone portal. Across the lintel of the portal are carved four words: *Courage, Perseverance, Opportunity* and *Knowledge*.

Surprisingly, this simple depiction of events in 1962 made a profound impact on me. Feelings rushed to the surface. I experienced gratitude for one who courageously knocked and refused to accept closed doors. I felt joy and renewed hope that the promise of Matthew is true.

Then another set of feelings came over me. In 1962, these were not my emotions. As I watched the series of events set in motion by James Meredith, Governor Ross Barnett and President John F. Kennedy, I felt bitterness, anger, loss and confusion. A way of life was passing away in front of me. For you see in 1962, I was a son of the South. Confession is good for the soul.

Amazingly, life changed for Meredith and me. Doors were opened to him, and by God’s amazing grace, the doors of my heart have been opened. The transformation is yet to be completed. All of us, with God’s help, continue to stride toward greater openness with courage, perseverance, opportunity and knowledge.

– Willis Britt

Prayer: God, we thank you for opening the doors of our hearts and transforming our ways and our thoughts to conform to your ways and your thoughts. Amen.



Willis Britt is West Jackson District superintendent.

Monday, March 12

The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock...who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above my adversaries, you delivered me from the violent. (2 SAMUEL 22:47a, 49 NRSV)

I grew up in a small rural town in Alabama. My parents, though both educated, experienced obstacle after obstacle in rearing five children in the midst of segregation, yet they taught us early to believe in God and to seek education at its highest level but never forget who we were.

I finished high school in that rural community and left to attend college in North Carolina, a dream of my father's. Little did he know that I would become a part of one of the largest student movements of the racial struggle, the "sit-ins." I married my partner from the sit-in movement. We returned to Mississippi to his hometown of Canton to await his entrance into the U.S. Air Force in the fall of 1965. We were recent college graduates and newlyweds.

We had few places to go as a married couple. One night my husband suggested that we go to a club where he and his friends had entertained in a band during his high school days. We dressed and drove up Highway 16 to this night spot. He escorted me inside after casually remarking that the club's name had been changed from The Ebony to The Stork Club.

As soon as my eyes adjusted to the dim light and smoke-filled room, I immediately remarked, "These people are white." But it was too late. The crowd had noticed us. Two men immediately approached, and the larger man reached for my husband. The shorter guy pulled a gun and shot between us. Terrified, I did the only thing that I knew to do and that was to run for my life. I ran across the highway and landed in a ditch filled with mud and lay face down. Then and only then did I realize that my beloved was not beside me.

I heard the noise of a crowd jeering, screeching and cheering like a crowd in a boxing ring or at a bullfight, only I realized that the object of their amusement was the savage beating of a black man, my husband, whom I had just married two weeks prior. I began to pray to the only One to whom I knew color didn't matter and cried for mercy. Soon after, a car light shone on the side of the road, and my husband's voice called for me.

– Frances C. Bartee

Prayer: God, we thank you for how you rescue us and for how your rescuing power continues to bring about deliverance. Amen.



Frances C. Bartee is a member of Central United Methodist Church in Jackson.

Tuesday, March 13

So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (JOHN 8:36 NRSV)

I crawled out of the ditch and got in the car, scarcely recognizing him, for he was beaten so severely that I took off my upper garments to wipe the blood from his face enough for him to drive us back to his mother's home.

When my husband's mother – the daughter, wife and sibling of United Methodist ministers – saw us and comprehended what had happened, she made a desperate call to her present pastor and a civil rights leader in Madison County. He and another white Methodist minister, who was also a leader in the movement, came quickly to escort us to the nearest emergency room, where we were rejected as soon as it was discovered that this was possibly a racial issue.

My husband was finally admitted to the university hospital, where his mother and I could not enter the room where he was being treated because we had to cross a “color line.” The plastic surgeon who operated to restore his face and body remarked that he had never operated on a “nigger” before and didn't intend to.

We were able to bring at least two people to court with the help of the civil rights activists and news reporters who demanded federal attention to our case. Our ordeal reached the pages of the *Atlanta Constitution* and other national newspapers. The accused were fined \$100 and never spent a day in jail.

We left Mississippi shortly after that, for safety's sake, and my husband completed his enlistment obligations, but despite my pleas, fears and desperate attempts to change his mind, we returned to his hometown and settled in as teachers, emerging immediately as instigators as we carried our history of civil rights activism into the still-segregated classrooms of the South.

Seeking to pursue dreams of higher education, my husband, with my encouragement, entered a master's program in microbiology and immediately became part of a federal mandate placed upon the university to enroll blacks into medical programs or forfeit funding. He thereby gained entrance into the same institution to study medicine where he was mistreated as a patient.

He has practiced medicine in the same city that almost entombed us and saved the lives of many, even the descendants of those who were in that moonlight mob.

I have taught in the public schools for 34 years and have served in The United Methodist Church. I know what “open hearts, open minds, open doors” can really mean.

– Frances C. Bartee

Prayer: Lord, let us remember that no one is free until all of us are liberated from the tyrannies of the past which seek to keep us enslaved. Amen.



Frances C. Bartee is a member of Central United Methodist Church in Jackson.

Wednesday, March 14

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

(MARK 10:15 NRSV)

My experience of the dark days of the early 1960s was that of a child. I saw glimpses on the television, heard conversations among parents and exchanges among leaders of my local church. Somehow the word trickled down that my church would be sure that no trouble makers would enter the worship services. Men would be stationed at the door to ensure that only those desiring to worship would be allowed to enter the sanctuary.

I do not know how the decision was made to guard the doors of my local church. I do not know who made the decision to keep certain people out of the worship services, but I do know now that Jesus would never approve of such a decision.

While I believe that we no longer have men or women guarding the doors of our churches to ensure that only people of a certain color are allowed in our doors, we still have far to go before we can find ourselves standing with Jesus and not with those who would seek to turn others away. May our prayer be that we will learn to invite all God’s children to the table. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mark 10:14).

– Mike Hicks

Prayer: God, we pray for a day when we can all, regardless of skin hue or social status, gather around your table and feast together. Amen.



Mike Hicks is pastor of St. Luke United Methodist Church in Tupelo.

Thursday, March 15

“...To set the burdened and battered free, to announce this is God’s year to act!” (LUKE 4:18-19 THE MESSAGE)

Wendell Berry writes in *The Hidden Wound*, “If white people have suffered less obviously from racism than black people, they have nevertheless suffered greatly; the cost has been greater perhaps than we can bear.”

