

Advent

Devotions

2020



Kennebec River
United Methodist Churches

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

Psalm 130:5-6---

The year 2020 is one of those times that we will be talking about for years to come. We will share our immediate reactions, the adjustments that came slowly, and finally our deep longing for it all to be over.

Last summer the Kennebec River Churches gathered around fire pits at our United Methodist churches along the river. We roasted marshmallows, sang songs, and told stories. Storytelling we realized was a wonderful way to connect to our neighbors, to see, as Maya Angelou would say; “We are more alike than different.” The River Church clergy thought sharing our stories of hope amid a pandemic could connect us once again. We may be at a distance from our family and friends, but we are not alone.

Advent is a time of waiting. Waiting can stir up a variety of emotions, fear, anxiety, sorrow, and grief. Waiting can also surprise us with hope! These meditations come from all six churches. As you read these reflections, may you feel the company of God and the blessing of the greater community that surrounds you.

Rev. Kathleen Decker Szakas---Highland Avenue UMC, Gardiner

Rev. Rich Cullen—Cox Memorial UMC, Hallowell

Rev. Kristin White—Green Street UMC, Augusta
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NOVEMBER 29



1st Sunday of Advent: Lighting the Candle of Hope

Scripture: ROMANS 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reflection

On this first Sunday of Advent we think ahead, not to the celebration of the birth of our savior, but to the completion of the work that He came into the world to do. The apostle Paul speaks of the hope that the entire creation has as it awaits the redemption of all that God has made. This sense of hope can easily be lost especially in trying times such as these. Yet, even in the midst of a pandemic, we can wait with patience for God in whom we place our trust. Hope and patience always go together and we cannot have one without the other. Let us embrace this season of patient waiting with faith, hope, and love.

Light the candle

Today we light this first Advent candle with the hope and expectation that the “God who has begun a good work in us” will continue that work until the creation experiences its full redemption. Praise be to God who is faithful, not just to those who believe, but to all that God has made. Amen.



NOVEMBER 30

Titus 2.12b-13 *"Grace will carry us though. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. "*

As I write this, all people in the world have felt and are still feeling the effects of a very scary and deadly virus; it feels like the whole world is on a big "pause button". Yet the seasons continue to change, the clouds continue to float by, the leaves continue to turn bright colors and then fall to mother earth, squirrels and chipmunks gather nuts, birds gather together and migrate south. Somehow life goes on - days turn into nights, nights turn into days, the sun rises and the sun sets, the moon and the stars appear and disappear only to reappear again. Babies are born, birthdays, anniversaries, holidays come and go, and milestones are reached. Life goes on even as, sadly, people die. Some die in accidents, some of natural causes, some from a deadly virus. And the world continues to turn on its axis. Life goes on and we humans realize that we cannot change what we want to change, at least not yet. The terrible virus reminds us that only God is in charge, only God can create life, only God knows the future. We are mere humans after all. Will we humans learn from this experience? Will we realize WHO is in charge? Will we acknowledge our dependency on our creator? Will we admit that we are all God's creations? Will we finally recognize that we humans, each and every one of us, are all God's children? God's precious loved ones?

A pastor friend of mine, Glenn Miller, puts it this way: "Christians are always living between the times, caught between Christ coming and Christ return..... We look back to Jesus' teaching and resurrection and forward to his coming in glory. Meanwhile, we are called to live in the gap between the two advents.... We know that we must cross many troubled waters before we find calm seas. In those moments, we need to remember that wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God will carry us to God's coming Victory.....Praying is the bridge that we can trust as we cross from this present age to the age to come. "

*God, we pray that you will help us to live in this world,
your world, with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to you,
while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of
our Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. Amen*

Melicent Versteeg
Cox Memorial UMC



DECEMBER 1

Please read John 4: 1 – 41

John 4: 39 *“He told me everything I ever did...”*

What provides me hope? Lots of things: the 2nd and 3rd verses of hymns; the faith of the saints and people of faith around me; the sun rising every morning; nature and scripture. When I first thought about writing this devotional advent meditation, I was sure I would be led to the prophets. But in my head, I kept hearing “Jesus met the woman at the well...”. I know this may be a strange choice for advent, but this really is the story of hope and salvation. And it provides me hope. It is noon time. Jesus has been walking a long time. He is tired and thirsty. He comes to the town well in a Samaritan village. He does not have a container and rope with which to draw water. We know that he could have used his power to draw water. But he didn't. He sat and waited for the person he had known he would meet.

Many believe that the reason the woman was at the well at noontime was because she was shunned by the other women in the community and came to draw her water when she would not have to deal with their contempt and rejection. Hers was considered a sinful lifestyle and they undoubtable had let her know of their disapproval.

When he sees her, he asks her to draw water for him This was strange for several reasons. Samaritans and Jews had a long-standing hatred for each other. They would go miles out of their way to avoid each other. In addition, for a man to speak to an unknown woman was considered a sin and would make the man unclean. So, asking a Samaritan woman to give him water was unthinkable, but he did it. He knew who she was, what she had done and what she was currently doing. And he asked this unclean person to draw him water to drink.

Through the power of his words and his love, she realized that he truly saw her and instead of rejecting her, he welcomed her back into the human race by asking her to do him a favor. She heard Jesus tell her that he was the long-awaited Messiah. Doing a favor for the Promised one, talking with him about her beliefs – it was so overwhelming that she left her precious water jug at the well and went to tell the people of the town that perhaps, just perhaps the Messiah had come to their town. Instead of scorning her, they went to meet this person and their lives were forever changed.

