

Walking Simply With Christ

A Lenten Devotional
for and by the Members of Bethlehem
and St. Martin Lutheran Churches



Lent, 2015

*“The spiritual life starts
at the place where you can
hear God’s voice.”
(Henri Nouwen)*

How to Use this Devotional:

In the front of this devotional, which is compiled from the thoughts and reflections of the people of Bethlehem and St. Martin Lutheran Churches, you will find a copy of our “Walking Simply With Christ Simplicity Calendar.” This is for your reference, to offer you small, focused activities each day (as well as a weekly practice) that will help you in your journey toward living more simply. Often, devotions have been included on particular days or weeks to complement that activity from the calendar.

Following the calendar, you will find one or two devotions for each of the 40 days of Lent. The 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays, so there is also included here a reflection on one of the lectionary readings on each Sunday, as well as some questions to guide your prayer life throughout that week.

Our hope is that this booklet will not only help guide your own growth in faith, but also make you feel connected to its many contributors. We never journey alone; we always journey with Christ, and we always journey with our brothers and sisters who share in the gospel, both here at Bethlehem and St. Martin, and all over the world and through time.

Blessings on your journey!

Walking Simply With Christ Throughout Lent

Day 1 (Ash Wednesday): Pray for your enemies.

Day 2: Start a gratitude journal, writing down 5 things each day that you are thankful for.

Day 3: Don't turn on the car radio. In the quiet, pray for people who are hungry.

Day 4: Give \$20 to a non-profit of your choosing.

Some small tasks you can do each day and week to help you live more simply and gratefully:

[Sunday, February 22]

This week, write in your gratitude journal each day. Being grateful for what you already have is an important way to fend off wanting more. Actually write it down, so you can go back and look later! If you want, share what you wrote with a loved one.

Day 5: Reach out to someone who is sick or in need of companionship.

Day 6: Look out the window until you find something of beauty you had not noticed before.

Day 7: Give 5 items of clothing to the South Wedge Mission's Free Store.

Day 8: Notice your trash today and see how much you accumulate. Think of ways to reduce waste. (Could you have composted something? Used something reusable instead of single-use?)

Day 9: Stop saving items to "read later." Read it now or recycle it.

Day 10: Buy a few \$5 fast food gift cards to give to homeless people you encounter.

[Sunday, March 1]

This week, take 5-minute showers, and/or have some no-shower days. Many people in the world don't have access to clean water at all, yet we in the Western world tend to waste it.

Day 11: Call an old friend.

Day 12: Pray the Paper (pray for people and situations in today's news).

Day 13: Read Psalm 139. Memorize one verse that speaks to you.

Day 14: Pay a few sincere compliments.

Day 15: Think about the first thing you touch in the morning. How much value does it have compared to everything else (including people) you touch today?

Day 16: Spend 10 minutes looking at the sky, trees, and land, and give thanks for creation.

[Sunday, March 8]

This week, incorporate rest into your daily routine, even if it is just taking a moment of quiet once every hour, or finding 15 minutes to sit quietly. Use this time to rejuvenate and be with God, whatever that looks like to you.

Day 17: Forgive someone. Or, apologize to someone.

Day 18: Write someone a hand-written letter.

Day 19: Change one light in your house to a compact florescent.

Day 20: Take a walk with someone you love, or a new friend

Day 21: Schedule a more significant Sabbath in your day. It should be a 6-to-1 ratio, with one hour of rest to 6 hours of work. Use that time for meditation, retreat, or volunteering.

Day 22: For two hours, turn off all devices (phone, computer, etc.). Use this time to play a game with your family, call an old friend, or have a conversation – in short, to connect with people you love

Sunday, March 15]

This week, try having two meatless days. Water used to raise livestock accounts for 40% of water consumption in the US (compared to 13% for domestic use like showers and toilets), and livestock are responsible for most of the methane gas and ammonia put into our atmosphere. If a four-person family skips steak just once a week, it has the same environmental impact as taking your car off the road for nearly three months. (Plus, it's good for you!)

Day 23: Introduce yourself to a neighbor.

Day 24: Read Psalm 121. Memorize a verse that is meaningful to you.

Day 25: Bring your own reusable mug/water bottle/takeout containers. If you don't have these, acquire them.

Day 26: Make a meal completely from scratch.

Day 27: Don't buy anything today. Give thanks for what you already have.

Day 28: Light a candle and say a prayer for someone you have seen recently who is in need.

[Sunday, March 22]

This week, set aside a chunk of time to tackle one category of "stuff" in your house (clothes, kitchen, hobby room...), and decide what to discard. Ask yourself, "Does this item add value to my life? Does it spark joy in me?" If the answer is no, and it is good shape, then donate it to the South Wedge Mission's "Free Store" (donations taken 4:30-6pm on Wednesdays). Otherwise, throw it out.

Day 29: Write a thank you note to your favorite teacher.

Day 30: Invest in (or make!) canvas shopping bags. Bring them not only to the grocery store, but into every store. Try not to acquire any bag you will later throw away/recycle.

Day 31: Use Freecycle to get rid of stuff you don't want. www.freecycle.org

Day 32: Donate art supplies to an elementary school, locally or in Rochester City.

Day 33: Read John 8:1-11. Memorize a verse that is meaningful to you.

Day 34: Smile at people today, because your glass is half *full*! It's a great practice, and it can make someone's day.

[Sunday, March 29]

This week, try to shop local whenever possible. Go to the public market or a local bakery, talk to the farmers who grow the food, buy products made in New York, support local business. One of the biggest oil impacts on the earth is transportation of food and goods. Buying local takes out that middle step that is so expensive (financially and environmentally).

Day 35: Extend small kindnesses to people today: pay for someone's coffee, open or hold the door, give someone your place in line.

Day 36: No sugar day – where else is there sweetness in your life?

Day 37: Give \$20 to a local non-profit.

Day 38: Pray for peace.

Day 39: Educate yourself about a different religion. See how it is the same or different from your own.

Day 40: Pray for your enemies (maybe you have new ones by now) then decide which of these exercises you'll keep for good.



Day 1 (Ash Wednesday)

What does it mean to “live simply,” and what has it got to do with being a Christian?

“Simple living” has everything to do with living a Christian life. Our complex lives – full of busyness, piles of stuff, promises of ease and convenience, and processed food – leave little room for restful and intentional time with God. With so many distractions in life, how do we foster this, our most important and life-giving relationship?

But the complexity of our lives doesn’t just hurt our relationship with God; it can also harm our relationships with those around us. Here are some other ways simplicity and a Christian life go hand-in-hand:

Living simply is about gratitude and generosity. We live in a culture of *more*, and a culture of *now*. We live under the false assumption that things will bring us satisfaction. Living simply is, in large part, about giving thanks for what we already have. The practice of generosity helps us focus on what we truly need, and on the joy we find in having that.

Living simply is about loving our neighbors. When we make decisions that are easy or convenient for us, we don’t always see who is really paying for it. Careless disposal of trash is paid for by the environment, and by the fish and birds who eat that garbage thinking it is food. Filling our lives with cheap, mass-produced stuff is paid for by people whose land is destroyed by production needs, and by people who work long hours in an unsafe and unethical environment so we can buy things cheaply. “And who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asked Jesus. Are these our neighbors, too?

