

 *Daily Thoughts for Lent*
MYSTIC CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UCC



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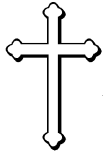


Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION by Rev. Ann M. Aaberg	4
Feb 17 King James Version of Psalm 121.....	5
Feb 18 Find Happiness in Everything You Do.....	6
Feb 19 What We Have Once Enjoyed	7
Feb 20 Love Is Not Forgotten	8
Feb 22 The Community of Faith	9
Feb 23 A Special Moment	10
Feb 24 Remember For Whom You Work.....	11
Feb 25 Christ Comes To Us ...Without A Name	12
Feb 26 Disturb Us, Lord	13
Feb 27 We Ask Not For Easy Lives	14
Mar 01 Walking With God	15
Mar 02 Be God's Kindness	16
Mar 03 Apache Blessing	17
Mar 04 O Come, Let Us Sing To The Lord	18
Mar 05 World Day of Prayer	19
Mar 06 Ozymandias	20
Mar 08 Faith	21
Mar 09 Prayer.....	22
Mar 10 A Mother's Prayer.....	23
Mar 11 Noah's Ark.....	24

This is the eighth Lenten Booklet for Mystic Congregational Church. It has been organized by the Adult Christian Education Committee and made possible by the inspiring contributions of the pastors and members of the church at large.

<i>Mar 12 Life Is Short</i>	25
<i>Mar 13 Saint Theresa's Prayer</i>	26
<i>Mar 15 The Gift of Friendship</i>	27
<i>Mar 16 Words</i>	28
<i>Mar 17 Playing It Well</i>	29
<i>Mar 18 Sanskrit Proverb</i>	30
<i>Mar 19 To Have Succeeded</i>	31
<i>Mar 20 A Multifaceted Diamond</i>	32
<i>Mar 22 God IS!</i>	33
<i>Mar 23 A Water Prayer</i>	34
<i>Mar 24 Your Church</i>	35
<i>Mar 25 Putting Others First</i>	36
<i>Mar 26 Writings of Mahatma Gandhi</i>	37
<i>Mar 27 In The Garden</i>	38
<i>Mar 29 Don't Wait Till I'm Gone</i>	39
<i>Mar 30 Hope</i>	40
<i>Mar 31 Christ Rose Again</i>	41
<i>Apr 01 MAUNDY THURSDAY by Rev. Ann M. Aaberg</i>	42
<i>Apr 02 GOOD FRIDAY by Rev. Ann M. Aaberg</i>	43
<i>Apr 03 Light A Candle</i>	44
<i>Apr 04 EASTER SUNDAY by Rev. Ann M. Aaberg</i>	45



Introduction by the Pastor

Common Themes

The “spirituality” section of my office bookshelves holds more volumes than any of the others, more than the biblical commentaries, more than theology, more than Christian history. Many were purchased for seminary courses, but many, too, were purchased to ignite and explore my own spiritual journey. Each one promises a way into the heart, a closer walk with God and deeper spiritual experiences. I scanned their titles and covers and contents this week as I began to make preparations for the observance of Lent, both mine and yours.

The books drew upon the work and experiences of saints and theologians, professors and pastors, writers and abbots, a host of people throughout the ages who have intentionally sought God through their daily prayer lives. As my eyes roved over the pages, I noticed several themes begin to emerge, themes which I believe can only aid us as we begin our Lenten journey together this year.

Of course, there are many specific practices available to us to deepen our spiritual lives – prayer, fasting, devotional reading, journaling, Bible study, intentional retreats - but five main themes seem to run through all of the actual practices we may use and all are offered by the holy sages who have gone before us: *silence, self-examination, simplicity, sacrifice and sabbath*.

The only way to truly hear God is to take the time to be *silent*, to try to quiet the rush of thoughts running through our minds and to just *be* in the presence of God. An honest assessment of the lives we lead, a *self-examination* of our relationships, our activities, how we spend our waking hours, is perhaps the best path to enrichment. Attempts at *simplicity* can clear away the clutter, both literally and figuratively, which keeps us from the people and things with which we truly desire to engage. A little bit of healthy *sacrifice* never hurt anyone. It cleanses us of entitlement attitudes and useless extravagance and contributes to our spirit of appreciation. Finally, *sabbath*, regular rest in God, refreshes and renews our bodies, our minds and our spirits.

I invite you take the time over the next six weeks of Lent to be quiet, to be honest, to simplify, to stretch a little, and to rest in God.