Jesus loves us so much that he is willing to come to our well, so that we can know God, trust in God's presence and grace, love God and have everlasting life. During this advent season, my hope and prayer is that we grow closer to the Messiah and let him forever change our lives. For the best is yet to come. Amen

*Holy God, as we prepare to welcome you at
Christmas, we are grateful that you meet us where we are
and love us as we are, molding us to be more like you.*

Thank you Jesus, Amen.

Kathleen Dunford
Green Street UMC



DECEMBER 2

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus UMH #196

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

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*Come Lord Jesus,*

*We enter into the Advent season of waiting,  
we come expecting great things. We come to meet you with hope  
burning for your freedom and your healing kindom. Amen*



## DECEMBER 3

**1 Peter 3:15 (NIV):** *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*

### MARCHALLENGE

“Marchallenge” (that’s “March” combined with “challenge”), a time when my way of life seemed to fall apart, change, decline or it just “wasn’t the way it should be”. I no longer felt comfortable having my daughters in my home, joining “the girls” for lunch, crafting with friends and even playing checkers with my grandson. Some mornings it was a challenge to get out of bed knowing it was going to be the same thing over and over and over again: meds, coffee, breakfast, coffee, CNN, lunch, maybe some reading, more CNN supper, Wheel of Fortune, some reading and off to bed . . . repeat, repeat, repeat. It felt like the death of another life. Depression was setting in . . . and I realized it.

But with the dripping away of those Marchallenge storms (yes, a heavy March snowstorm had destroyed my 30-year-old grape arbor), droplets of hope began to appear. First the hope of nature – crocus, a doe with two fauns in the backyard and mud! Then a handwritten note from a college friend in the mailbox, a face mask sent from my son in San Diego (with the thought he was worried about me), a happy picture from my grandson in the groceries delivered by my daughter . . . several of many droplets. Those droplets turned to showers: Church in the Wild (connecting again with church family), circumstances bringing one daughter “home” to work from home, more emails, texts and snail mails, summer drive-by waves, sitting on the rocks at Pemaquid . . .

I had become too complacent. I had taken much for granted: my children, my home, my way of life. When adversity hit, I felt at a disadvantage. Michelle Obama said, “it’s important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages.”

The Marchallenge experience opened my eyes to the hope that I can witness and use the gifts that God has given others . . . and me. I, too, with precautions, can share time with a friend, send a note, do more drive-by waves and beeps, do fractions with my grandson and even Facetime and Zoom to catch up with others. I believe hope is a blessing God has given us to share with each other from our bag of gifts.

*God, open our eyes to the blessings hiding in our midst.*

*May we be open to the hope you reveal*

*in times of joy and challenge. Amen.*

Jane H Hubert  
East Pittston UMC

A stylized, blue cursive word "Hope" written in a flowing, artistic script.

## DECEMBER 4

**Lamentations 3:22-24** *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."*

When the "stay-at-home" order was given back in March it felt to me like we were entering into a period of exile much like the ancient Israelite people experienced during the time of the prophet Jeremiah. The Book of Lamentations, which is attributed to Jeremiah, speaks of the heaviness of grief and sorrow that the people felt, both those who were in exile in Babylon and those who remained behind in the now decimated Judah and Jerusalem. The first two and a half chapters of this book speak very vividly of these dark days and the pain that the people were experiencing. Yet, in the middle of this string of negativity and pain comes these incredibly powerful words, "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

What follows is a word that speaks meaningfully to us as we enter into the season of Advent. Because "the Lord is my portion", therefore "I will hope in him." We continue to be challenged on a day to day basis by this unprecedented pandemic. The number of people infected by the virus and the number of people whose deaths are attributed to it continues to rise daily. Although we have been given some hope that a vaccine is imminent, we have no choice but to continue to wait and live in suspense of that day. Like the prophet in the dark days of exile we too have a hope that is more true than that of a vaccine. It is the hope that we place in the God who is our portion and strength. God has not forsaken us, but remains faithful even though our lives have been turned upside down by the pandemic.

This year the pandemic has provided us with a window into the reality of Advent waiting. Just as we wait for the pandemic to come to an end, we also wait for that day when God will bring to completion this imperfect world in which we live. God is already at work and has invited us to partner with God in the work of transformation. This enterprise begins with each one of us as we place our hope in the God who remains faithful even when we creatures prove faithless. May we recommit ourselves to this effort even as we struggle to maintain steadfastness and hope in the midst of our pandemic waiting. May we live our lives each day with purpose and expectation that not only will the pandemic end, but that God will also bring us and our world to God's desired end. May we continue to pray and live out the reality of the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

*O God who is our portion and strength, we thank you for your faithfulness to us even as we live impatiently in this time of pandemic. May we place our hope in you as we trust as well that gifted scientists will provide us with the vaccine that we need. May we find in this time of waiting the grace to continue your work in our world- feeding the hungry, ministering to the sick and dying, seeking justice.*

*Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.*

Rev. Rich Cullen, pastor  
Cox Memorial UMC





## DECEMBER 5

**1 Corinthians 1:9** *God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**John 8:12** *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."*

Advent is a season of waiting – waiting for Jesus to come as a baby at Christmas, and waiting for Christ to return and make all things whole. We have had an extended period of waiting this year: waiting to get together with friends and family, waiting to hug people at church, waiting for this pandemic to end, waiting for life to feel normal. And while there's news of a vaccine, I sometimes ask myself, "will it ever end?"