Living simply is about stewardship – of our world, of our bodies, of our resources. God has created a beautiful world that our habits work to destroy. God has given us bodies that are temples, which we put secondary to the need for convenience. God has given us each other and asked us to care for one another, but we are so busy keeping up our busy lives and taking care of all our stuff that we scarcely have time for one another. Living more simply helps us focus on God, our physical and emotional health, our loved ones, and the world.

On Ash Wednesday we hear those words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” What could be simpler and earthier than that? Join us as we learn what it looks like to walk simply with Christ.

Day 2

“But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

It’s hard to say when I first became interested in living simply. Perhaps it was when I grew up in a small town in Northern California, where shopping at local stores and being conscious of my environmental footprint was ingrained from before I could talk. Perhaps it was when I was diagnosed with cancer, and became aware of all the carcinogens I was facing in the world, from my food to my laundry detergent to my home to the clothes on my back, and I was determined to avoid as many of them as possible. Perhaps it was when I went to college and learned how intricately we are all connected, such that my innocent actions have an impact on people and animals far away that I don’t know. Perhaps it was when I started working full time and balancing a home life and a social life, and for the first time discovered how essential it was to my well-being to have intentional time for rest and rejuvenation.

Surely the development has been a combination of factors, but what I know for sure is this: every decision I make affects a lot more than me in this moment. The apostle Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians that we are all a part of one body, and when one member suffers, we all suffer. As I have grown in my life as a Christian and as a citizen of the earth, I have come to see that body members are not limited to those I see. It includes my neighbors in other parts of the world, other animals who contribute to the eco-system from which I benefit, even the earth itself. God called all creation good, and I interpret that to mean that if one part of that creation suffers, we all suffer. My goal as a person of faith is to be the most respectful and life-giving member of the body that I can be... and that is why I strive to live simply.

God of all creation, help us to be aware of our impact on others this day – on the people and earth around us, and on those far away. Amen.

Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Day 3

One thing I would like to do to simplify my life is to not spend too much time at night watching TV. It takes away from visiting, crafts, or devotional time. It can be a time waster that takes away from more important things in life. To live simply means to not be tied to materialism and, instead, focusing on

important things that “do not cost anything”. Most important that we spend quality time with loved ones.

This is a more “Godly way”, and is what is good to build lasting relationships. Time is one of our most important gifts that God wants us to share.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Please help me focus on important things in life. Help me be a vessel here on earth to spread joy and love, and to help others see the importance in the simple things in life.

Lorraine Kirchhoff, SMLC

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*“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost. (Matthew 18:12-13) God always reaches out to those in need, and so we should too!*

Jacob Hubbard (confirmation student), SMLC

#### **Day 4**

“Living in our Material World”

On the grand stage of a well-lived life, material possessions should play a rather small role. Of course, we all need the basic necessities of life, but once we meet those needs for ourselves and for our families, the piling up of possessions creates more problems than it solves. Our real riches, of course, are not of this world. We are never really rich until we are rich in spirit.

Do you find yourself wrapped up in the concerns of the material world? If so, it’s time to reorder your priorities by turning your thoughts and prayers to move important matters. And, it’s time to begin storing up riches that will endure throughout eternity: the spiritual kind.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Your Word teaches me to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness. Today, I will trust You completely for my needs, both spiritual and material. Thank You, Father, for Your protection, for Your love, and for Your Son. Amen.

(from *365 Devotions Prayers for Women*)

Jeannette Lockwood, SMLC

*Cont’d.*

“Honor your father and mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Respecting your parents helps to have respect for others.

Something I would like to be able to do is find ways that I could bring others to Christ. For me to live more simply I would like to give up coveting. I see things that are different than what I have and desire them. I think mainly I would like to try it out and see if I like it better than what I have. Too soon old and too late smart: I’m now recognizing want and need are very different.

Elwin Bardo, BLC

### **First Sunday in Lent**

*“And [after Jesus’ baptism,] the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.” (Mark 1:12-13)*

Temptations are all around us. We know we should eat more vegetables, but the smell of pizza is so alluring. We know that shirt was made in a sweatshop somewhere, but it is such a good deal. We know that we don’t need any more kitchen appliances, but this one looks like it will make my life so much easier.

None of these things are not inherently bad. And it is true that sometimes, simple living is anything but easy, especially because it can be so counter to the culture we live in, that is so accessible to us. It takes more thought, more awareness, it sometimes makes us feel guilty for failing, it requires us to think out of the box of “how I’ve always done it,” it may mean taking a little more time to do something than usual. It would be easier to give in to the ease of the lives to which we are accustomed, in which we can avoid thinking too much about the long term or long distance consequences of our actions.

So then what is the payoff for simplicity? Is it freedom from unnecessary stuff? Is it more quality time with loved ones? Is it more opportunity for intentional time with God? Is it the realization that you are doing all you can to live lightly in this world, knowing that your actions have as little negative impact on others as possible? These realities are a good sort of temptation!

*What will be the temptations you will face in your journey to live more simply? What hurdles will you encounter? How will you overcome them?*

## **Day 5**

*One powerful way to live more lightly in the world is to “go meatless” one day a week. Livestock are one of the greatest users of land and water, and one of the greatest emitters of greenhouse gases, and just one meatless day a week goes a long way. So on Mondays, we will provide a meatless recipe you can try – you won’t even miss the meat!*

### **Bean Pizza**

#### **Ingredients:**

Three cans of beans (different kinds – your favorites!), drained and rinsed  
1 Cup (or a little more) of salsa  
1 small onion, chopped  
1 glove garlic, chopped  
some olive oil  
2 pizza crusts  
16 oz shredded mozzarella

#### **Instructions:**

Preheat oven according to instructions on crust package.  
Heat oil in a medium pan. Sauté onion about 5 min, then add garlic for another min.  
In a large bowl, mix together beans, salsa, and onion mixture.  
Spread half of bean mixture on crust. (Either make two pizzas, or freeze half.)  
Top with cheese and bake according to crust package instructions. Let cool, cut, and enjoy with a green salad.

## **Day 6**

Whenever I visit my folks in Texas, I get a chance to ‘live simply.’ They live in the country on a 5-acre plot of land. Because it’s nestled between King Ranch graze land and a farmer’s grain fields, their home has all the charming characteristics of country living. My mother has two big white rockers and a two-person swing on her back porch. I take my spot in one of the rockers and watch many kinds of birds, from mockingbirds to green jays, compete for a chance to splash in the two birdbaths brimming with water. It’s a daily ritual of mine when I visit, to sit outside in the mornings and thank God for the beauty that surrounds me. As I watch John Deere tractors or combines churn away in the distance, I treasure this alone time with God . . . time to talk to Him, listen to Him, receive refreshment from Him, be inspired by Him . . . until the heat of the day sets in and it’s time to go back inside. But don’t worry, I’ll be back on that porch later in the day, when the sun is setting and the breeze is cooler, this time with mom and dad in tow, talking *simply*, being together *simply*, loving *simply*.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to look up from my busy life, and see You. Thank you for the opportunities you give me to live simply, to take in the beauty of your creation, no matter where I happen to be. In the name of Your Son I pray, Amen.

Sharon Haffen, SMLC

### Day 7

Are you familiar with the concept of cleaning "every drawer, every year"? I think that applies to cupboards, closets, basements, attics, garages, and nooks and crannies also. And we're not talking just about dust here. We're talking about duplicate items that turn up in several different locations. "A place for everything, and everything in its place" is another concept I've yet to master. If I could just learn to return things to their proper home, I wouldn't have to repurchase items I can't locate because they are tucked away in some foreign spot.