With blessings for the days to come,
Pastor Ann

Easter Sunday, April 04

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”

John 20:11-16

Indeed, why are we weeping? Christ is risen, we are forgiven, and eternal life is ours!

Snap out of it! Dry your tears! Run and tell *everyone*! Death itself has been conquered and nothing, nothing, NOTHING can separate us from the love of God!

**Christ the Lord is risen today!
Shout and sing Alleluia!**

Reverend Ann M. Aaberg



Saturday, April 03

Light a Candle

*Light a candle for those we mourn.
Into a new life they will be born.
Do not look for them at the gravesite.
They are somewhere else radiating their beautiful light.
They have gone to a new world where
there is no darkness, no pain.
Their light and essence will always remain.
Light a candle for those who have left this mortal place.
They are free to travel through time and space.
When we think of them, they are near.
When we sit in a beautiful garden. Their voices we hear.
When we listen to a divine symphony,
We close our eyes, their faces we see.
Light a candle for they have not really gone.
With each flickering flame, in your hearts
they will always belong.*

A. Pell, 2005

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Psalm 121

from the King James Version of the Bible
(to be read aloud)

¹I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

²My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

³He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

⁴Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.

⁶The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

⁷The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

⁸The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.



Thursday, February 18

Find Happiness In Everything You Do

When discouraged in these troubled times, try to think positively and “Find Happiness in Everything You Do”.

*Find happiness in nature
In the beauty of a mountain
In the serenity of the sea.
Find happiness in friendship
In the fun of doing things together
In the sharing and understanding.
Find happiness in your family
In the stability of knowing that someone cares
In the strength of love and honesty.
Find happiness in yourself
In your mind and body
In your values and achievements.
Find happiness in
Everything
You Do.*

Author Unknown

Submitted Anonymously

Good Friday, April 02

*When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.”
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

John 19:30

Did the people at the foot of the cross that dark afternoon, in their fear and utter confusion and disappointment, in their unspeakable sorrow, did they wonder: What do you mean, Jesus? What is finished?

Certainly, Jesus’ physical suffering was finished, the incredible torture of the past 24 hours leading up to his death.

Finished, too, was the constant state of courage his human nature had to muster as he withstood betrayal and arrest and desertion and false accusations in humble silence.

Maybe he was finished with his apparent frustration with the disciples who never seemed to really understand.

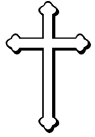
Maybe it was the endless jostling of the crowds as they always pushed in towards him to get a glimpse, a touch, some healing, some attention.

Perhaps it was the ever-present challenge of the Pharisees.

Or was it the demons forever taunting him: Jesus of Nazareth, we know who you are!

The taunting, the testing, the torture – all finished. On that black afternoon, did his people wonder privately in their hearts – I thought you came to save us. The Romans still surround us. Our chief priests and scribes are still corrupt. We thought you came to free us, to liberate, to rescue and restore. Was their any faith left that day or was that finished, too?

Reverend Ann M. Aaberg



Maundy Thursday, April 01

So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?

Matthew 26:40

The Passover meal is over. The bread and wine have been shared. Jesus' Last Supper has been served and they have gone out to a place on the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. All of the things Jesus told his disciples would happen at the end of his life are about to begin. Judas has slipped away and Jesus knows his hour is near.

His anguish, his internal struggle, his fervent prayer, his need for support from his friends ... *"remain here, and stay awake with me"* ... all remind us of the raw humanity of Jesus, and our hearts break as our beloved Master, Teacher, Savior, cries out to God to let this cup pass from him.

His friends doze while Jesus agonizes in the garden.
Would we?
Do we?

Do our heavy eyes close to the acute suffering around us?
Do we have trouble staying alert to the struggles of the weak? Do we nod off in the face of those who are forced to go it alone?

Jesus, grant us the strength and the faith you had in your final hours that we may be vigilant for your people in agony.

Friday, February 19

What We Have Once Enjoyed

*What we have once enjoyed,
We can never lose:
All that we love deeply
Becomes a part of us.*

Helen Keller



Saturday, February 20

Love is Not Forgotten

I hold her in my arms. It was a long time ago, but I remember almost every step. It is cool out and the sun casts long shadows on the ground. I go down the steps into the back yard and slowly walk around the fence stopping at the apple tree. She looks up and I tell her about apples and one day when she has teeth how good they will taste. A little further on we stop at a maple tree and I show her a leaf and put it in her hand. She immediately puts it to her mouth. It doesn't taste good and spits it out. A little further on we stop at a pom-pom tree. I tell her it is a pom-pom tree since the flowers look like pom-poms. I put a flower to her nose and she smiles. It tickles and smells good. We go back into the house.