Wendell Berry is right. We all have suffered the wound of racism. The apostle Paul told us that when one member of the body suffers, we all suffer.

This came home to me last spring when the community in which I was living discovered a racial tension it had not previously known. For the first time in the collective memory of the community, parents were choosing private school education over public school education. No one would say it was racially motivated. Maybe it wasn’t. The tension among friends said otherwise.

I thought of a first grade teacher I know. Every day, in a room full of first graders, she doesn’t look at skin color when she begins teaching her students to read. She looks at a room full of children eager to learn.

Perhaps it’s time that we model the openness of a first grade teacher and the honesty of a 6-year-old. Then, the wound that we have inherited and that continues to be open will begin to heal.

Jesus said, “This is God’s year to act!”

– Bill McAlilly

Prayer: O Lord, let me be a source of healing in this season of self-examination. With you by my side, let me act. Amen.



Bill McAlilly is Seashore District superintendent.

Friday, March 16

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (ISAIAH 11:6 NSRV)

Nine miles from Money, you go over the Tallahatchie River bridge into Greenwood, where I grew up. It was the cotton capital of the world. Some have called it the most Southern place on earth. Both were true in 1968, the year I turned 8.

I never knew about Emmett Till when I was a little girl, only after I got to Millsaps. Money was where he was killed. Money to me in those days was the place where we had a cabin, went duck hunting with my Daddy and my sister, where we pulled bream and turtles and gar out of the waters of Six Mile Lake in the heat of the summer.

In the fall of 1968, I was in the fourth grade, and Mrs. Grantham was my teacher. I loved school because of her. She was very tall and elegant, a little bit round, too, with smooth gray hair in a graceful bun. She wore beautiful matching suits and always smelled good, too.

The school was Bankston Elementary. Only white kids went there. That year was the year voluntary desegregation came to Greenwood. All I knew was that a child who was African American was coming to be in my class.

We welcomed her warmly, probably coached by Mrs. Grantham, I bet. We were anxious but determined. Dolly being in our class was going to work, you just hide and watch if you didn't think so!

After a while we settled into a peacefulness with Dolly in our class and went on with fourth grade. Except that one day, she didn't come to school, and we didn't know why. I can remember us plying Mrs. Grantham with questions about her. Somehow, why she wasn't there all of a sudden seemed really important. Funny how kids know things that nobody ever tells them. We were relieved to be told finally that she'd just been sick.

Mrs. Grantham assured us she'd be back and when. We were thrilled – relieved, I guess – it wasn't our fault! We decided as a class that the day Dolly came back to school would be special. We hatched a plan. We'd fix this situation right up, just in case she had stayed home for some reason other than being sick.

The day Dolly came back to Mrs. Grantham's class she came to class a little bit late. When her face finally appeared, the whole class stood up, down to the very last one of us. We were in charge at that moment, an elementary school-child's dream come true! We sang Louis Armstrong's words in unison, real loud:

“Well, hello, Dolly,

“Yes, hello, Dolly,

“It's so nice to have you back where you belong.

“You're looking swell, Dolly,

“I can tell, Dolly,

“Dolly don't you ever go away again.”

And then, for good measure, when we saw her shock starting to give way to a grin, we sang it again, getting louder and louder with every line, some of us with balls of feeling in our chests that we didn't completely understand.

It was one of the proudest moments of my life. Still is. The people who killed Emmett Till were out there. But we were out there, too, even then. More importantly, we still are.

– Lynette Little

Prayer: God, we thank you for the innocence of childhood and for allowing children to demonstrate to us how to love unconditionally. Amen.



Lynette Little is pastor of Petal United Methodist Church.

Saturday, March 17

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven...” (LUKE 6:37 NRSV)

Late one night my freshman year at Tougaloo College in Jackson, four of my fellow classmates and I were driving back to campus after having eaten a late meal. On the way back to the campus, we saw flashing blue lights in our rearview mirror. We were pulled over by two large white highway patrolmen. The patrolmen pulled their pistols out of their holsters and demanded some of us run. We all knew better. We remained still.

We were arrested later that night and placed in the Madison County jail. We spent the night in a cold dark cell, filled with fear and terror. We were afraid that our jailers would come into our cells and beat us while we slept. The next morning we all were given a “free haircut” so that we would be “presentable” before the judge. Our hair was cut with horse shears. We were then led before a local justice court judge who announced that we were all guilty.

The hurt, pain, humiliation of that night stayed with me for a long time. I began to believe that the persons who had committed this injustice against us were evil. It took years of prayer, reflection and meditation for me to be able to truly forgive those who I felt had wronged us. The words from Jesus, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing,” helped me forgive them.

– Embra K. Jackson

Prayer: God, we thank you for granting us the ability to forgive others and the healing that it brings to our hearts, minds and spirits. Amen.



Embra K. Jackson is the administrative assistant to the bishop. He attended Tougaloo College from 1970-1974.

Sunday, March 18

One Great Hour of Sharing

Fourth Sunday in Lent

The LORD says, “Do not fear... I have called you by name, you are mine.” (ISAIAH 43:1 NRSV)

From the red clay hills of a farming community in rural Alabama, I was taken to Gulfside Assembly on a youth retreat. My life has not been the same since.

I was looking for something different and greater in my life. Gulfside was just the place for me to search, grow, spread my wings. I was a member of the youth fellowship out of the Central Alabama Conference. At that time in a segregated society we had no place to go to call our own except Gulfside Assembly in Waveland – a long way from north Alabama.

Who would have guessed then that I would become the director of youth work in the Central Alabama Conference and introduce my youth to this great, beautiful, sacred place? Years later I became a member of Gulfside’s board. As I accepted more leadership roles across the church, my faith deepened and my commitment to Gulfside took on a special place in my heart. I knew God was calling me to this place of ministry. The warmth of close relationships and the energy of this community inspired me and brought out my best.

As president of the Gulfside Board of Trustees I have been challenged even more so to trust in a God who holds my destiny and the destiny of Gulfside in his loving and just hands.

– Mollie M. Stewart

Prayer: God, keep us mindful that we are created in the image of you and endowed with unlimited potential. You have the key. Amen.



Mollie M. Stewart has many years of experience in leading and resourcing ministry in small membership churches. She is president of the Gulfside Board of Trustees and coordinator of Local Church Ministries at Hinton Rural Life Center.