Even being organized (I've purchased numerous clutter-keepers over the years) doesn't insure that what is kept is important, necessary, essential or indispensable. During this Lenten season, I'd like to question my reasons for holding on to nonessential stuff and see if by letting it go, it will lighten my heart. I have a feeling it will!

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Faith Weidman, BLC

### Day 8

We don't pay much attention to the people who take away our garbage for us – the official garbage collectors, the men and women with shopping carts who collect discarded cans, the metal scavengers who pick up old stoves and metal scrap in their dilapidated pickups....

But with life, there's garbage. And we do rely on a host of people to whisk everything away, no matter how greasy, grimy, or dangerous it is. Civic services are a wonderful thing, but I wonder how our way of life has been affected by our ability to let someone else handle our garbage. How would we live if we had to get rid of our trash ourselves?

Some Garbage Facts:

- \* Garbage production in the in the U.S. has doubled in the last 30 years.
- \* 80% of U.S. products are used once then thrown away.
- \* 95% of all plastic, 2/3 of all glass containers, and 50% of all aluminum beverage cans are never recycled.
- \* The average American discards 7 pounds of trash per day.

From *Sustaining Simplicity: A Journal* by Anne Basye

## Day 9

“Mom’s Scalloped Potatoes with Ham and Rice Pudding Dessert”

I was raised on a big Holstein cow family farm. Meals on the farm were always big, nutritious and made with lots of love. My Mom has always been a great cook! A special Sunday meal was Mom’s delicious scalloped potatoes with ham and dessert was baked rice pudding. And the rice pudding was made with real CREAM from our Holstein cows. After Sunday church and Sunday School, we would come home to a nice big lunch. She always said her meals are simple to make. So, when I make Mom’s scalloped potatoes with ham and baked rice pudding, I remember all the love she put into making her dishes.

Prayer: Lord, show me the ways of simplifying my life. Show me the importance of simplicity so I can understand, so I will have quality time for my relationships with loved ones and You. Amen

Pattie Miles, BLC

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For me, I’m very busy, but I can find time at the beginning of the day to pray. When I get up every morning, I can say a little prayer to start off my day.

Prayer: Dear God, Help me through the day and help in school to do a good job on my work and make it not so stressful, in your name I pray.
Amen

Casey Harter (confirmation student), SMLC

Day 10

My New Year's Resolution this year is to simplify my life by cleaning out the clutter. So when Pastor mentioned that our Lenten theme was going to be simplicity, it cemented my idea to clean up and clear out! Now comes the hard part of disciplining myself to just do it! After doing some research on the computer, my way of avoidance of starting the task, I came up with some action plans from experts.

First was the suggestion to build in only 15-30 minutes a day to work on cleaning an area. Work for that amount of time and you can feel that it is an improvement over yesterday.

Second is to try focusing on one small task at a time. Once you've accomplished this task, move on to the next.

Hopefully, using these methods I will declutter my house and my life and build an oasis of calm.

Prayer: Dear God, please help me to declutter my house and my life to live simply and more closely with you. Amen

Nancy Currier, SMLC

Second Sunday in Lent

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35)

Last Sunday we thought about temptation. One of the biggest temptations for me is holding onto a way of life that I have known and grown used to. For example, I know I can get decent produce at Wegmans, but I know I could get locally grown produce (that likely tastes even better) at the Public Market, or in the right season, at any number of local markets and stands. At Wegmans, I will get produce that was shipped halfway around the world, that used literally tons of oil to make it to my plate, that was likely harvested by underpaid workers in harsh conditions, that is covered in pesticides. If I get local produce, I will support my local economy, I will talk to the person who grew it and learn about its life, I will know that it was likely grown and harvested in an ethical manner.

But... it requires me to get up earlier on a Saturday, or go to the market at a time that isn't convenient for me (Wegmans is open 24 hours, after all!). It requires me to go a little bit out of my way. And so, even though I love farmer's markets, I have a hard time letting go of those particular habits, those particular ways of life. Jesus tells us that those who lose their life for his sake and the sake of the gospel will save it. Can I lose this part of my life to gain something greater, knowing that in doing so, the benefits to myself and to my neighbors will far outweigh the benefit of ease and convenience?

What in your life do you need to lose in order to live more simply and more consciously aware of those around you?

Day 11

Black Bean Quinoa Burgers (it's pronounced KEEN-wah)

INGREDIENTS:

1 (15 ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained	1 large clove garlic, minced
1/4 cup quinoa, rinsed	1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
1/2 cup water	1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup bread crumbs	1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce (such as Frank's RedHot®)
1/4 cup minced yellow bell pepper	1 egg
2 tablespoons minced onion	3 tablespoons olive oil

DIRECTIONS:

1. Bring the quinoa and water to a boil in a saucepan. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until the quinoa is tender and the water has been absorbed, about 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Roughly mash the black beans with a fork leaving some whole black beans in a paste-like mixture.
3. Mix the quinoa, bread crumbs, bell pepper, onion, garlic, cumin, salt, hot pepper sauce, and egg into the black beans using your hands.
4. Form the black bean mixture into 5 patties.
5. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet.
6. Cook the patties in the hot oil until heated through, 2 to 3 minutes per side. (Also good grilled!)

Day 12

"I am greatly afflicted." And in my dismay I said, "Everyone is a liar." How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord in the presence of all his people." (Psalm 116:11-12)

I like this verse because it makes me feel as though God understands that everyone makes mistakes but he forgives us for them. Also that even the most holy person will lie at some point in their lifetime.

Kirsten Kildal (confirmation student), SMLC

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*"I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me!" (Philippians 4:13)*

I chose this bible verse because if I am having trouble at a sport or with school I can always pray and God will help me work through it. I may have a few ups and downs but in the end everything works out with God's help.

Benjamin Kunzer (confirmation student), SMLC

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"Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers." (Psalm 1:1)

This is good advice for me because it reminds me to surround myself with good people and I can spread joy to others.

Delaney David (confirmation student), SMLC

Day 13

This sharing is a result of some of my reflection time. For me TRUST is the single most important element in my journey through this life. I've learned it takes faith to trust that God is working for our *good* and not to *harm* us. (paraphrase from Jeremiah 29:11), especially during life's challenges.

This past year I faced the challenge of trusting God when a pathology report came back positive for cancer. I didn't expect this as to my knowledge, no one in my family has had cancer. When I got the report, I was shocked and

fearful for a few days, forgetting about my faith. The smugness of being protected by my family's medical history vanished. Going into Strong's Wilmot Cancer Center was a humbling experience. I was truly vulnerable to this scary human condition. It was my doctor who reminded me of my faith and trusting God. No matter what the outcome (gulp) I could trust Him. I had trusted Him through more than one life threatening experience: one four years ago, one when my daughter was born, and one in my senior year in high school. I know not only from these experiences but also from my daily walk with Christ that He is for us not against us. I found that when I allow Him to be in control of my life, and guide me (not the other way around) I am very blessed. I am even very thankful for my encounter with cancer as it has strengthened by faith and helped me fight off the voice of fear (...the doom-laden thoughts with which our minds deceive us). Then there is more room for His presence; joy, peace, and the courage to grow up into His radical love.