In the early Spring (it seems so long ago) I was slipping into a funk. The restrictions were so severe and more and more events I had looked forward to were being canceled. I was dragging myself through the "things that must be done." And then a card came in the mail with warm words from an unexpected sender. It was like a ray of sunshine into my cloudy day and it brought with it possibility, where I'd just seen barriers.

The ups and downs of life, pandemic, general societal anxiety and stress continued and every so often, when it was getting to be too much someone brought be a small surprise gift, or a word of encouragement, or a call, or another card. Each time I have the sense of the light of love breaking through and showing a way forward.

Now, I certainly have hard days when no card or gift appears. But one of the joys of this strange and stressful time has been seeing streams of unexpected light when I felt surrounded by darkness. It feels like a gift of God – through the hands and words of people. In the darkest time – God's love shines. And so I wait with you, and with hope: for Christmas, for a vaccine, for healing the fractures, for the fullness of God's perfecting love.

*"I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining...*

*I believe in God, even when God is silent."*

*from "I Believe" by Mark Miller*

*Light of the World,*

*You shine your love even when I don't see it.*

*Be with me as I wait in the darkness for you to come. Amen*



**DECEMBER 6**



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent: Lighting the Candle of Peace**

**Scripture: Isaiah 9:6**

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us: authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

My peace I give...the Prince of Peace

### **Reflection:**

This year has been a year of “if onlys.” If only this pandemic would end. If only...

With the uncertainty of a pandemic, and the unrest of social change, with an unrelenting election season and the unfolding realization of climate change, 2020 has not been a peaceful year. The Advent season is supposed to be familiar – gathering in our sanctuaries, singing carols together, Christmas pageants and Christmas Eve candlelight. Yet even these familiar things that bring us peace have been readjusted this year. The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of a Prince of Peace, and the Christmas angels proclaim “peace to all” as Christ is born. However, Jesus himself said, “My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”

### **Light the Candles**

This second Sunday of Advent we add to the hope that’s already shining and we light the candle of peace. This light welcomes the Prince of Peace. May it open our hearts to the peace God gives. Amen.



**DECEMBER 7**

**Jeremiah 29:11** *I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. (GNB)*

## EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

I recently heard the phrase "made my peace with uncertainty." Mulling that over, I Googled the phrase, finding that there are websites dedicated to this concept. Covid-19 has taken most of us to the mindset of not knowing what to expect as we make our ways forward. We have indeed been forced into a state of anxiety, yet we have limited control over our lives even during the best of times.

Celebrating the season of Advent is also embracing uncertainty as we await the birth of The One who comes to teach us to love and be patient with one another. Just as we have been blessed by the birth of Christ, may we also recognize and celebrate small everyday blessings as we navigate the dark times of a pandemic.

*Holy Father, keep us mindful of the light rather than the dark. Remind us that we do have control over the way we share your love and goodness with others. Amen*

Patsy Tessier  
Highland Avenue UMC



**DECEMBER 8**

**Reading: Luke 21:29-33**

**Ecclesiastes 3:14-15 (The Living Bible)** *“Whatever is has been long ago, and whatever is going to be has been before. God brings to pass again what was in the distant past and disappeared.”*

We set out for the woods, my new friend Julia and I, hoping to shake an atmosphere pervaded by political tumult and an alarming upsurge in the Covid pandemic. Having carefully followed safety protocols since March, we agreed to take a long-postponed walk but wore our masks even though we were outdoors.

As we approached the “wild church” clearing behind the church building, our concerns dissipated into the quiet peace and majesty of the worship space carved out by church volunteers in early summer. It had long ago been an apple orchard. As the years rolled on, pasture pines sprang up and eventually grew into towering monarchs. Now this grove had become a place in nature to worship while the congregation waited for when meeting indoors, in the sanctuary, would again be possible.

Gradually, a sense of peace settled over Julia and me, an awareness of the permanence of God’s glory and grandeur manifested in all Creation. Our talk turned to thoughts of God’s kingdom. What does it mean? Where is it? Scripture contains many references, always with the idea of expectancy: it is coming, it has “drawn near,” even, in one translation, it is “here” or “within you.” To claim it requires not only hope for the future but also responsibility in the present order of things.

As we followed the path out of the clearing, Julia extended her arm in a welcoming gesture, acknowledging the earth on which we stood. “At hand,” she said quietly.

*Dear God, May our eyes be open, our ears attentive to your presence  
and your promise, wherever it manifests. Help us to be patient and trusting  
as your purpose unfolds before us and within us. Amen.*

Lucy Martin  
East Pittston UMC



DECEMBER 9

**It Came Upon the Midnight Clear UMH #218**

It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth,  
To touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,  
From heaven's all-gracious King."  
The world in solemn stillness lay,  
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled,  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains,  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.

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Holy God,

Your story is awesome. And we get to be part of it.

In this unusual year, weave our stories into the story of your unusual birth.

*Let us bear witness to your peace, as you are born anew in us
and in the world this Christmas. Amen*



DECEMBER 10

Hosea 2:18 *I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.*

THE SQUIRRELS

He was proud of his mother deciding to stop walking. To have come to the edge of memory care, must have taken courage, he figures.

These were the notes on wildlife in that time of pandemic absence he did not share with her. That the squirrels whom all summer frolicked in front of the kitchen window in the early morning got interrupted. He found the larger of them stiff in the road, no response, no wound, as if it too had simply decided to stop moving after a shock too large for life. The other squirrel paused in a nook of the maple tree in view of the kitchen days later as if to moon at him, beautiful creature considering body mass to dark eye ratio. What to do for the bereaved least of us.