NOTE: Offerings received for One Great Hour of Sharing support the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Hurricane Katrina destroyed all Gulfside Assembly’s facilities in 2005. Today, the site hosts volunteers working with Mississippi United Methodist Katrina Response and UMCOR to help heal hearts and homes on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Monday, March 19

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (LEVITICUS 19:18 NRSV)

... **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (MATTHEW 22:39 NRSV)

Senior English at Meridian High required a major term paper. After a busy weekend, I forgot that Ms. Emmons would ask for titles on Monday. As she called the roll, “Adams, Allen, Atwood...,” I was in a panic; I was fifth on the roll.

I glanced quickly at possible titles at the end of the homework chapter. When I heard “Barham,” I reported a listed title with outward matter-of-factness, “The Whys of Anti-Semitism.” The teacher and classmates seemed surprised and puzzled. I confess I didn’t know what Semitism was, much less anti-Semitism. Class over, I dashed to the library to discover that my subject was “Why is there prejudice, disdain and persecution toward Jews?”

With the Holocaust and the rise and fall of Nazism still recent history in 1961, there was no shortage of research data. Books published by the Anti-Defamation League and B’nai B’rith and magazine and newspaper articles were in our library. But one obscure textbook paragraph suggested interviews as a possible source for term papers. I knew immediately that I would interview the local rabbi.

An amazing German immigrant, Rabbi Goldstein substituted for Latin, Spanish and French teachers, spoke modern Hebrew and was, of course, a scholar in ancient Hebrew. His English had a wonderful accent that commanded dignity. Seven languages! The numbers tattooed on his arm marked his time in concentration camps.

At the interview, my tasteless juvenile first question was, “Why do people hate Jews?” With animated laughter he exclaimed, “Ah! Why don’t you go to the heart of the matter!”

Then he said something that changed my life: “The real question is, ‘Why do people hate...period?’”

Before my paper was completed, I came face to face with my own segregated culture of hate. The Sunday School Jesus became relevant to my world.

I cannot separate my personal spiritual journey nor my call to servant ministry from that turbulent time of change. When I sense the cancer in conversations about immigrants or Catholics or women or prisoners or Muslims or foreigners or another race, I am reminded of two Jewish rabbis who still teach me much.

– Ron Barham

Prayer: God, we thank you for being a God that teaches us not to hate, but to love each other as you have loved us. Amen.



Ron Barham is executive director of Wood Institute and pastor of Sturgis and Big Creek United Methodist churches.

Tuesday, March 20

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

(PSALM 31:2 NIV)

Years ago, before I backed into the preaching business, I was a vocational-technical school administrator. One of the chores that I hated and the kids hated was the dreaded tornado drill.

I rang the bell for the drill and heard the moans coming from the kids (and teachers, too). They reluctantly complied with the proper procedures and went into the designated safe areas.

It was my job to hurriedly walk the halls and check to see that all were out of their shops and classrooms and that all were accounted for. My building was built during the energy crisis days, so we had very few windows, therefore, very little natural light. About the time that I started down the hall, the power went off. It was dark as pitch. I hollered for all to remain calm, but they made some catcalls and the like. There I stood, in the intersection of two halls, riding herd over 150 nervous teenagers in the dark.

Suddenly, I felt a young lady grab me and hug me tight. Instead of moving away from her, I just let her hold on. Touching or hugging a student was certainly an unforgivable sin, but I held her close for a few minutes. After five minutes or so the lights came back on, and I looked down to the biggest smile I've ever seen, bright white teeth shining as she looked up to me. I sounded the all-clear signal, and the kids went back to class.

The kids never grumbled about the drills again because that one scared them, especially the little girl who grabbed onto me. She was afraid of what the boys might do under the secret of darkness. She grabbed onto a bastion of safety. She found comfort in her storm. Never once did I think of pushing her away. Never once did I worry about the repercussions of losing my job because of this young black female student hugging up on this big old white man.

Apparently, she knew that I was safe and would protect her. She was right. I would have protected her with my last breath. She knew that I had a love for her and all of my kids.

That may be one of the few times that I was "Godly," for you see, God protects us just like that. We are free to grab on to God any time that we feel the need. He will tuck us under his arms of protection. He is our shelter every day if we have sense enough to grab onto him.

– Walter Downs

Prayer: God, we thank you for protecting us in times of uncertainty. Amen.



Walter Downs is pastor of Liberty United Methodist Church in Booneville.

Wednesday, March 21

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”
(MATTHEW 25:45 NIV)

As I ministered to the “least of these” my light grew brighter and brighter. For two weeks I was exposed on a daily basis to the least of these, the homeless community of Memphis. As I ministered to their needs for clothing and a bath at Manna House, I discovered my own brokenness.

As a good Christian I have paid my tithes, served humanity with “volunteer” work all my adult life, but I had never offered the least of these my hospitality. I had never welcomed them into my life. I had never spent time with them, inquiring about their life, their daily struggles to survive. I never asked “How did you arrive at being homeless?”

The stories vary, but the abandonment remains the same. By extending myself to them and not being afraid of them, I was able to get to know them on a personal level. I felt compassion for them as I listened to their stories. And I realized that God is calling us to righteous indignation about the injustices they experience on a daily basis.

As I ministered to them I also discovered my own defects. Self-examination and acknowledgement of my brokenness was the first step toward healing. I also discovered the power of God’s love extended through me aided in the recovery of their self-esteem. Giving and receiving love is powerful and transformative, for after all, God is love. And love is the glue that bonds us together as the community and household of God. As we go about our daily lives let’s not forget to offer the hospitality of God’s love to all we meet. *And you will become a light unto people living in darkness.* Amen.

– P.A. Gibson

Prayer: God, help us to show your love to the least and the lost and to those the world has deemed invisible and unlovable. Amen.



P.A. Gibson is pastor of St. James United Methodist Church in Ocean Springs.

Thursday, March 22

And now faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love. (I CORINTHIANS 13:13 NRSV)

A dear old friend called one Sunday afternoon to say that her grandson with cystic fibrosis was in critical condition. Without a lung transplant he would die. When it was determined that our daughter, Karie, had the same blood type as his, she did not hesitate for even a moment. “Whatever he needs, I’m willing.”

Within a week Karie and I were at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she had her chest opened and a healthy lobe of her lung removed to be placed in Brandon’s emptied chest cavity.

In so doing, Karie became the first non-related living lobe donor in history. “If this gives him one month, one year or more that he can be a healthy boy, able to run and play and ride his bike, it will be worth it all,” she said.