Prayer: Holy God, help us trust you, knowing that you are always faithful and always with us. Help us to know you are always compassionate even in our moments of unbelief. We pray that you will increase our faith and knowledge of your love. Amen

Nancy Smith, BLC

Day 14

[As I've tried to be conscious of the question, "What is necessary?"], a lot of my struggles have been around stuff – a logical place to begin for citizens of the stuff capital of the world. That struggle never goes away, because every time an object goes out the door, a new one is trying to insinuate itself into my life! My struggles around time and activities also continue; I hate to refuse an invitation to a good time. But stuff and time are easy compared to the uncomfortable territory this question is taking me to now: justice. Shedding excess has made me see waste. Labor wasted in the pursuit of things with no lasting value. Time wasted on inessentials. Paper and plastic wasted in elaborate product packaging. Metal and glass wasted after one use. People wasted by a system that demands more, more, more.

It's a system we're all part of. As one economic analyst has pointed out, while as workers or producers we are "fed up and worn out," as consumers we are "impossible to satisfy." We groan about our long hours, but we want "59¢ tacos, \$199 coast-to-coast flights, new products and, oh yes, don't forget 24/7 technical support... A chicken in every pot has become two sport-utility vehicles in every garage. American consumers have rewritten the Bill of Rights: life, liberty, and more cheap stuff."

Are we *really* about life, liberty, and more cheap stuff? Or can we stand in the confidence of God's love and question our selfishness? Might the powerful question, "What is necessary?" teach us to live in ways that help shape our culture into God's culture? That's my prayer, for you, for me, for our children.

From *Sustaining Simplicity: A Journal* by Anne Basye

Day 15

As life becomes hectic, whether at work or at home, there is a need to take a step back and look at what's really important in life. All the e-mails, text messages, cable tv channels and internet sites only make life more complicated.

I find that what brings me the most joy in life are the simple things that God has given us: a kiss and hug from my wife in the morning, my dog licking my face when I come home from work, the smell of hay when it's first cut, singing a favorite hymn in church, and watching my nephews play baseball.

These are gifts from God that I cherish and help me simplify my life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for everything you've given us, especially the things in life that we can take for granted because they are so simple. Amen

Steve Borkhuis, BLC

Day 16

I find sleeping in a tent peaceful, uncluttered with things, just having the basic needs. No tv, no radio, no newspapers, no electric, letting heart and mind rest. Free to focus on relationships with friends and family and enjoy God's nature. God gave us the basic needs. We are the ones who clutter life with stuff and busyness. Life is made up of moments and a moment can change everything. Ask God to help fill those moments by sharing what you have to help others, not spending your moments trying to acquire more stuff that will not give you comfort or peace. Clutter your life with God's word and the people you love and being charitable.

Prayer: Lord, please keep my life cluttered only with what is pleasing to you.

Laurie Brooks, BLC

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*I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made Heaven and Earth. (Psalm 121)*

I know I can trust God to help me in every part of my life.

Eric Podgorski (confirmation student), SMLC

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I have a very busy life but I can find some time before I go to sleep to pray to God. I am thankful to God and my prayers help and guide me in all I do and pray for in my life.

Meghan Taylor (confirmation student), SMLC

Third Sunday in Lent

“Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.” (Exodus 20:8-10)

When I was a kid, I hated naps. My mom had to bribe me with *Lady and the Tramp* to get me to lie down, and even then, I did it only for the reward. By the time I got to college, I longed for a chance to nap, to rest, to have time to myself when I didn't have a paper lingering, or rehearsal to attend, or some other commitment. As an adult and a pastor, I have begun to deeply appreciate my sabbath time (which is Friday, since Sunday is decidedly not a day of rest for me!) as an opportunity to refresh and be with God, an opportunity that is often elusive to me during the busyness of the week.

We usually think of the 10 Commandments as a list of things we can't do. But here in the 3rd commandment, this “thou shalt not” becomes a word of such grace and relief, because in essence it says, “You shall not work yourself to the bone. Take a break, already!” And yet this is one of the hardest commandments to keep! But God doesn't want us to waste away from the pressure we put on ourselves. On the contrary, God wants so much for us to have time to simply breathe in life and appreciate what is already around us that God commanded it. Now – will we listen?

How do you find time for sabbath rest in your life? When is it (it may not be Sunday...)? What do you do (or not do) during it? If this is a hard commandment for you to keep, why is that?

Day 17

Lentil Mushroom Vegetarian “Meatballs”

Ingredients

1 cup dried brown lentils, picked over and rinsed
1 bay leaf
2 cups vegetable broth (or water)
8 ounces cremini (or white) mushrooms, sliced
½ cup old-fashioned oats
½ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves
1 teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried tarragon
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium white onion, chopped
3 to 4 garlic cloves, minced
¼ cup red wine
1 tablespoon tamari soy sauce (optional)
2 eggs
sea salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine lentils, bay leaf, and vegetable broth/water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. (They’ll be a little undercooked.) Remove from heat, drain and let cool for a few minutes. Discard the bay leaf.

In a food processor, combine the mushrooms, oats, lentils, parsley and spices. Pulse/blend until the mixture is pretty well pulverized but not mush.

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm the olive oil, then add the chopped onion and a pinch of salt. Cook, stirring often, until onions are translucent and turning golden at the edges, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for about 30 seconds. Stir in lentil-mushroom mixture and cook until browned, about 5 minutes, stirring constantly.

Add red wine and soy sauce to skillet. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until liquid has been absorbed. Remove from heat and, if you’re using a pan that retains heat like cast iron, transfer the mixture to a heat-safe bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Allow the mixture to cool until it is comfortable to handle.

In a small bowl, whisk together two eggs, then thoroughly mix the eggs into the lentil and mushroom mixture. Use your hands to scoop up one small handful of the mixture at a time, shaping it into a golf-ball sized ball (about 1½-inch diameter). Place each “meatball” onto the baking sheet, leaving an inch of space around each one (you should end up with 15 or more meatballs). Bake for 35 minutes, or until golden brown. Delicious on pasta with pesto or red sauce, or on a bed of greens.

Day 18

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:1-5)

The word *community* has many connotations, some positive, some negative. Community can make us think of a safe togetherness, shared meals, common goals, and joyful celebrations. It also can call forth images of sectarian exclusivity, in-group language, self-satisfied isolation, and romantic naiveté. However, community is first of all a quality of the heart. It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own (see Philippians 2:4). The question, therefore, is not "How can we make community?" but "How can we develop and nurture giving hearts?"

Henri Nouwen, 1932-1996

Day 19

I pray for Peace for the world!

Sebastian Kulak (confirmation student), SMLC

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I have a very busy life with all my sports such as football and wrestling and my school work but once in a while on the first week of every month I go to a church and help at the food cupboard. At the food cupboard, I help fill bags with food to give to families that do not have as much as us. I like doing this because it makes me feel good knowing I am helping other people.

Anthony Grimshaw (confirmation student), BLC

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“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119)

I have a very full schedule but I find the time to help my older neighbors with work outside their home. I rake their leaves in the fall and shovel in the winter and then prep their yard for summer in the springtime. This psalm helps me get through each day and remember God is always with me.

Doug David (confirmation student), SMLC

Day 20

I grew up on a dairy farm in rural central New York, and there learned first-hand from my parents about hard work, sacrifice, and living close to the land. We always had enough to eat, had enough clothing, and our house was good enough. As I write this “enough” seems to be the defining concept for “living simply.” I remember “making do” with everything we had. One way in which we “made do” was growing a garden.