He remembers her partner tugging at a brown Hannaford bag poking out of the neighbor's trash lid, how its tail would go up at the point of the tug, three paws splayed out on the top, one over the edge. How he cheered for the possibility the squirrel might succeed. Now he was gone. He carried him to the woods between a rake and a snow shovel. That same animal on the fence tops in the dark had once matched the appearance of the neighbor, teaching the man who was proud of his mother no one was right taking anyone else's privacy, and teaching that adage not always so. "Thank you, Squirrel," he thought. He misses his Mom when he finds a piece of plastic still clenched between his fingers. He doesn't remember what this piece of plastic was meant for. "It's for the trash," he, God bless, remembers. How many times did he find himself saying "Mom, it's empty. Your hand is empty. There's no need to keep it clenched anymore. Let it go."

Loving God, you bless our world with animals who teach us of your presence and passion. There were animals at your birth, witness to your arrival. Thank you for the ways animals teach us to love one another and bear witness to your goodness. Amen.

Kevin Lee
Highland Avenue UMC



DECEMBER 11

Psalms 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God."

Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Proverbs 3:6 "Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

REFLECTIONS ON THESE TRYING TIMES

This has been such difficult times for so many people with so many worries. Will I get sick, or will I give it to my loved ones? Will my business survive, and will I be able to provide for my family and my employees families? Who will watch my kids? Who will take care of my parents? Along with a lot of peoples' worries came anger, bitterness, and dividing of sides. For me I started to see more of the world through other's eyes. While our church was not meeting in person, I started to do a Facebook live time of worship music and doing bible studies online with a group of friends. I found much to my surprise that the group listening every Sunday was growing and it was from many people that I didn't expect to want to spend an hour listening to "God Music." The group of people doing the studies was also growing from a small group of 4 to almost 20.

At first my thought on the growth of the listeners was that people were really bored during quarantine, so much so that they would spend an hour listening to a guy that didn't play that well or sing that well. But I kept hearing from people that they looked forward to that hour as a way to relax and be still. Not worry, not be angry, just be still. It became that for me too, sitting in my sunroom singing to God and a bunch of friends became a way to stop focusing on the other things going on around me and focus on HIM and them. I wasn't worrying about my needs; I was playing their requests for HIM.

Our bible studies also seemed to keep coming back to walking your path with God. So many times, we would be talking about being still and listening for God's voice, or seeking his direction. I am becoming quite sure things don't happen like that without Gods direction. As the weather warmed and the concerns for spreading Covid continued we were faced with meeting as a church inside or not. Many were more concerned then I was for the danger meeting inside, but I was learning to be still and love first. When talk started to make an outdoor church in the wild, I saw the answer that God was providing for us. In two weeks, we had an awesome little wild church and people were allowed to worship in ways that they felt comfortable.

Through all of this isolation and frustration, I was being taught to be still and listen. To think of others before I thought of myself. To worry about whether the young family across town had diapers, not whether I had toilet paper. Maybe even to follow a little closer to the path that God has for me.

"God thank you for the lessons you teach us through happy times and troubling times. I pray that your spirit continues to whisper in our ears to just be still and listen to your call. Lead us to the path you have chosen for us where we always love first, act with compassion, and give mercy to all, and most importantly walk humbly with our Father."

Bob Moody
East Pittston UMC



DECEMBER 12

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 *Sharing comfort through experiences. 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.*

I'm fortunate. As the lockdown was heading our way, my family, in four households, were together and we decided to stay together, being as careful and conscientious as possible. We continued to be back and forth in each other's homes, helping one another.

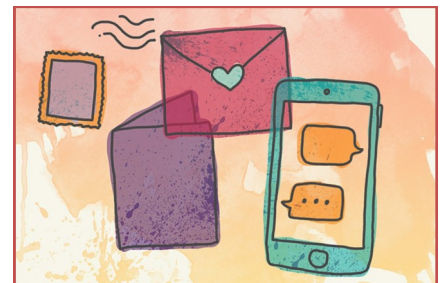
I belong to Grange and the theme for 2020 was selected a few years ago, "Cultivating Connections". The agriculture background of Grange is a reference to 'cultivation' and, of course, 'connections' involve connecting with everyone in our reach. Well, as we relied more and more on internet services to stay connected with those we know and reach out to connect with those we don't know, but have mutual friends so we aren't endangering others with any possible hacks, we've learned a lot about internet connections and have grown in that circumstance. I'm fortunate to have an old desk top computer so that I can be connected with many others around the globe. As I check with friends and connect with many prayer groups, I feel blessed that I can support those in need who reach out through the internet looking for prayers or just some kind words or laughter, or even advice from an old lady with many life experiences.

I'm also fortunate to have lots of old hymnals in my bookcase and, as I always have, I can rely on the comfort of hymns to get me through each day. They have always been my comfort whether I've been in a dentist's chair, crossing a long bridge that I don't like or watching a loved one die – "I Know the Lord Laid His Hand on Me," "How Great Thou Art," and "What a Friend we Have in Jesus".

Also, I grew up on the "Little House" books learning about the Ingalls family's isolations and being thankful I don't have to be as isolated with no communications as they did.