As it turned out, Brandon lived for four years and ran track, played basketball at his high school and lived his life to the fullest. An infection took him then, but, oh, how he lived for four whole years.

The bottom line of this story is that Brandon was a 14-year-old black child and Karie was a young white woman who, I am blessed to say, did not see color as an issue at all but rather saw a friend who needed her.

It really doesn’t matter what the color of our shell is or whether our hair is curly or straight. One day God’s children of every color will sit together at the heavenly banquet, and the colors round that table will be like a tapestry, a beautiful, glorious tapestry, a family.

– B.J. Mathias

Prayer: God, we thank you for your steadfast love that empowers us to love others without regard to our differences. Amen.



B.J. Mathias of Purvis is a member of Oak Grove United Methodist Church.

Friday, March 23

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (JOHN 3:16 NIV)

“For God so loved the world...” Those are the words printed at the top of the poster that hangs above my desk. Yet it’s the picture below those words that often catches the eye of visitors and friends, creating opportunity to explore a topic sometimes uncomfortable for those of us who have lighter skin tones.

The poster is of two large hands, the hands of God, offering Christ to a hurting world. But unlike most representations one might see, these hands and this Christ are black rather than the expected white. The poster is actually a reproduction of a painting on display at Community of St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago, a church I discovered in 2004 when I spent the month of January working, living and studying at Olive Branch Mission.

“The Branch,” as it is affectionately known, is a combination homeless shelter, drug rehabilitation program and learning environment for college and seminary students interested in urban and multicultural issues. It was there I came face to face, maybe for the first time, with the tragedy of the poverty trap, along with the injustice of decades of both personal and institutional racism. It was also in Chicago where I began to understand my own ethnicity, that being white meant that I lived with certain privileges and benefited from certain institutionalized forms of racism that continue to hold today, preventing us from reconciling one with another. In hindsight, it was in Chicago that my life began a new journey, one that continues today and will for a long time.

I wish I could say that I no longer harbor prejudices or that I have moved beyond all racism, but it’s just not that simple. And that’s why I keep the poster on my wall. It reminds me that God is the God of all, and that he has a special place in his heart for those who have suffered injustice. It reminds me that I have a long way to go and much to understand. And it compels me to ask, each day, “What color is my God?”

– Chris Bowers

Prayer: God, we thank you that you define us and not the world. Amen.



Chris Bowers of Meridian is a probationary deacon.

Saturday, March 24

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

(REVELATION 1:8 NRSV)

I had nightmares trying to learn Greek. A group of us at seminary took what we called “suicide Greek.” It was a year’s worth of language training crammed into 10 long summer weeks. Verbs, participles, compound complex sentences. Woo, lots of fun stuff!

It got so tense near the end, I dreamed one night that giant capital Alphas and Omegas, the first and last letters in Greek, were coming to eat me up.

That summer of Greek turned out OK. “This will be a great tool for you,” the professor said one morning, and he was right. Learning a new language gives new perspective and new insight, and the world expands. There’s always more to learn, though.

A group of that professor’s Greek-loving students went to the “old country” one winter. On the plane, the attendant started speaking rapid-fire Greek. “What’s she saying?” we asked him. He replied, “How should I know? I only read this stuff. I don’t know how to speak it!”

Language divides us. It does in our world today, and it always has done so. New words, new sounds, new ways of putting words and ideas together – that’s where the fear and the anger and the suspicion come. “They don’t sound like we do.” But it’s also the place of real possibility. I knew a pastor to Latinos in Alabama who learned Spanish while he was hanging out in Mexican restaurants, and he was getting ready to do the same thing with Chinese.

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). We can expect people to do things our way and to change for our benefit. Or, we can choose a more positive route and see change as a chance to learn and grow and expand. We can see it as a chance to welcome others. There’s a very good Biblical word for that sort of attitude. It’s called hospitality.

– Eugene Stockstill

Prayer: God, open our hearts so that we may receive others as you receive us. Amen.



Eugene Stockstill serves the Tremont Charge.

Sunday, March 25

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (ROMANS 12:21 KJV)

While driving my friends around Greenwood in 1963, we visited the hospital. After we parked, three white men came over, called me the “N” word and asked what was on my bumper. I said, “I don’t know.” They ordered me to look. It was a “register to vote” sticker. They told me to “take that ___ thing off.”

When I refused, they hit me and threatened to throw me in the river if I didn’t. Immediately, my friends started screaming, and then a helpful voice yelled, “Leave that boy alone and let’s go.” As they left, they said, “There is no need to call the police because we are the police.” I drove away fearful, yet thankful that things turned out OK.

This incident could have tainted my view of Greenwood forever, but God, the Civil Rights Movement and others inspired me to take the high road, by forgiving them and working toward inclusiveness. This I did, serving nine years as a pastor nearby (1965-1974) and as district superintendent there (1998-2004).

Uniting with other Christ-like people in the district, I continued to strive for inclusiveness. I lived in an all-white neighborhood, eulogized the pastor of Greenwood First United Methodist Church, had consecutive years of cross-racial pulpit exchanges, preached and worshipped in churches throughout the district and attended other community events, feeling that the goals of inclusiveness were being realized. The beginning was rough, but today, God’s intended community there is bigger, better and growing; and so am I.

– Fred H. Brown

Prayer: God, we thank you for the privilege of serving as your ambassadors, of carrying your light into the world, of sharing your love with others to conquer hate and prevail over evil. Amen.



Fred H. Brown of Columbus is a former district superintendent and administrative assistant to the bishop now pastoring St. James United Methodist Church in retirement.

Monday, March 26

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (PHILIPPIANS 2:5 NRSV)

His name was Henry Jackson Moore, “Brother Jack” to his many friends, “Grandpa” to me. He was born on Oct. 19, 1872, in Kemper County and grew up the son of farmers in the throes of Reconstruction, a period in which racial animosity and strife were rampant, setting the course for the next century of division and mistrust.

H. J. Moore became a Methodist preacher. His first appointment was the Yazoo Circuit, the first of many successive pastorates in south Mississippi. He retired in 1941, five years before I was born. He died in 1966 at the age of 93 after 69 years in the Mississippi Conference.