We have grown a vegetable garden every year since we have owned a home, and even when we had an apartment, we were able to use a piece of land between our apartment and a kind lady’s back yard. Gardening allows me to stay in touch with my farming past, and to take a break from the busy-ness of my day. There is a soothing feeling just being in physical contact with the soil, planting seeds, and watching the miracle of growth and fruition. This is indeed one of the ways one comes closer to God.

I remember standing in the barn doorway with my Dad, looking out over the huge field of ripened oats and barley, and exclaiming, “look at all that gold – seeing that is worth more than real money.” “Yes, Dad, it sure is – it’s beautiful,” I responded. Years later, I think about the faith and trust in God that all farmers must have – the very same faith and trust one has in planting and maintaining a garden. It is all so simple, yet so complex.

Prayer: Dear God, You are ever present in our lives, and constantly remind us of your miracles. Instill in us that sense of wonder and awe in the miracle of growth we witness in our gardens and in the food we eat. We take for granted the air, sun, soil and water you provide for us. We thank you for providing us with a way of moving from our complicated and shallow lives toward those experiences which, though seemingly simple, are really deep and much more meaningful. Amen.

Ed Currier, SMLC

Day 21

“Sacred Sunday”

Living in Germany as an American presented many challenges. Aside from being geographically far away from our family & friends, all the while trying to overcome the language barrier... let's talk about getting directions to the nearest WC (water closet/bathroom) in an emergency (!!) One can appreciate how challenging daily life had become. Besides the obvious difficulties mentioned, the differences in culture were honestly the hardest adaptation I encountered while living abroad. And it is not for lack of acceptance that I say this. I believe we each have qualities from our upbringing, dictated by our society, and unique to our personalities that have a great influence on our lives. To elaborate, the traditional Sunday rest day is a much honored part of German culture - it is an old world fairytale we learn about in school from studying the Pilgrims, the Amish, the Mennonites, or a frustrating concept we are reminded of when we try to go to Hobby Lobby after church on Sundays!

As many of you may know, I am a hardworking overachiever - a quality we Americans are proud to be. (And yes, this is how Germans perceive us as well, as always wearing sneakers for any occasion...got to love Nike!) We work hard, we raise a family, we sit for many committees/organizations, we volunteer, we go to church, we pray, we see our friends and family often, we exercise, we dabble in an instrument or other hobby or two or three..., we complete every DIY post on Pinterest, we cook, we clean, we stay current with events, we read, we travel, and...well, we sleep a few hours here and there when time permits. And how do we get it all done? We use every day of the week to get our errands ran, our appointments made, our meetings held and our “To Do Lists” completed. Simple, right? But who suffers? And what happens to our relationships with those that matter when we try to do too much and be too much?

While living in the quaint little village of Weiden in der Oberpfalz, I abruptly discovered Sunday was not a day of productivity. Sunday is a sacred day in German culture. No stores are open. No restaurants are open. Even the local gas station is closed. Sunday is a day of rest, a day of devotion. A day to attend church, take a walk and become one with nature, to take a nap, to have a family meal or visit housebound friends or family, a day to pray. And don't even think about vacuuming, mowing the lawn or doing any loud work around the house. The local Polizei (police) will be called on you- I am not kidding!

The reality of losing a day of productivity was devastating to me at first. I couldn't even grocery shop! As time went on I changed my attitude and Sunday became my sacred day as well; a day of rest, a day to celebrate Christ, a day to go to the local spa and heal my body & mind, a day Joe and I could enjoy cooking together, catching up on our week, reflecting on our life, hiking the beautiful countryside, and growing in our relationship closer to God. Since moving back to the US, I have tried my best to preserve this practice. Forget my "To Do List"! I have come to terms with not being able to get it all done! I have also come to terms with a very important concept that many struggle with: I am enough! I am enough because God has made me the way I am and he has a purpose for me. I don't have to get it all done, and I don't have to be all that and a bag of chips. Celebrating Sunday as a sacred day has been a great step towards simplifying my life and emphasizing on my relationship with God. Although it is an American luxury to grocery shop on Sunday night (FYI no one goes to Wegmans then!), I continue to focus on me, my family, and my relationship with God on these sacred days.

Prayer: Sweet simplicity, that's all I ask for God to fill my life with sweet simplicity. May the burdens of life never steal the simple pleasures and joy of my inner child. May I dwell in God's grace with a mind filled with thoughts of sweet things, fascinated by his creation, always full of wonder, till my final day. May I always be amazed by the complexity of a beehive, the activity of a bird building it's nest, the blessings of bounty that comes from growing vegetables in a garden, the pleasure of fresh baked bread, the sweetness of the scent of jasmine or orange blossoms in the air, the bliss of flying a kite, the awe of a newborn, a life filled with light and purity. May I remain untouched by the darkness that lurks in the shadows, in the minds of those who embrace evil. That is the prayer for my life. Amen

Melanie Geiger, BLC

Day 22

Lately life seems to be speeding up like never before, and I find myself more and more in need of a Sabbath Day. Yes, I know that Jesus is our Sabbath rest and that we are not bound by this Old Testament restriction. Yet I often feel the need to unplug from the world and take Sunday as a day of rest. What does that mean for me?

It means that the first thing I do on Sunday morning is to make a conscious effort not to attach my pedometer to my waistband while I'm getting dressed. Every other day I'm all about getting in my steps, whether it's 10,000 or 7,000 or whatever I can manage for the day. This doesn't mean that I spend all day Sunday sitting. It just means that for one day I'm not keeping score. I'll go for a walk or play with the grandkids without any attempt to measure achievement.

The second thing I do is go to church. Before the service starts I often sit and reflect on the week gone by. I am by nature a worker and a planner. I think it comes with the German heritage along with the coffee and the kuchen. So I'm always surprised by something that's happened to me during the previous week, something that I had not planned, nor foreseen. I thank God for His presence with me through these experiences. Then I think about what the next week might hold and ask for His presence again.

After church, filled and renewed by the Holy Spirit, I like to socialize at coffee hour with my friends, and then have lunch with my family. I have the hardest time relaxing during the afternoon. I'd like to say that I don't grocery shop or go to the mall on Sundays, but that's not always true. Our society makes it very hard to give up those activities. And if I'm sitting home, I'm tempted to mop the floor or do the laundry.

In the evening, I make a simple meal or call out for pizza, and then I watch tv, read, or continue to work on the Saturday crossword puzzles, continuing to unwind and prepare for the week ahead.

So, although I desire to make Sunday a day totally given to worship and rest, I'm not completely there yet. Would it be wrong to say that I'm working at it?

Prayer: O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ELW

Sally Steinmiller, BLC

Fourth Sunday in Lent

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
and his mercy endures forever. (Psalm 107:1)*

My grandparents often sang German canons in their home, all of them based on different scriptures. Today's Psalm was one that we often sang together following a meal, when our bellies were full. "*Danket dem Herrn. denn er ist sehr freundlich, seine Güte währet ewiglich!*" Ours was the only family I knew of that "returned grace" at the end of the meal as well as the beginning, but it is a practice I rather like. There is no such thing as thanking God too much, and to do this *after* we have been satisfied by God's bounty, when we were truly experiencing that bounty in our very bodies, seemed to be even more appropriate than giving thanks before we really even understood all that God has provided.

Gratitude, not only at meals, but as the apostle Paul said, "in all circumstances," is one of the best ways to live simply and to combat the allure of acquiring more. When we recognize what we already have, and experience God's bounty in our lives, we also recognize, "Having more than I already do won't bring me any more joy than I already feel." In fact, it might even help us to realize that our acquisition of more stuff is keeping us from being grateful for what we already have. So let us "give thanks to the Lord" – for our family and friends, for our homes, for enough food to eat, for the way a stranger smiled at me today, for the opportunity to sing un-self-consciously in the car where no one but God can hear, for the way dogs wiggle with excitement when you get home from work... you get the idea!