Dear Lord, thank you for creating us in all our differences and similarities, so many of us can just go on going on and so many of us stress about not being able to go on going on. We are thankful for today's communications so that if we have to be confined physically, we can still connect with one another. Thank you for being constant in our lives. Amen

Marilyn Stintson
Dresden/ Richmond UMC



DECEMBER 13



3rd Sunday of Advent: Lighting the Candle of Joy

Scripture: Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good;
abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Reflection:

On this third Sunday of Advent, we come with joy! Or we come wanting to get some joy to take with us. Or maybe we come seeking refuge from the social pressure of the season to be **JOYFUL!!** Especially this year when our favorite traditions are suspended or rearranged in response to the virus. Perhaps adding to the pressure we feel, Paul says that it's God's will for us to rejoice *always*. But we don't need to manufacture the joy ourselves. This joy comes from God. So Paul guides us "don't quench the Spirit." Don't block the Spirit, "don't suppress the Spirit." Our path to deep joy is to let the Spirit do her thing in us and among us. So together we will light the third (pink) candle to glow and cheer us, reminding us that "the one who calls you is faithful and will do this." Thanks be to God!

Light the Candles:

Today holding fast to hope, and saturated by peace, with our community of United Methodist River Churches and Christians everywhere, we light this third Advent candle, allowing the unquenchable Spirit to light our lives and stir joy. God is faithful. Amen.



DECEMBER 14

Psalm 121:5-6: *The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*

These words have comforted me through many times of worry and wonder. I can imagine, when the troubles of the day are glaring, that God’s shade covers me. When darkness consumes me, God’s light peaks into the smallest crack. During this time of living with a pandemic this shade and light continue to bring me hope.

When the virus first arrived at our doorsteps I could not imagine adjusting to our new normal. Driveway visits with our grandchildren, Zoom worship, and staying home seemed like an impossible thing to ask. So much to give up, so much to learn, and so much worry. It was not long before masks felt less odd on our faces, elbow bumps were awkwardly exchanged, and the benefits of Zoom meetings were realized. Each day moved like molasses yet God was watching.

Summer light delighted us after the darkness of isolation. Suddenly we were called out to feel the ground on our bare feet, to feel the wind, to take off the mask and smile from a distance. The gardens and waters of Maine singing like Glenda the Good Witch: “Come out, come out, wherever you are!”

The shade of beautiful foliage painted maps that led us on car rides and walking paths. Like mirrors the rivers reflected the beauty. Could a dry summer really bring about such beauty? Yes. Could we really be stunned by such sights while the virus lurked? Yes.

Like many people, I can be overwhelmed by the worries of “when”

- When will I be able to hug everyone freely?
- When will I not count days after seeing my grandchildren?
- When will I be able to see my parents?
- When will we feel safe?

Despite these questions my hope remains, it does not take much to remind me of God’s watch. The starry sky, the birds at the feeder, a good cup of coffee, and the smiling eyes of a child peeking over a mask--shade and light surrounds me.

God, we pray that just as you watch over us, we watch over our neighbors.

We pray that we can bring relief and encouragement during this time.

May our words reflect your promises and lead to hope. Amen.

Pastor Gayle Holden
East Pittston and Dresden Richmond UMC



DECEMBER 15

John 8: *Jesus said “..I am the light of the world.”*

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Recently, I went out to go to the store. The cold wind was blowing up a storm and the sky was layered with gray clouds. What remained of the beautiful fall leaves, were being whisked off leaving limbs stark and alone against the elements. I shivered and got into the car. There on the console was the ever- present face mask, a reminder of the pandemic that has turned our world upside down. It too had taken the color out of lives by limiting our ability to interact with our friends and family, to say nothing of the fear of us or our loved ones becoming its victims. As I sat there waiting for the car to warm up, I gazed into the sky and to my surprise, I saw, in the distance, a shaft of sunlight shine down through the clouds. I smiled at its radiance and its promise that soon there would be a change in the weather.

In Genesis 1:3, God had said “ ‘..Let there be light,’ and there was light.” In John 8:, Jesus said “..I am the light of the world.” I thought of the pandemic and wondered if, somehow, it held any promise for us. Then it hit me that God’s light had indeed showed itself, even in the midst of all the terrible human suffering. God’s love had shown itself in the form of many, many stories of the selfless devotion, dedication and love of our doctors, nurses, and first responders, who work so hard to save the lives of those with the disease even at the risk of their own. It was also reflected in the countless acts of kindness and love shown by those who fed the hungry, comforted the sick, and worked tirelessly to keep the light in God’s world. In this advent season, we too, should renew our promise to follow that light.

Dear Lord, we do not know what we will face each day

but whatever may happen to us you are there.