Twenty five years ago and the memories are still there and will be there forever.

Two thousand years ago God gave us something to remember. His love!

Wednesday, March 31

Christ Rose Again

I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair enquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.

Thomas Arnold (1795-1842)
Classical Scholar and Headmaster of Rugby



Tuesday, March 30

Hope

*Hope is the thing with feathers
that perches in the soul
and sings the tune
without words
and never stops
—at all.*

Emily Dickinson

Monday, February 22

The Community of Faith

*Where two or three are gathered together in my name,
There am I in the midst of them.
A new commandment I give unto you,
That you love one another.
As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Abide in my love.
That my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.
If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself
And take up his cross and follow me.
For he that findeth his life will lose it,
And he that loseth his life for my sake will find it.
Let your light so shine before others,
That they may see your good works,
And give glory to your Father which is in Heaven.*

These familiar words of Jesus, selected from Matthew and John, are arranged here so as to be danced in a service of Sacred Dance. Some years ago at Center Congregational Church in Manchester I was part of the Sacred Dance Group, and this was one of our favorites for interpretation. I still dance it in my heart.



Tuesday, February 23

A Special Moment

To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour.

Sir Winston Churchill

Monday, March 29

Don't Wait Till I'm Gone

*If you have roses, bless your soul,
Just pin one in my buttonhole
While I'm alive and well today,
Don't wait until I've gone away*

Anonymous



Saturday, March 27

In the Garden

*I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear, falling on my ears, the Son of God is
calling.*

And he walks with me and he talks with me

And he tells me I am his own

And the joy we share as we tarry there,

None other has ever known.

One morning as I lay cuddled in warm blankets for
meditation time, these new words came to me:

*I come to the garden today and I feel His presence around
me:*

*The smiling face, the touch of grace, new words of God's
eternal love.*

YES, he walks with me and he talks to me

And he tells me I can be strong

For that little bit of God in me will help me carry on.

The writer feels that there is a little bit of God in all of us.

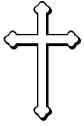
Wednesday, February 24

Remember For Whom You Work:

*Whether you work for a private company, the government, a
large corporation, or yourself, the true disciple understands
that he or she ultimately is working for God in that place.*

*“Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done
for the Lord and not for your masters, since you
know that from the Lord you will receive the
inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord
Christ.” Col. 3:23-24*

Norman Shawchuck
A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God



Thursday, February 25

Christ Comes to Us ... Without a Name

Christ comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old by the lakeside he comes to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me", and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they shall learn in their own experience who he is.

Albert Schweitzer

Friday, March 26

Writings of Mahatma Gandhi

Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served.

But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in the spirit of joy.

The best way to find yourself is in the service of others.

We must become the change that we want to see in the world.



Thursday, March 25

Putting Others First

I realized I always put myself first in a sentence. I would say something like "Me and (my friend) sat together at lunch today." I put myself first. Yes, I am important, but wouldn't it be nicer to put my friend or family member first? Wouldn't they be happy I put them first? Both of those questions I would answer with a "Yes". My friends and family are very important to me. I want to thank God for these wonderful people in my life. I also want to thank them for being the best friend or family member anyone could have.

Friday, February 26

Disturb Us, Lord

*We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.*

*We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.*

Attributed to Sir Francis Drake, 1577



Saturday, February 27

We Ask Not For Easy Lives

*O God, come to us, we pray thee,
with the resources of thy power,
that we may be strong within.*

*We ask not for easy lives,
but for adequacy.*

*We ask not to be freed from storms,
but to build our houses on rock that will not fall.*

*We pray not for a smooth sea, but for a stout ship,
a good compass, and a strong heart;
in the name of him who faced enmity and death
without flinching,*

Thy Son Jesus Christ our Savior.

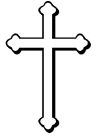
Harry Emerson Fosdick, 20th century minister

Wednesday, March 24

Your Church

*We remember that your church
was born in wind and fire,
not to sweep us heavenward
like a presumptuous tower,
but to guide us down
the dusty roads of this world
so that we may lift up the downcast,
heal the broken,
reconcile what is lost,
and bring peace amidst unrest.*

Garth House



Tuesday, March 23

A Water Prayer

During Family Weekend last fall at St. Lawrence University where our son, Christopher, is a sophomore, we attended an Abrahamic Sacred Song Service in the Gunnison Memorial Chapel. It was a beautiful service incorporating the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths.