For the first week of Lent, our "walking simply with Christ" simplicity calendar suggested we keep a gratitude journal each day. Did you do it? Did you find different, specific things to be grateful for each day? What five specific things are your grateful for today?

Day 23

Whole Wheat Spaghetti with Olive-Tomato Sauce (low-fat, low-sugar)

Ingredients:

¼ cup olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
6 large cloves garlic, chopped
1/3 cup dry white wine
One 28-oz can diced tomatoes
½ cup chopped black olives

¼ cup chopped fresh basil
¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
½ pound whole-wheat spaghetti (or fettuccini)
2 TB grated Parmesan cheese

Instructions:

Preheat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add oil and onion and cook, stirring constantly, until the onion is golden and soft, ~5 min. Stir in the garlic and continue to cook another min. Add the wine and cook for 1 min. Stir in tomatoes, olives, basil, and red pepper flakes. Cook until a thick sauce forms, 15-17 min. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water (about 8 cups) to a boil. Stir in pasta and cook to desired doneness, 8-9 min. Drain pasta and return to the pot. Add the sauce and Parmesan cheese and toss to coat.

Day 24

Of all the spiritual disciplines that a Christ-follower can practice I find that the simplest walk that I can have with him is to meet him in solitude and when possible in silence. I say when possible in silence because it takes time and effort to quiet our spirit to the point of silence. Our lives are usually so full of frantic activity that even in solitude we find it difficult to set aside the cares of the world so that we can wait on the Lord in silence. When we take the time to quiet ourselves enough to receive spiritual wisdom we are deliberately opening ourselves to a deeper relationship with God.

We can quiet ourselves enough to enter into this silent place by starting with a more direct spiritual discipline such as reading the bible, a devotional or a prayer and then deliberately focusing our thoughts on the wonderful ways we have been blessed by God. I find that reading in the book of Psalms or Proverbs is particularly effective because they are full of spiritual wisdom and the promises of God. When we focus on God's wisdom he will usher us into a silent state where he can commune with us. He is always waiting for us to quiet ourselves and open the door for Him to build the deeper relationship that we so sorely need to have with him.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, please help me to start and end each day in your presence by quieting down enough for you to lead me into a deeper walk with you. I ask this in the name of my precious savior Jesus Christ.

Dick Howard, BLC

Day 25

One prevalent barrier to people trying to live simpler lives is financial concern. Worrying we won't have enough for ourselves makes us fearful of being generous, and so money, which can be such a gift, becomes instead a huge hurdle to our being able to live joyful, grateful lives. But what if even our relationship with money could be simpler? How can financial simplicity help us become more generous?

When people and families get bogged down in payment plans, financing programs, late fees and other financial complexities they have difficulty focusing time or energy on anything other than getting out from under those debts. Imagine paying for things "the old-fashioned way" as it was done only a few generations ago. This would mean that you only bought something once you had saved up enough to purchase it in cash; no financing. If you no longer paid interest on items or no longer had payments, what would happen to all the money that would have been wasted on interest? If we could simplify our purchasing in this one way, we could take the money that would have been spent on interest and use it to help God's people. It's much easier to focus on giving to others when we aren't worried about keeping ourselves afloat.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the many blessings we have been given. We often forget that our needs have been provided for by you. We confuse wants with needs and pay extra to satisfy those wants immediately. Please help us make mindful decisions with our finances so that we may better use what you have given us, to help provide for the needs of others.

Kerri Donohue, BLC

Day 26

In early March, our dark, cold basement comes to life with heated mats, fluorescent glow lights and small fans. Vegetable and annual flower seeds are sprouting and making their way toward the light. It is a fulfilling time to watch the transformation, and to anticipate the warm weather that is sure to eventually arrive.

The process never ceases to amaze me as we watch the transformation. It is easy to see the divine during this time of anticipation. We dream of the day that the ground will be warm enough to plant and watch as they mature to a harvest.

Sure, you can get fresh produce at the grocery store. But to go into the backyard and pick fresh green beans or tomatoes for the evening dinner, it is worth the effort in my book.

Prayer: Praise be to God for the harvest. Amen

Becky Hyde, BLC

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In an effort to maintain momentum towards Pre-K drop-off and mid-morning nutrition on track, I spend 20 minutes making the same meal every weekday at 10 am. Over the weeks, Jillian (my four year old) has taken on more and more of the process of making sautéed mushrooms and spinach with scrambled eggs. Aside from turning on the stove, she has learned almost all of the steps and can do so independently, including egg cracking, mushroom dicing, and scrambling with spatula. The predictability of this meal has simplified our morning routine, provided an opportunity for mommy/daughter time, and confidence building for a pre-schooler. As an added bonus, this meal choice provides us both a healthy protein to kick-start our energy level for the day.

*"Live simply so that others may simply live."*

Amie Kulak, SMLC

### **Day 27**

About 15 years ago my life changed dramatically. I went from living in a large suburban home to a small apartment. I had no choice but to learn to live more simply: less stuff. During this time it helped me discover what's really important in life. Stuff does not bring happiness. Now before buying most items I ask myself if it's a need or a want. The majority are a want. I have a roof over my head, food on my table, clothes to wear and a job. Those are my REAL needs. Several years ago when praying I started my prayers by saying "God, thank you for everything you give me each and every day." It's a simple prayer that reminds me God does supply me with my daily needs. Thanks be to God.

Cindi Smith, SMLC

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Many years ago my father-in-law always said, "Never worry, never hurry, just take time to watch the flowers grow." I finally took his advice and simplified my life by retiring after 42 years of nursing. I will always be a nurse but it's time for God to decide another direction for the rest of my life. The everyday work chaos is gone, along with my high blood pressure!

A coworker gave me a framed "Retirement Blessing" which says it perfectly: You started on this journey, so many years ago, and now it's time to leave behind dear friends you've come to know.

You sought Divine direction and a heart to do His will. Your work became your passion, as you used your gifts and skills.

You set the highest standards for yourself and others too, showing honor, pride and dignity-they saw the best in you!

A "rags to riches" story need not be your bottom line. The priceless things we gain in life, often come from the Divine.

So don't waste one more minute wishing for things that might have been, rather watch the seeds you've planted grow, and feel His peace within.

I pray God keeps you safe and well, wherever you may turn, surrounded by your loved ones, living out the dreams you've earned.

And in the quiet of your heart, may you hear God softly say.... "My good and faithful servant, I'm proud of you this day."

So now I plan to watch the flowers grow and count my many blessings.

Carol Geier, SMLC

Day 28

One thing that focuses and fuels my day is a "quiet time" in the morning. If I have this time after I "gear-up" I feel rushed, negating its purpose. If I leave it until later in the day, that time usually never comes.

This time usually includes various forms of prayer and reading three devotionals with the Bible. One of these is the *Upper Room* which has daily selections written by believers all over the world. The second is *Disciplines*, published by the same organization as the *Upper Room*. This one is authored by usually clergy of all denominations writing daily reflections for a week's period. The third is *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. She has cultivated the art of listening to the Holy Spirit (Jesus) in her heart and offers daily encouragement and messages with verses from the Bible to undergird these.