Give us the strength and guidance to do your will. Amen

Dwight and Mary Cooper
Highland Avenue UMC



DECEMBER 16

Joy to the World UMH #246

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

~~~~~

*God of joy,*

*help us to reverberate with the joy that rings out this season.*

*We wait with expectation for the new day when all heaven and nature sing out in joy,  
and we remember the baby Jesus who brought us into communion while we enjoy  
the presence of the Spirit guiding and nurturing the flow of all good things  
that we repeat. Amen*



## DECEMBER 17

**Scripture Psalm 150:1-6** *Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

When I was in high school a friend and I sometimes sang duets together...we'd spend hours planning and singing different tunes together and often we'd come back to a couple favorites. We also liked them as they came from the Presbyterian Hymnal instead of being Methodist songs at that time! I haven't heard these songs in years, but the words of these songs have stuck with me throughout the years and often been a comfort when I was lonely, sad, bereft or troubled.

Since last March I've used music to calm myself and reaffirm that God is in charge and only a prayer away. Being isolated so much of the time has made me think of the hymn entitled "Alone".

*It was alone the Saviour prayed in dark Gethsemane;  
Alone He drained the bitter cup and suffered there for me.  
Alone, alone, He bore it all alone;  
He gave Himself to save His own, He suffered, bled and died alone, alone.*

But probably "Back of the Clouds" has been my theme song as I know just around the corner the sun will shine and it does.

*Never fear tho' shadows dark around your path may fall;  
Do not let your heart be troubled;  
From His throne in Heaven, God is watching one and all,  
He will ever care for you.  
Back of the clouds the sun is always shining.  
After the storms your skies will all be blue;  
God has prepared a rosy tinted lining,  
Back of the clouds it's waiting to shine thru.*

Thinking about it, it's amazing that after over sixty-five years, these words seem as fresh as they were when I was a teenager. The message hasn't changed. But the comfort and assurance is there still. The music of Christmas brings much of the same assurance to me and I hope you have the "Joy, Joy, Joy Down In Your Heart" as you enjoy all the favorites of the Season. May they bring comfort and reassurance to you and your family.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of music. As we listen to the  
beautiful Christmas songs we hear during this season,  
may we thank you for not only the birth of your Son, but for  
His resurrection. "Praise Ye the Lord, Hallelujah. Amen.*

Corley Anne Byras  
Cox Memorial UMC



**DECEMBER 18**

**Psalm 90:14** *Surprise us with love at daybreak; then we'll dance all the day long. (MSG)*

## UNEXPECTED GIFTS

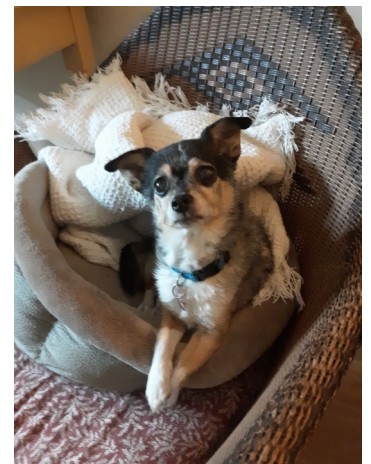
Since early March, we have been deprived of our "normal" lives: celebrations, gathering with friends or family, and entertainment such as concerts, restaurants, and museums. Even worship at church has been upended. There are, however, surprise blessings to be found every day, blessings that we may not have noticed in our former routines.

My daily walks with Frida have expanded into new territories which I had yet to explore. Frida, a lively 14 year-old Chihuahua mix, is great "chat bait." Children and older folks are especially drawn to her, thus sparking opportunities for conversation... at a safe distance! Wide smiles and sharing the acknowledgement of our tough times lift my heart and sustain me throughout the day. There's a lady that I encounter who will stand by as Princess, her elderly companion, takes her time to rest before walking on. Once as I was leaving the Gardiner waterfront, two young skateboarders spontaneously gave me broad smiles as they waved goodbye.

I don't think that I would have paid much attention to these exchanges previous to Covid-19, because I would have been too wrapped up in the routine and the expected. These are reflections that will encourage me as we travel through the dark days of Advent in anticipation of another surprising gift.

*Heavenly Father, open our eyes that we may see  
beyond that which we accept as normal.  
Surprise us each day with the possibilities of  
connecting with others. Amen*

Patsy Tessier  
Highland Avenue UMC



DECEMBER 19

**Luke 2:25-32 New American Standard Bible** *And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,*

*"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,  
According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."*

I love the story of Simeon, a devout elderly man who has been told by God that he will not die until he has seen the promised Messiah. I love reading that he was instructed by God's spirit to go to the temple at the time when that could happen. This is one of many Scriptures that convince me the Holy Spirit did not first enter the world at the time of Jesus's ascension. "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be..."

When we did the *Companions in Christ* adult study at Green Street some years ago, I mentioned to Rob Shore how much this story meant to me. He, knowing I was having difficulty writing poetry at that time in my life, challenged me to put it in a poem. With his belief that I could do so, I wrote that poem early the next week. Several years later, when Delsa Mock wrote and directed an Advent play which was presented at Green Street, she allowed my poem to be read while John Webb, standing in for Simeon, held up a lifelike baby doll and thanked God for a promise fulfilled. This Scripture brings to mind for me thoughts of waiting and anticipating, but also reminds me of the importance of Christian fellowship in my life.

*Holy God, as we look forward once again to the birth of the baby Jesus,  
help us to be open to the movement of your Spirit, believing in your steadfast love –  
the love that became flesh and dwelt among us. Amen.*

Sally Joy,  
Green Street UMC



**DECEMBER 20**



### **4th Sunday of Advent: Lighting the Candle of Love**

**Scripture:**

**Psalm 89:1-2**

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

**Luke 1:46b-47**

"My soul magnifies the Lord, 47. and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

**Reflection:**

People have always raised their voices in song praising God. In hope, and as prayers for peace, in times of joy, and with love, people sang songs.

We can imagine Mary's song of love as she carried God's son under her heart. As she carried the worlds' love under her heart.

**Light the Candles:**

On this fourth Sunday of Advent we light the candle of love. The circumstances of this Christmas may leave us feeling out of step with our traditions. We pray the familiar love story of Christ's birth will refresh our spirits, encourage us in our longings, and sustain us on this journey. Amen.





**DECEMBER 21**

**Matthew 1:23...** *and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us."*

## CONNECTION

Staying connected is how I have managed to cope through this pandemic (and, I'll admit: extra sleep also has been key!) I live alone, so connection doesn't happen automatically. By the end of March I had already taken two specific steps:

- ✝ I started (and still keep) a calendar recording for each day who I have talked to (by phone or Zoom) and any face-to-face encounters. (There were days in March and April where I didn't see anyone at all face-to-face, so I made a point of calling people.)
- ✝ After seeing familiar faces from Cox Memorial UMC on my old computer, I bought an iPad, so I could participate more fully in our wonderful online gatherings. These helped me to stay connected. The cards, puzzles and other things that Corley Anne sent (and still sends) to each of us at Cox, also have made me feel connected.

All of this, for me, ties in with the good news of Christmas: that God came to live among us, in order that we might have an even better path for being connected to God.

*Dear God, Thank you for all the ways you reach out  
to connect with me, including through friends.*

*Please show me opportunities to reach out to those  
who feel alone during this pandemic.*

*I pray in the name of the One who came to earth as one of us:*

*Jesus, Emmanuel. Amen*

Anne Carter  
Cox Memorial UMC



**DECEMBER 22**

**Luke 3:11** *John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”*

**1 John 3:16-18** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

In such uncertain times, it can be easy to feel hopeless and desolate and even turn to a rhetoric of divisiveness, spurred by grief and uncertainty.. Constant re-exposure to this divisiveness can lead to cynicism, alienation, and despair.. The antidote to this despair is community and compassion. One of the most healing experiences for me amongst the heartache caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has been my participation and exposure to the Maine Coronavirus Community Assistance Project. This utilizes the facebook social media page <https://www.facebook.com/MaineCoronavirusCommunityAssistance> to create space for caring souls to ask for help, offer resources and share information. Examples of some of the needs are food gift cards, gas cards, used clothing, a Christmas Tree, birthday cards for children, etc. Another site with a similar purpose is [maineneeds.com/bettertogether](http://maineneeds.com/bettertogether)

Witnessing the community come together to meet the needs of others is faith restoring.

*Dear Lord, you said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*

*Help us to hear the cries of those in need;  
help us to be your voice to love and comfort them,  
to be your hands to reach out and feed,  
clothe and shelter them, to help bring them hope. Amen*

Kristen Record  
Highland Avenue UMC



DECEMBER 23

Love Came Down at Christmas UMH #242

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, Love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But where with for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.