Grandpa’s influence is one of the major reasons I became a thoughtful Christian and grew to abhor racism. As a youth, I was impressed by Grandpa’s gentle and open response to the Civil Rights Movement, so out-of-step with the inflamed resistance of many white Mississippians. He never preached it and seldom spoke of it, but with the acuity of teenage observation I could see that Grandpa loved black folk and white folk alike. I could sense that he identified with the hunger of the oppressed.

As I studied history and absorbed the prevalent attitudes of the culture, I saw a stark contrast between his openness and hopefulness and the hatred and fear that was all too common. The only explanation I could conjure, then or now, is the difference following Jesus made in Grandpa’s character and sensitivities.

The difference certainly could not be attributed to the culture in which he lived. I believe the difference came from his cruciform life, lived at the intersection of God’s grace and human spirit, his consistent effort to live up to the character of Christ in the midst of the everyday. I admired him and this difference his faith had made in him. That was all it took to make me want that kind of relationship for myself.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” This is not just a phrase from one of Paul’s New Testament epistles. I saw it, I sensed it, applied, alive and at work in the life of Henry Jackson Moore. I pray that it is alive, now, in me.

– David Price

Prayer: God, let us be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may be your agents to help transform others. Amen.



David Price is Hattiesburg District superintendent.

Tuesday, March 27

Put on each and every piece of God's armor that you will be prepared and able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan. (EPHESIANS 6:11 LIVING BIBLE)

During the middle of the civil rights era, my father was pastor of St. Paul Methodist Church in Meridian. The church was used for voter rights meetings and other CORE, SNCC and NAACP* projects. Often we received threats via phone and mail. My father's words were always, "Prepare for the worst and accept the best." As I reminisced these situations, some memories surfaced.

A few years ago, I was browsing through an old trunk containing clothes I could no longer wear. I picked up a bag containing an old football jersey. As I opened the bag and unfolded the shirt, I began to recollect my middle linebacker days. On the shirt there were still some stains of blood of various shades. Further, there were indications of rips and tears in several places. Some had been mended. Some still remained open.

The shades of blood on the jersey indicated that I had not only injured other people in games, but I, too, had been hurt. Without doubt, some hits given and received were accidental. Others were intentional fouls of unnecessary roughness. Likewise, in life, not only have I hurt others, but I, too, have been socially injured. The emotional and spiritual rips and tears I allowed the Great Physician Jesus Christ to treat have mended. The meaning of "forgive" is "to release; let go." Those injuries that I was determined to treat with the balm of revenge rather than forgiveness remained open with throbbing pains.

In one game, we were trailing at halftime. We needed more agility and speed rather than strength. I suggested that the linebackers take off some pads that we might have more flexibility. In the end, we had more agility but were also more susceptible to pain and injury. Consequently, many of the blood stains and shirt tears could have been avoided.

Paul reminds us that in the daily game of life, we are not fighting what is tangible, physical or visible. Therefore, daily, "Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever Satan attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing up." The purpose of the armor is not to injure others, but to use as a defense from injurious attacks. Thus, the one that will be victorious in the end is the one who fully prepares in the beginning.

– A. W. Crump Jr.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for covering us with your love. Amen.



A. W. Crump Jr. is professor of philosophy, logic and social statistics at Jackson State University.

*CORE - Congress of Racial Equality, SNCC - Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Wednesday, March 28

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (PHILIPPIANS 3:12 NRSV)

The season of Lent invites all of us to a searching self-examination of our spiritual condition in light of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our salvation. The measures and standards of the world are hardly sufficient for this journey of self-discovery and change to which we are each and all invited by the cross. The vision which guides us is the gospel task of reconciling the world to God and each of us to our neighbors through our transformative relationship with Jesus Christ.

With respect to our progress in realizing the vision of racial reconciliation, I am reminded of the lyric from U2's song:

“You know I believe in the Kingdom Come;

“Where all the colors will bleed into one.

“But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.”

We know, in our hearts and inner vision, that God intends all God's children to live as one family in authentic love and true justice with one another. Yet, our experience of this life leaves us looking for, longing for more. We are surrounded by unfairness, prejudice and inequality which constantly denies the very fullness of life Jesus clearly intends for all his sisters and brothers. What can we do?

The apostle Paul seems to understand the “not yet” nature of the human condition. He articulates our frustration with not having arrived at the place of fairness and love toward all. Yet, Paul is not resigned to the imperfection of the world. Instead, remembering the claim and power of Christ, he commits himself to being faithful and responsible to the heavenly call, the divine vision, the unrealized wholeness which is God's gift to everyone. This is our choice, as well.

We can pretend we have arrived, which is to deny the reality of suffering all around us. We can become fatalistic, resigning ourselves to injustice and becoming hard-hearted in the process. Or, like Paul, we can choose to live courageously according to the redeemed realities of the resurrection faith. To choose this path will often put us at odds with others who have made other choices. It will not always be easy to hold to this path of relationships and public behavior. The power to do so is not ours, but rather belongs to the one who, by his sacrifice, has made us his own, even Jesus Christ.

– Steve McDonald

Prayer: God, we admit that we have not already reached the goal but are striving toward the goal of being like you. Amen.



Steve McDonald is Greenwood District superintendent.

Thursday, March 29

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
(EPHESIANS 6:4 NRSV)

One Sunday, I went to McDonald's for a burger. As I got my diet Coke (of course, you always drink a diet drink with high-calorie food – one cancels the other that way), there was a very pretty little girl dressed in her Sunday best with little pigtails with beads and barrettes in her hair. She had gotten her drink and in a voice that could only belong to a sweet little girl said to me, “Sir, would you give me a top for my drink?”

I said, “Sure,” and reached high up and handed her a top. It was the wrong size. I noticed that it didn't fit and said to her, “Oh, honey, I got the wrong size for you. Let me get you another.” I handed her the correct-sized top and again in that sweet voice she said, “Thank you so much, sir.”

After sitting there with my lunch for a few minutes, I looked around the restaurant to see if I would see the child and her family. I did not see them anywhere.

However, I formed an opinion that had I seen her family I would have seen a family filled with dignity and order and manners. I think I would have seen adults who know how to nurture a child and teach that child not only proper manners but also how to be bold enough to seek help to meet her own need.

The next morning I went into a room that has been unused for some time. On a shelf on the side of the room away from the windows I found a little pot with a tiny cactus of some kind standing forlorn and extremely dry – even too dry for a cactus. I picked it up and thought I would water it, put it in my office window so it can get some light and see if it will come to new life and growth – at least give it a chance.

It is now sitting in my window being nurtured by my kind words to it and by much-needed sunlight and water. We shall see if it lives and grows or not.