This is the Water Prayer that was said in unison:

*I am but a drop of water.
Alone, I would disappear,
dried up by the scorching sun
or sucked up by the dry, thirsty earth.*

*But together we can wear out stones,
carve out the Grand Canyon,
make streams and rivers,
and find our way to the sea.*

Monday, March 01

Walking With God

Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God.

George Washington Carver

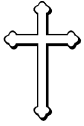
God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars.

Martin Luther

We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence: see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence ... We need silence to be able to touch souls.

Mother Teresa

I enjoy walking in fields and forests and taking photos.
It helps me to appreciate the wonders of nature.



Tuesday, March 02

Be God's Kindness

Be God's Kindness

Be the living expression of God's kindness

Kindness in your face

Kindness in your eyes

Kindness in your smile

Kindness in your warm greeting

In the slums we are the light of God's kindness to the poor.

To the children, to the poor, to all who suffer and are lonely,

Give always a happy smile—

Give them not only your care, but also your heart.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Monday, March 22

God IS!

I believe in a God of unlimited power and unfathomable intellect. To not believe would be to deny the image of a cardinal against a blue sky in February, or the milky way on a clear summer night, or the sparkle of sunlight on a fresh snowfall; or to deny hearing surf thundering on a beach, or a well played symphony, or wind sighing through pine branches. God is every where and every thing; at once simple to understand yet incomprehensible.

God, for me, defies physical description and I cannot accept biblical statements that man was made in God's image.

I don't have any idea of WHAT God is –

I just know that God IS!



Saturday, March 20

A Multifaceted Diamond

My daughter-in-law gave me a book titled *Handbook for the Soul*, a gathering of America's most celebrated spiritual writers. Brian Weiss, MD says "*my work is a reminder that we are not bodies or our brains, but our souls. That is the part of us that is eternal. A good metaphor for our progress is to think of ourselves as a multifaceted diamond. Some of us have facets that are covered in dirt and tar, which stands for ignorance. All of us are the same under the dirt and tar, but some have many clean facets; others just a few. When all the facets are clean and the diamond is gleaming beautifully, the solid form is transformed into light. That is our soul. At some level we are all the same. We are all connected. Everyone in our drama is a facet of ourselves, and we are a facet of them. We all are facets of the same energy—an energy possessing incredible wisdom and love. We all have God within us.*"

Wednesday, March 03

APACHE BLESSING

MAY THE SUN

Bring you new energy by day

MAY THE MOON

Softly restore you by night.

MAY THE RAIN

Wash away your worries.

MAY THE BREEZE

Blow new strength into your being

MAY YOU WALK

Gently through the world and know
Its beauty all the days of your life.



Thursday, March 04

O Come, Let Us Sing To The Lord

O come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God,

and a great Ruler above all gods.

In God's hand are the depths of the earth;

The heights of the mountains are God's also.

The sea belongs to God who made it,

and the dry land which God's hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,

let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

For the Lord is our God,

and we are the people of God's pasture,

and the sheep of God's hand.

From the Book of Psalms

Friday, March 19

To Have Succeeded

To laugh often and much

To win the respect of intelligent people

And the affection of children

To appreciate beauty

To find the best in others

To leave the world a bit better

Whether by a healthy child

A garden patch or

A redeemed social condition

To know even one life

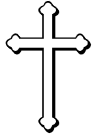
Has breathed easier

Because you have lived

This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

These verses from Emerson's poem formulate a simple guide for a meaningful life and encouraged me to do one of my first pieces of calligraphy.



Thursday, March 18

Sanskrit Proverb

Look To This Day

For it is life,

The very life of life.

In its brief course lie all

The realities and verities of existence,

The glory of action,

The splendor of beauty

The bliss of growth . . .

For yesterday is but a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision.

But today, well lived,

Makes every yesterday a dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.

Kalidasa

I memorized this many years ago, and it is still an
inspiration to me.

Friday, March 05

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

"Let all that have breath praise God.

We praise God for life itself.

We praise God for His steadfast love."

This is the message of women in Cameroon, West Africa expressed on this World Day of Prayer. Celebrations today begin with sunrise in the Pacific region and follow the earth's orbit shining across Africa and the rest of the world. We will follow the liturgy as we gather at Old Mystic Methodist Church this morning.

People of Cameroon are bound together by music so we will sing:

"Over my head there's music in the air

There must be a God somewhere".