~~~~~

*Light of love,
You shine on us and shine in us.
In the darkness, with growing expectation,
we wrap ourselves in your love and look for the glimmer of your sign.
All the while, our love of you and our neighbors grows. Amen*



DECEMBER 24

Romans 5:3-4 *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

DEVELOPING ENDURANCE

There is nothing more challenging than waiting. We wait for our turn. We wait for Holidays and trips. We wait for babies to be born. We wait for test results. We wait for a loved one to get well. We wait for people to get out of surgery. And we even wait as loved ones are dying. The strongest people I know have endured more trials than anyone should ever have to go through in a lifetime. My friend, Lolly, has had reoccurrences of Lymphoma at least four times in her life. Now, in her late 70's, she is in the toughest cancer battle of her life. Her hair has fallen out once again as she goes through chemotherapy and radiation and she tires easily. Yet Lolly is one of the most spiritual and faithful people I know. She is passionate about her love of God and everyone that knows her, knows about her strong faith.

Another incredibly strong woman is Paulette. She was our minister's wife when our kids were growing up. Our kids were best friends, we shared the task of leading the youth group, as well as a mission trip to Yuma, Arizona. She was active in The Walk to Emmaus weekends, led our prayer groups and encouraged the UMW of the church. In 1990, three days before Christmas, we received a call on the prayer chain that there had been a freak accident at home and their 14-year-old son, Jon, was critically injured. My husband and I left our children with my parents (who were visiting for the holiday) and rushed to the hospital to be with Paulette and Bob. It was soon apparent that Jon had little chance of survival and was basically on life support. We prayed together and kept them company. When the doctor came in to say that it was time to let Jon go and asked if they wanted to donate his organs. Paulette agreed to the donation. She then pulled us into a prayer circle. Her prayer was to thank God for Jon's short but wonderful life. The weeks, months and years that followed were extremely challenging for the family. The pastor was angry at God for taking his son and blamed his wife for not preventing it from happening. The middle child, a boy, blamed himself because he was the last one with his brother before the accident. The daughter clung to her grandmother, while her parents split up for awhile. Through it all, Paulette never lost her faith and continued to encourage others. If ever there was a person whose trials brought endurance and endurance developed strength of character, it was Paulette.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask that you remind me that you are always beside me, especially when the burden seems so heavy.

Give me the strength, with you by my side, to live this life that

I have been given and know that I am never alone. Amen.

Laurie DeCoursey
Cox Memorial UMC





DECEMBER 24 (CHRISTMAS EVE)

Silent Night UMH #239

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, oh, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth



*Babe in the manger and King of Kings,
We quake in the silence and the glory of this night.
We welcome you into our homes and into our hearts
no matter how humble, dirty, polished or prepared.*

You continue to make a home in us.