The child of the day before and the cactus are both alike in one regard. Neither could reach their full potential without nurturing. The same can be said about each of us. Is that why, do you suppose, that the Bible so often speaks of how we are to love and support one another in our faith journey?

– Guss Shelly

Prayer: God, we thank you for the privilege that you have given us to be co-creators with you, sharing the love that you have given us as your children with our children. Amen.



Guss Shelly is pastor of First United Methodist Church in Gulfport.

Friday, March 30

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?” (LUKE 15:4 NRSV)

While in theology school, I worked part time in the credit center of a large catalog retailer, authorizing credit approvals and at night making credit collection calls to customers. Some bad credit in the form of non-collectible accounts was expected. The company viewed about a five percent loss as acceptable.

In our world, some think that it is possible to use this economic approach to life. However, in God’s economy, percentages never work. Therefore, the Christian cannot deal in percentages when it comes to being obedient to God and doing God’s will.

The lost sheep and lost coin parables in Luke point to a different and particular value system when considering relationships with human beings. During the Lenten season this year we have the opportunity to review our humanistic economy compared to God’s economy in the area of race relations, racism and prejudice.

We should never be pleased and content with an improved percentage of success when it comes to our treatment of others and their value as human beings. We should not just expect racism and prejudice to continue even though things may not be as bad as in previous times. We do not need to deal in percentages when it comes to this matter. Until there is racism no more, our work as Christian witnesses is not done. We can’t take a vacation. We must think in God terms, not secular, humanistic terms, all of our days. God is always concerned and is never satisfied with just improving. We should not be satisfied either.

May the God of light brighten our lives and may our lights shine as effective Christian witnesses each day.

– Jerry Beam

Prayer: God, let us not be satisfied with demonstrating a portion of your love or a portion of your grace, but let us strive to realize the fullness of you and your purpose. Amen.



Jerry Beam is New Albany District superintendent.

Saturday, March 31

For you are all one in Christ Jesus. (GALATIANS 3:28 NRSV)

I participated in the first official meeting across racial lines in the Mississippi Conferences (Central Jurisdiction for blacks and Southeastern Jurisdiction for whites). Although it was some 40 years ago, I remember the events as though they were yesterday.

At the Red Carpet Inn in Hattiesburg, jurisdiction officers sponsored a retreat for the United Methodist Women's officers of the two former conferences. On the night when Mrs. Eloise Hopson related her experiences as an African American in our church, it was the first time I had examined the church I love from that perspective. All weekend, with one new experience after another, I wrestled with God's call to the issue of racism.

During the final worship on Sunday morning, my restless spirit was still struggling with the meaning of the call in the atmosphere of the late '60s and '70s. Suddenly, from across the room a note was passed to me. It was from one of God's saints, Frankie Russell, jurisdiction president. It read simply,

"Twick, dear, I perceive that God has called you to the issue of racism. REMEMBER THAT GOD NEVER CALLS YOU TO GO OUT ON A LIMB THAT GOD IS NOT OUT THERE WITH YOU."

Needless to say, the note, carefully tucked in my Bible, sustained me through the period of merger. Thanks be to God for enriching my life by teaching me that we are all at the banquet table together. Here we are neither Jew nor Greek, black or white, male or female. We are one in Christ!

– Twick Morrison

Prayer: God, thank you for allowing us to be one in you. Amen.



Twick Morrison is the chairperson of the conference Commission on Religion and Race.

HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday, April 1

...But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

(I KINGS 19:11-12 RSV)

In 1966, Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander, a professor at Jackson State University, published *Jubilee*, the story of her grandmother, who was born a slave but lived to see emancipation. *Jubilee* was a high literary success; some say equal to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.

In the summer of 1966, at a flower show held in Jackson, I was invited to create an arrangement interpreting a book by a Southern author. The book was to accompany the flower arrangement. I chose *Jubilee*. I used fiery Tropicana roses and lush Southern foliage, sure that I had captured the indomitable spirit of Vvry, the heroine of *Jubilee*.

When I set up my display including my copy of *Jubilee*, I began to hear hostile murmurs from some of the show workers. Listening to a still small voice from God citing equality, I found myself saying, "The schedule did not specify white; it said Southern authors."

When the judges placed a blue ribbon beside my *Jubilee* arrangement, I felt affirmed. Listening to that same still small voice has given me courage to speak up whenever I sense the playing field needs leveling. It's a small thing, but it has made all the difference in the world in the way I live out my life, hopefully for the common good and for God's purposes.

– Gay Huff

Prayer: God, help us have courage to stand up for truth and justice in the face of hostility. Amen.



Gay Huff of Jackson attends St. Matthew's United Methodist Church and is the former conference director of Lay Speaking Ministries and a two-time delegate to General Conference.

Monday, April 2

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children. (PSALM 103:17 NIV)

Thomas Bridges was my grandfather, my mother's father. When he died I was about 6. I thought he was just plain great.

He was an educated and well-spoken gentleman, a good businessman and an accomplished artist. His wonderful watercolor self-portrait had a distinct place of honor in my Aunt Helen's living room after he died. I would stand across the room and stare at that painting and wonder about him and his life. He stood tall and proud in the portrait, with his glasses in his hands and the look of self-assurance in his eyes.

My grandfather was a portrait painter back in the days before everyone had cameras. The popularity of the camera changed his life and took away his career. He moved to New York City from North Carolina and trained for a new career as an insurance salesman. He took my mother everywhere he went. My mother cherished the memories and precious time she spent with him.

One of her fondest memories was the sound of the calliope at the circus. My brother had a sound effects record that he played occasionally. One of the sounds was the calliope whistle. When my mother heard that sound, she would laugh and then suddenly cry as she remembered her father and their trip to the circus.

She had the same reaction of joy and tears the day I told her that I had been accepted on full scholarship at Duke Divinity School. She was very proud but crying. She told me that my grandfather had applied to Duke University as a young man but was denied entrance because he was black.

Those words hurt me deeply. The man that I knew and loved could not get the education he wanted because of his color.

When I graduated from Duke Divinity School I thought about him and all the thousands of black people like him who were turned away from education, justice and freedom. We are standing on the shoulders of so many thousands today! Thanks be to God for the way that they paved for us all.