One message that seems to be a reoccurring theme is that we need to intentionally make time in which to "hear the still small voice". God gets our attention in many ways but seldom does he shout. "God times" have been "still" times for me: appreciating bird song, experiencing a flood of love and well-being upon waking on a summer morning as a child, or finding peace in my heart as I struggle to be open for healing. There have been more of these

times (moments) but most days “it” is just a submission to follow his plan rather than catapult into my own.

The other message that is recurring in *Jesus Calling* is that in “our weakness is his strength”. God doesn’t expect us to navigate this world all on our own. In fact, if we feel we can do it all on our own without needing God’s help.

We do put up a barrier to Christ’s (the Holy Spirit’s and God’s) presence with us. He knocks but we must answer and let in his help: comfort, peace, healing and abundant life.

Prayer: Holy Lord our God, keep us on the intentional path of seeking you daily in the present moment, not fearful of the future, nor regretful of the past but thankful for your presence with us and for us, knowing that you hear our prayers, troubles, fears and dreams, even helping us in our times of unbelief, be they momentary or longer. We ask in the name, wonder and mystery of our triune God. Amen

Nancy Smith, BLC

Fifth Sunday in Lent

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit.
(Offertory hymn, based on Psalm 51:10-12)*

Being conscious of living more simply is not something that happens immediately. We are so inundated with the culture of ease that is all around us, it makes it hard to break out of what we have grown used to. As I began learning about ways to live simply and why it is worth it, I couldn’t help but start to feel guilty. Some changes were easy and even fun for me to make, like bringing my own grocery bags. But other things, like limiting my use of single-use plastic, or carving out more time from my schedule for sabbath and prayer, or buying less pre-made food, are much harder, and I feel a pang of guilt whenever I realize I could be doing better.

Times like those I have to tell myself, “It’s okay. This is a process.” It’s a good time to pray with the Psalmist, “Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.” Hearts can’t change overnight. New habits don’t form just because you think they should. This Psalm always plays a significant role during Lent, appearing on Ash Wednesday, on this 5th Sunday in Lent, and again during Holy Week, because Lent is a time when we focus on repentance, on turning toward God, on seeking “cleaner” hearts and renewed

spirits that are ready to receive the gifts of God. It is a good prayer year round, but especially helpful to remember whenever that pesky guilt starts to creep in!

As Christians we know we are already claimed and loved by God, but also are always seeking to be renewed, created new, and come closer to God. In your journey toward living simply, where have you felt your heart being created new? Where have you needed to pray for this?

Day 29

Recipe: Yoga Pot

Courtesy of www.greenkitchenstories.com, modified by Mel Geiger, BLC
1 simple pot, make ahead of time, great for lunches, meals and super healthy!

1 Tbs coconut oil
1 yellow onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ tbsp fresh ginger, minced
1 tsp ground cayenne
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1 broccoli, cut into bite-sized pieces
2 large carrots, cut into bite-sized pieces
½ fennel, thinly sliced
1 zucchini, cut into bite-sized pieces
Canned plum tomatoes (1-2 cans)
½ cup of red lentils, rinsed
½ cup cooked kidney beans and/or chickpeas
1 handful of fresh herbs (cilantro, thyme etc)
Greek yogurt

Heat coconut oil in pot. Add onion and garlic.
Lower heat and cook for a few minutes, onions will soften.
Add ginger, cayenne and cinnamon. Stir constantly.
Once fragrant add remaining ingredients, except beans and herbs.
You may need to add some a cup or more of water. Use your judgment. The lentils will absorb a lot of water.
Cook for about 30 minutes. Stir often.
Add beans. Cook for another few minutes.
Serve in bowls topped with Greek yogurt and fresh herbs.

Day 30

“Living Simple or Simply Living for Jesus”

Living simple is not reaching beyond our needs. In this fast paced world we have access to almost everything the world has to offer. When we seek Jesus we have all that we need.

Work is a gift from God, but when our wants are greater than our needs, work becomes a burden in this fast-paced world. Focusing on what God wants for our lives and asking Him in prayer gives us priority for living not just for ourselves but for others. Material things are temporary; only Jesus is everlasting. (Heb. 11:6) "He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Material things do not bring happiness, Jesus does. "Put your hand in the hand of the one who calms the water", so the song goes. Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. God has plans for your life. Live simply for Him.

Prayer: Thank you Almighty God for giving us all things we need, your only begotten Son. Give us strength to always put you first in our lives so we can serve others with all our heart, and live simply for You.

Norma Leisten, BLC

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*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my Path.” (Psalm 119:105)*

This year I signed up for Rotary Club at my high school. Rotary Club is a school club where all the members sign up to volunteer a certain number of hours per month. Sometimes it’s difficult to fit in my schedule, but it’s worth it in the end. I like this Bible verse because it guides me in my everyday life to continue to help out where I can.

Matt Taylor (confirmation student), SMLC

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“Give thanks to the Lord because he is good his mercy endures forever.” (Psalm 118)

This reminds me to be thankful for all the good things God does for everyone. It also reminds me that when things are bad good things will come.

Patrick Reilly (confirmation student), BLC

Day 31

“The 100 Things Challenge “

Dave Bruno (who started the grass roots movement in 2007) said that The 100 Things Challenge was inspired by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Stuff is not passive. Stuff affects us. Jesus says you can't serve two masters. When you simplify your life, it opens up room – not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually. The 100 Things Challenge is very simple: you downsize your belongings to only 100 things. A Google search yields a treasure trove of quotes, ideas, “rules” and results including lists of things saved. A sample follows: “When you get started, you'll probably find that you can't count in everything you own. You have to define your own set of rules. Normally people just count those things that belong to them – not things that are shared with other family members, like furniture. It lays out a plan for clearing both physical and sentimental clutter. Often these are things that represent who you once were. But once their purpose is over, they just keep you stagnant. “SHED” is an acronym for “separate the treasures, heave the trash, embrace your identity from within, and drive yourself forward. It comes down to the products vs. the promise. People are finding that their homes are full of stuff, but their lives are littered with unfulfilled promises.

I need to get some control over my life, even if it is just a tidy kitchen counter. Right now I'm down to one nice pen, one mechanical pencil and one spork. When you think about it, 100 things is actually a lot of stuff. In some countries owning 100 things would be considered being wealthy. “I discovered that when you write down everything you own it puts everything in a different perspective and you realize that you can get rid of so much stuff you don't use. After I get to 100, I'll be giving away or boxing up the remaining items I have. If I don't need them after a few months, I'll donate them.”

That removes all of the “what if I need that” excuses.” Do you need that item or will a picture suffice? Things don't bring happiness. Things only bring a moment of satisfaction and then these things start to absorb our energy as we store them, dust them, and organize them. It can be challenging to purge and so I believe it is better to stop items at the door before they come in the house. St. Francis of Assisi said “I need very little and of that very little I need very little.” Some say that “joy trumps Simplicity.”

Prayer: Dear God, as I sort my stuff, please guide me to choose both. Amen

Jeff Peters, SMLC

Day 32

“And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.”(Galatians 6:9)

As many of you know, I spent over 40 years in the fashion industry in NYC. I drafted patterns for everything from costumes, children’s clothes, to bridal gowns and women’s sportswear. It was a very challenging career as well as rewarding. I would feel a sense of pride when I would see someone wearing a garment that I had worked on from start to finish.