Thank you for coming. Amen



DECEMBER 25

Matthew 25:40 *Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*

My first year of being a single parent, to my baby daughter, was rough. However, we were safe, happy, and blessed with an abundance of dear loving friends. The Christmas she was 18 months old, I worked part-time so we had very little money. One of our friends gave our family to their church for their Giving Tree. It was a wonderful Christmas. My daughter was blessed with clothes for the cold Maine winter and we received a box with all the fixings for a Christmas dinner. More than anything God gave me a community and I knew through that gift of community...God had us in His hands and we were going to be okay.

*Father God as we were Blessed with your Love
through the community, help us always
give back with your Love through us.*



Denise and Abigail Ranger
Dresden/Richmond UMC

DECEMBER 26

Isaiah 40:31 *but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

THREE LITTLE WORDS

As most of you know, not only did we all suffer in many ways with this pandemic but I was also diagnosed in January with breast cancer. With those 3 little words, “You have cancer,” life and priorities drastically changed.

Having to endure the personal fear of this deadly disease, the agony of multiple surgeries, the chemo and its side effects, radiation and recovery but also the intense isolation that the entire world was assaulted with created an overwhelming need for a greater source of strength and hope than that found on this planet! At least I thought so. I did find it, though, through personal prayer, my wonderful caregiver husband, my family, church family and friends praying for me, my pastor and from people I didn’t even know sending me cards, letters, texts and gifts (so many!). I know resoundly that I could not have gotten through this ordeal without every single prayer and words of encouragement.

One thing for certain, God was with me on this journey; He was listening and holding my hand. I felt His presence; still do. When there were down days and I could not get out of bed or off the couch, He was right beside me, reminding me that His comfort, hope, love and strength are limitless.

Whether the crisis is personal or pandemic, we humans are an incredible species who do not hesitate to love, reach out and help their neighbor. Three little words: God is here. Hope is here. Spread the news.

*Spirit of the Living God,
You went to such lengths to be here, with me.
Help me enter each day with the expectation to see you.
Help me be open to your surprising ways, and to recognize you
in unexpected people and circumstances. Amen*

Janette Sweem,
Dresden/Richmond UMC



DECEMBER 27

Psalm 138 *I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; 2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.[a] 3 On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.[b] 4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. 5 They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. 6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

Psalm 138 is my “Life Verse”. I first read this Psalm during a time of great personal difficulty years ago and it was as if God were speaking to me directly, through these words. Particularly Verses 3, 7 and 8. They are a reminder to me that God hears and answers prayer (Though not always in the way we want or expect) God’s Holy Spirit, gives us strength and courage and ultimately God’s protection is with us and for us, God has a purpose for each of us and will not forsake us, even in the darkest of times God’s light is still able to shine through.

Though I have to admit it has seemed as though God has been absent during these months of pandemic, political and civil unrest and increasing violence as we all grow weary of this situation we find ourselves in as a community, country and world.

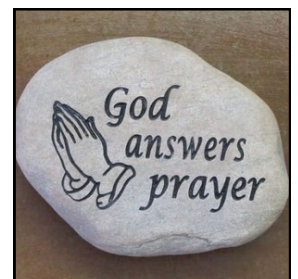
But during the season of Advent, we are reminded to look toward the hope in the coming light of the birth of Jesus, born into a world of chaos as God’s purpose to redeem humankind.

We are given the invitation every year, actually every day, to begin anew and look toward that coming light and take hold of it for ourselves and extend it to others whom God places in our path.

For we are, indeed “all in this together” and one day, as King David wrote, even those in high authority on Earth - “*shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. 5 They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.*”

God extends the invitation but leaves it up to us to take a hold of it despite current circumstances believing God will not forsake the work of His hands.

*Holy and Redeeming God, strengthen our spirits and encourage our hearts
as we move toward the coming light of your love born so long ago into
the chaos of this world, remind us again and again that we are the work of your hands,
each with our own struggles, each with our own stories
but all of us together in need of Your Love. Amen.*



DECEMBER 28

John 15:12 *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Mark 12:31 *the second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

I received an e-mail this morning with a touching story about a feral dog who had befriended an injured hummingbird, one who was almost dead – a very unlikely pair who became fast friends. It was an amazing story of love and acceptance by two very different sorts. Later today, I received a card in the mail from a very dear friend. There was no special occasion, just an upbeat, caring card.

On any day, these would be very special to me. We sometimes see so much discouraging news around us, and it’s so nice to get something positive. But today, they were extra special. You see, my husband and I had made the difficult decision last night that we would have to put our dog, Ruckus, of 15 years down. We know it’s not fair to try to keep him going when he’s hurting so much. But, as you can imagine, it has brought lots of tears. And these missives were a ray of sunshine on a very dreary day.

During these challenging times, reach out to those around you with an upbeat message; you never know when it will bring that sunshine to someone in need.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the caring friends who are there
for us during these uncertain times. Help me to be one of those friends –
to bring some sunshine to someone’s day -
to share your love as Jesus did. Amen*

If you would like to see the story about the dog and hummingbird, here’s the link:

<https://1funny.com/man-dog-hummingbird/?fbclid=IwAR3f2heQTYxGICQ2oduAvZyeyVuQTR7wudnTFtHqCfpv-OU62q9c4Ayl-OA>

Vicki Record
Highland Avenue UMC



Hope *"We must accept finite disappointment,
but never lose infinite hope"*
~ Martin Luther King Jr.

Peace *"Peace begins with a smile"*
~ Mother Teresa

Joy *"When the mind is pure, joy
follows like a shadow that
never leaves"* ~ Buddha

Love *"Love yourself. Then forget it.
Then, love the world"*
~ Mary Oliver



Spirited - Thinking