"We have come over a way that with tears has been watered:

"We have come, treading the path thru the blood of the slaughtered,

"Out of the gloomy past, till now we stand at last

"Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast." ("Lift Every Voice and Sing," James Weldon Johnson)

– Victoria Sizemore-Tandy

Prayer: God, we thank you for the inheritance that you promised us on our parents' and grandparents' behalf. We thank you for allowing us to reap the blessing of their faithfulness. Amen.



Victoria Sizemore-Tandy is Senatobia District superintendent.

Tuesday, April 3

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. (MARK 14:23 NIV)

On March 7, 1965, “Bloody Sunday,” a group of voting rights demonstrators was violently attacked by police and state troopers in Selma, Alabama. This led two weeks later to a march from Selma to Montgomery led by Martin Luther King Jr. to protest for voting rights. It would culminate at the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery on Thursday, March 25.

At the time I was a social action executive for the Massachusetts Council of Churches. My job the week of the march was to get airplane reservations for clergy and laity flying to Montgomery to join the effort. The MCC chartered a commercial plane and flew about 200 clergy and laity down to join the march on Wednesday. We arrived at the camp site of the march in the early evening, and we slept that night on an athletic field.

The next morning Dr. King led some 25,000 of us out of the camp to the capitol. That crowd would grow as we marched. Yet, along the line of the march were thousands of Southern whites. A few made menacing gestures, most just looked at us grimly with disdain and anger, and the younger people more often just gave us the finger.

Because I was tall and bigger than most, I was asked to walk on the outside. Someone told me, “If somebody’s gonna get hit, we would rather it be somebody your size.” It was not a comforting thought, and I remember complaining to myself that demonstrators seemed to be terribly small.

As the morning wore on, I noticed the very humid spring of Alabama. My Mississippi blood had “thickened up” and, dressed in my Boston clothes, I began to feel the heat and to get quite hungry and thirsty. As inspired as I was to be there—and scared, I might add—I was nevertheless focused more on food and drink than anything else.

I looked up the line and coming our way, that is, against the flow of the march, was a black woman. She had on a print dress that had endured too many washings and well-worn shoes. She was very poor, I thought to myself. But in one hand she had a stack of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and in the other a gallon jug of red Kool-Aid. I don’t know why but when she got to me, she shoved those sandwiches into one of my hands and that jug of Kool-Aid into the other. She then looked up at me and said, “Heah, Brother, we gonna overcome!”

I was dumbstruck. I uttered some kind of “Thank you,” and looked down at the sandwiches and Kool-Aid. When I turned to say something else, she had disappeared into the crowd. I took one of the sandwiches and passed the others to the person on my left. I lifted the jug above my head and took a long drink. When I passed it on to that same man on my left, it hit me like a brick: “This is my body broken for you, and this is my blood shed for you.” I chilled for the next quarter of a mile.

–Tex Sample

Prayer: God, we thank you for those who sacrificed their bodies and their blood, their food and their drink, for the social freedom of all. Amen.



Tex Sample is a native of Brookhaven.

Wednesday, April 4*

“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (LUKE 22:19b NRSV)

We continued the march to the capitol and passed the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King Jr. had pastored as he led the Montgomery bus boycott. Arriving at the capitol, we were the largest Southern demonstration for civil rights in United States history. Once on the capitol grounds we sat on the grass. There were singers and other musicians; there were speeches and the introduction of dignitaries. We sang freedom songs and shouted support from where we sat. But we were all waiting for Dr. King to speak.

Finally, King climbed to the back of a flatbed truck and began. The speech that day was as inspired and as powerful as his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963 in Washington. Throughout his compelling oratory people black and white shouted support and encouragement. He spoke his dream: “Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man. We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. That will be a day not of the white man, not of the black man. That will be the day of man as man.” Then he moved toward his conclusion. He knew great struggle still lay ahead, and he moved to the question of how long the dream would take.

“I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because no lie can live forever. How long? Not long, because you will reap what you sow. How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

He then moved into a pattern of shouting, “How long? Not long. How long? Not long.” Then he seemed to shout to us: “How long!” And that crowd of thousands upon thousands rose up off the ground and shouted in roaring response. “NOT LONG!” He ended it with, “How long? Not long, ‘cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on....Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.

“Glory, glory hallelujah!

“Glory, glory hallelujah!

“Glory, glory hallelujah!”

At that point Dr. King had three years, three years before his body would be broken and his blood would be shed. With his death I would ask, “How long?” In the violence and wholesale injustice that continue to plague the earth, I have often asked, “How long?” But in all these things I can still hear that wonderful black woman with the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and strawberry Kool-Aid: “Heah, brother, we gonna overcome!”

– Tex Sample

Prayer: God, we thank you for your son, who sacrificed body and blood for our spiritual freedom. Amen.



Tex Sample is a native of Brookhaven.

*Anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death.

Holy Thursday, April 5

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” (LUKE 11:4 NIV)

While attending a Journey Toward the Light event in 2006, I heard civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer’s widow and children tell their story.

Mr. Dahmer died following the fire bombing of his home by night riders in 1966. The Dahmers said they were prepared for something to happen to their father/husband because of the work he was doing. They just didn’t know when or how people would try to stop him from facilitating voter registration for the black residents of his county.

Mr. Dahmer took several precautions. He never went anywhere alone. The children knew all of the emergency numbers. The family often slept on the floor below windows. As I listened to their story, I thought to myself, “What a brave man this was. He pursued this calling knowing that harm might come to him and his family.”

Mrs. Dahmer said she wondered how she would make it alone with the children after her husband’s death. She had already been denied her teaching job. She talked about how difficult it was to raise the children alone. Mrs. Dahmer ended her story by telling the group that what happened to her husband could have been stopped by us – church people. “Church people did not speak up or out,” she said. Church people remained silent and stood by, allowing this grave injustice to take place.

Later, her son told the group that one of the participants in the bombing came to him and asked forgiveness. The son could not hate him nor hold a grudge. He said he had to forgive the man because of what his father and the church had taught him.

I struggled to understand how one could forgive such a premeditated act of violence. Then I reflected on what Mrs. Dahmer had said. No one spoke up or out that had the power to stop what took place that night her husband died. I was reminded of the night of Jesus’ arrest.

Even his followers abandoned him. Peter followed at a distance, but when confronted about being a follower of Jesus, he denied knowing Christ. I was convicted. Too often I am silent when it is time to advocate for justice.

– Lindsey Robinson

Prayer: God, give us the grace to seek forgiveness and to extended forgiveness to those who offend us. Give us the boldness to take opportunities to witness and advocate for truth and justice. Amen.