"And He will raise you up on eagle's wings

and hold you in the palm of His hand."

Praise God!



Saturday, March 06

Ozymandias

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Wednesday, March 17

Playing It Well

C.S. Lewis in his essay, *The World's Last Night*, certainly having recalled Shakespeare's line, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players..." speaks of the myths which make us attempt to guess the plot of the drama of life in which we are the characters. "But how can the characters in a play guess the plot? We are not the playwright, we are not the producer, we are not even the audience. We are on the stage..." Then Lewis goes on to discuss how the player can know when the play is over, for too often we say of the last curtain, "Not now, of all moments!"

Lewis continues, "But we think thus because we keep on assuming that we know the play. We do not know the play. We do not even know whether we are in Act I, or Act V. We do not know who are the major and who are the minor characters. The Author knows. The audience, if there is an audience, (if angels and archangels and all the company of heaven fill the pit and stalls) may have an inkling. But we, never seeing the play from the outside, never meeting any characters except the tiny minority who are "on" in the same scenes as ourselves, wholly ignorant of the future and very imperfectly informed about the past, cannot tell at what moment the end ought to come. That it will come when it ought to come we may be sure; but we waste our time in guessing when that will be. That it has a meaning we can be sure, but we cannot see it. When it is over we may be told. We are led to expect that the Author will have something to say to each of us on the part each of us has played. The playing it well is what matters infinitely."



Tuesday, March 16

Words

*Words which do not give the light of Christ
increase the darkness.*

Mother Theresa

Monday, March 08

Faith

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things unseen.*

Hebrews 11:1



Tuesday, March 09

Prayer

As I was cleaning out a closet I came across this quotation on prayer that I had saved from college days:

*Prayer can be as quiet
As a falling petal,
Fragrant as a flower,
But as strong as metal.*

*Prayer can be a crying,
As in Gethsemane.
And he who heard his son, the Christ,
Will he not hear me?*

*Prayer can be the music
Of a song divine,
The miracle of harmony,
His counterpoint with mine.*

*And always to the Spirit-fed
Prayer can bring the Living Bread.*

G. Gibson

Monday, March 15

THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

*Friendship is a priceless gift
That cannot be bought or sold,
But its value is far greater
Than a mountain made of gold—
For gold is cold and lifeless,
It can neither see nor hear,
And in the time of trouble
It is powerless to cheer—
It has no ears to listen,
No heart to understand,
It cannot bring you comfort
Or reach out a helping hand—
So when you ask God for a GIFT,
Be thankful if He sends
Not diamonds, pearls or riches,
But the love of real true friends.*

Helen Steiner Rice



Saturday, March 13

Saint Theresa's Prayer

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you..

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

The following is the benediction that Pat Schaefer uses for the Women's Fellowship meetings based on Saint Theresa's Prayer

May there be peace within you today.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in God, yourself, and others.

May you use the gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

And may you trust that God is indeed the still center of the turning world, no matter how fast it may spin.

Wednesday, March 10

A Mother's Prayer

Dear Lord:

Thank You for this child

That I shall call mine.

Not my possession

But my sacred charge.

Teach me patience and humility

So that the best I know

May flow into its being.

Let me always remember –

Mother love is my natural instinct

But my child's love

Must ever be deserved and earned;

That for love, I must give love,

That for understanding, I must give understanding,

That for respect, I must give respect;

That as I was the giver of life,

So must I be the giver always,

With no planned returns.

Help me to share my child with life

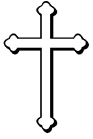
And not to clutch at it for my own sake.

Give me courage to do my share

To make this world a better place

For all children, and my own.

Ruth Rochelle



Thursday, March 11

Noah's Ark

Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark

- ONE: *Don't miss the boat.*
- TWO: *Remember that we are all in the same boat!*
- THREE: *Plan ahead.*
It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
- FOUR: *Stay fit. When you're 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.*
- FIVE: *Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.*
- SIX: *Build your future on high ground.*
- SEVEN: *For safety's sake, travel in pairs.*
- EIGHT: *Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.*
- NINE: *When you're stressed, float awhile.*
- TEN: *Remember, the ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.*
- ELEVEN: *No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.*

Friday, March 12

Life Is Short

*Life is short,
Break the rules,
Forgive quickly
Kiss slowly,
Love truly,
Laugh uncontrollably,*

And never regret anything that made you smile.

Life may not be the party we hoped for,

But while we're here we should dance.

Anonymous