Lindsey Robinson is a member of the Connectional Ministries staff.

Good Friday, April 6

And all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. (I CORINTHIANS 10:4 NLT)

A summer storm was in the distance the day Mrs. Louise died in 1957. She was hoeing in her garden. Despite the clear sky overhead, a flash of lightning struck her. In a moment she was separated from her family, friends, the community and her place. Mrs. Louise was a matriarch in the Canaan community. The manner of her death would have pleased her, I think, sudden while she was doing what she enjoyed on her own place, her farm.

My family and I did not own our farm. We were sharecropping in Fayette County, Alabama. We were the only white family in the community. Our neighbors were loving black families or single individuals. Folks borrowed from each other without regard to race. Sugar, flour, coffee and tea were exchanged often when someone ran out near mealtime. A pair of scissors was loaned and borrowed so often that the original owner was lost in the exchange. We had a good community. The death of Mrs. Louise was a blow to us.

We buried her a week later at Canaan Church. The building was made of planks. It was a faded wooden structure in the middle of a cemetery filled with sandstones. The windows were open boxes where panes and frames needed to be. Slatted pews filled the sanctuary. At the service there was standing room only despite the scorching heat.

The Reverend Nalls delivered an appropriate eulogy. He interrupted his sermon to say, "I'm thirsty." We had no water at the church. Some young men and I loaded into an old Ford pickup and went to the nearest well with a gallon jug. There probably were two water coolers in town at the courthouse marked "White Only" and "Colored." My school had no black students. On this day at Canaan, though, everyone was a person, a child of God.

We returned with the water. Our glass was a Garret Snuff glass. One of the ushers served Rev. Nalls first. Once his thirst was quenched, he continued to preach.

The ushers poured water and passed the cup throughout the congregation. *All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.* No priest turned the cup in his hand and wiped the brim with a white cloth.

We placed Mrs. Louise into the red earth of Canaan. Many lingered. We shook hands and embraced each other. Another storm, a much-needed one, was in the distance. Someone placed the gallon jug inside the door and hung the Garret Snuff glass on the nub of a cedar's trunk. No sign was present.

– Don McCain

Prayer: God, we thank you for providing a fountain that flows freely with living water available to all, so that those who drink of it will not thirst. Amen.



Don McCain is an elder in the Mississippi Conference. He is currently on disability leave and lives in Amory.

Saturday, April 7

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

(EPHESIANS 2:8 NRSV)

I was raised in the Methodist Church and went to church and Sunday School. When I went to college at Jackson State, I wandered away from the church.

In the summer of 1970 there was widespread student unrest, and students were killed at Kent State and Jackson State. I was a freshman at Jackson State when this happened. It looked like a war zone as troops descended on campus. Two young men were killed by National Guardsmen. The officers opened fire on the girls' dormitory and riddled its entire front with bullets. My roommate and I listened to the barrage, which appeared to last several minutes but in reality may have taken 20 seconds. As things settled down, it seemed like forever before medical help arrived to treat the wounded.

My roommate and I walked to the girls' dorm. When we got there, the girls were traumatized and dazed. All of us spent the rest of the night on the ground in front of the dorm. When I opened the side door of the building, I observed what looked like a lake of blood. After witnessing this, I developed an intense dislike of white people.

The next summer I went to a summer program in Illinois. My roommate invited me to a Pentecostal church. To my surprise it was a white church. Intending to see racial hatred in them, I saw just the opposite. They were down-to-earth, genuine, loving people. Through this event, God transformed my hatred into love for all people and led me back to the church.

– Dewey A. Handy

Prayer: God of grace, thank you for transforming hatred into love and acceptance. May all experience the transforming love of your son so that your kingdom may come on the earth. Amen.



Dewey A. Handy of Jackson is chairperson of the conference Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee.

**Mortals, join the mighty chorus which the morning stars began;
Love divine is reigning o'er us, binding all within its span divides. Every singing,
march we onward, victors in the midst of strife, Joyful music leads
us sunward, in the triumph song of life.**

– HENRY VAN DYKE, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Easter Sunday, April 8

Jesus Christ is Lord of all! (ACTS 10:36)

On this Easter Day, Jesus Christ lives, raised from agonizing death to radiance of life. Light streams from the tomb! Death is swallowed up in victory! Boundaries are broken. Jesus Christ is Lord of all!

As Easter people, we bear forth this life, this light, this victory. Our horizons are pushed back, our vision is expanded, our hope is anchored in what God has done.

During the past Lenten days, we have remembered darkness. We have shared our journeys. We have confessed our weakness and our failings. We have received and offered forgiveness. Now, in Easter light and joy, we are overwhelmed anew by the goodness of God.

John Perkins was interviewed for *Sojourners* magazine by a young man concerned about his grandmother's racism. "How might she be helped to change her ways?"

John Perkins asked simply, "Does your grandmother like blueberries?"

The young man answered, "She loves them."

John Perkins responded, "Then take her some of my blueberries."

Divine love reigns over us and binds us together. God's work continues through us. We give thanks for our place in Christ's reconciling ministry.

In every place, Christ lives and goes before us. In every place, Christ binds our wounds. In every place, Christ is bringing victory.

May you be blessed with Easter courage, hope and joy as you continue to live and lead in the light of our Risen Savior. Alleluia!

– Hope Morgan Ward



Hope Morgan Ward is bishop of the Mississippi Area of The United Methodist Church.

Journeys Toward the Light

Sponsored by the Mississippi Conference Commission on Religion and Race, Journeys Toward the Light provide opportunities to return to important civil rights sites in Mississippi to remember and reflect. Journey destinations have included Ruleville, Oxford/University of Mississippi, Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, Hattiesburg, Philadelphia/Neshoba County, Jackson and McComb. The next Journey Toward the Light will be in Laurel on March 22. To participate, contact Rev. Lindsey Robinson in the conference office, 601-354-0515, toll-free 866-647-7486, Lrobinson@mississippi-umc.org.



Light Partners

All churches in the Mississippi Conference are invited to become Light Partners. Light Partners share experiences across racial lines. Through the disciplines of study, worship, prayer and action we hope to deepen our understanding of one another and the Light we share as we journey together. The entire congregation can participate or any smaller group, such as a Sunday School class. For more information or to request a Light Partners brochure, contact Rev. Lindsey Robinson in the conference office, 601-354-0515, toll-free 866-647-7486, Lrobinson@mississippi-umc.org.