Behind the scenes there are many parts that make up the whole. I always felt fortunate to work in an industry that is comprised of people from many countries, with their own special talents. The pattern designers helped me learn to make patterns on the computer. The sewers made my garments look good, so I was proud to fit them on the models.

However, as many of you who sew know, it takes quite a bit of patience to finish a project. Sometimes, you might sew over a pin and break a needle, or maybe sew over your finger and start BLEEDING! There were times that things didn’t go so smoothly. When that happened, I would go out on lunch time and walk down to a small church on Broadway and sit there to pray for clarity in finishing my work. Feeling more refreshed, I would come back and focus on the problem to finish the job.

Prayer: Lord, please inspire me to be my best. What joy I find when I feel that what I am doing, I am doing for you.

Barbara Washburn, SMLC

Day 33

“Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (Thessalonians 4:16-18)

So much of my life I raced around trying to control every aspect of my life and my families. It kept me so busy and I often wasted much of my time on things that I learned were really out of my control. It wasn’t until I learned to rely on God in every step of the way that life became manageable. This was a hard lesson to learn and I am still working on this.

But the one thing I do every morning the minute I wake up is to take time to read a devotional book I have on my night stand and the Bible and then pray for the day ahead. I write my prayer requests down in a prayer journal and then go about my day. It helps me to place everything in my busy day in God's hands and then rely on God to lead me down his path. And even though things don't always go the way I think they should, I know that God's way is best, so this Lenten season I am making an extra effort to put prayer in the forefront of my day and share the power of prayer with others as a way to simplify all the struggles we have in our daily lives.

Karen Kunzer, SMLC

Day 34

Our family is always looking for ways to save money, make us closer as a family and have fun and learn. Recently in a cost cutting measure we discontinued our Time Warner cable. We now use Frontier for our high speed internet, and purchased a Roku unit to connect our television to the internet in order to subscribe to Netflix. Although we did this to save money, it has also made us closer as a family. We play many more board games, and when we do watch television it is often times together. We watch shows such as Wonder Woman, the original superman, Hogan's Heroes, MASH, and many more oldies that Greg and I grew up with. There are some programs that I used to look forward to on cable that are missed. There is something so freeing, about getting good old-fashioned free TV, even if we do have to use a gigantic antennae, with tinfoil wrapped around the top. Change is hard and not always enjoyable at first, sometimes it has rewarding benefits.

Prayer (found online at Northumbria Community):

Lord, help me now to unclutter my life,
to organize myself in the direction of simplicity,
teach me to listen to my heart,
teach me to welcome change,
instead of fearing it. Amen

Adrienne Olean, SMLC

Palm Sunday

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:22-25)

One of the moments in which Jesus most profoundly revealed himself to his disciples was at the Last Supper, in which he shared with them a simple meal of bread and wine, and told them this was his body and blood, given for them. After several attempts at foretelling his impending death and resurrection, it was in the simplicity of a shared meal that the disciples really started to understand who Jesus was. It is this same meal that we continue to celebrate as a Christian community. It is a chance to realize that God can be revealed in huge, impressive ways just as God can be revealed in the most simple of foods. It is at this meal that we are also able to take God into ourselves, to literally taste the grace that has been given to us through Jesus Christ.

Not every meal is Holy Communion, but every meal can be a holy communion – a time that is sacred because we set it aside to be time with family, a time in which we realize that the earth provides for us everything we need for survival, a time when we come together in community (with family and friends) to give thanks and enjoy one another. Where two or three are gathered, God is there, but we can also trust that God is present in the simplest elements of the earth that provide for our nourishment. As Martin Luther's Table Prayer says, "The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

What are meal times like at your house? Do you pray before meals? If you live with other people, do you eat together? Why or why not? If you live alone, do you take time to savor what God has provided? Why or why not?

Day 35 (Monday of Holy Week)

Simple Gifts
(Shaker Song Lyrics)
By Joseph Brackett

*Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free
Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
Twill be in the valley of love and delight*

*When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shant be ashamed
To turn turn will be our delight
Till turning turning we come round right*

As I was thinking of the theme of living simply, this song immediately sprang to mind, I have played many variations of it in band and sang it countless times. When I looked up the lyrics to begin this reflection, the line that struck me most at this time of my life was the second stanza:

When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shant be ashamed

Oh what a glorious gift. How often have we remained rigid and inflexible in a situation in our life? How easy was it to change from that inflexibility? How often do we find once we bow and bend we feel ashamed or weak? Those are the times when God is with us, guiding us so even as we bow and bend, we do not break.

I am an avid cyclist and at times when I find myself out on long rides, as I start to fatigue, I feel my shoulders tense up. The weight of my upper body comes to rest on my handlebars and my back becomes tense, my elbows get stiff and my hands and wrists get tight. If it is windy or hot or hilly or if I am just a long way from home and I have a long way to go, I find myself getting more stiff and rigid. Sometimes simplicity is the act of forcing myself to relax my shoulders, to flatten my back, to take a deep breath. I use this mantra in my everyday life, “balance, relax, shoulders down and back, breathe. Simplicity can come from the act of bowing and bending, and in that, God gives us the strength to carry on.

*Isaiah 40: 29-31
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,*

*and young men stumble and fall;
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.*

Elizabeth Ovando, SMLC

Day 36 (Tuesday of Holy Week)

As I sit here, a bit overwhelmed with too many dirty dishes in the sink and another load (or two!) of laundry to take care of, my living space doesn't look as simple as it has on other days. I think since I live alone and am really only responsible for myself, I've always thought I already did live a fairly simple life. But looking at my calendar showing my daily life maybe it's not as simple as I thought!

So, when the busy times in my life, (two part-time jobs, being a backup babysitter for any of my wonderful grand-nephews, etc.) seem too overwhelming, I just say this single sentence prayer that I recently found online:

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that you and I together can't handle.

Kris Weingartner, SMLC

Day 37 (Wednesday of Holy Week)

One of the simplest phrases in the Bible is "fear not," and it's used over and over again. God is always telling His people not to fear. He tells Joshua in Joshua 1:9, "Do not be afraid and do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." He tells the Israelites in Isaiah 43:1, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine." He tells Mary in Luke 1:30, "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God." He tells the shepherds in Luke 2:10, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."

I believe these "fear not" passages are meant for us as well. When I can't sleep at night because my mind is thinking about the problems of the day, I go over some of these "fear not" passages in my head. Here are some others from the psalms.

Psalm 3:6 "I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side."

Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Psalm 27:3 "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear."

Psalm 91:5 "You will not fear the terror of night nor the arrow that flies by day."

It's as if God is saying, "It's simple. Put your trust in me and do not fear."

Prayer: Lord, help us in our weakness when we are overcome by fear. Let us put our trust in You and remember that with You by our side, we have nothing to fear. Amen

Sally Steinmiller, BLC

Day 38 (Maundy Thursday)

As a child, it was always one of my favorite things during Lent to watch the altar being stripped following worship on Maundy Thursday. The lights were turned almost completely out, save a few highlighting the altar, my mom's beautiful soprano voice wafted above us with the chilling words of Psalm 22, and my pastor dad solemnly took the front of the church apart, one piece at a time, handing it to one of the waiting altar guild members, who quietly took it back to the sacristy (the room behind the altar). I found the ritual enchanting, intriguing, unsettling, and even as a youngster, I found it deeply appropriate. We had just heard about Jesus' last meal with his disciples, and of course we all knew the dreadful things that would happen the next day, and as we watched the altar stripped to its barest bones, how could we not also imagine our Lord being stripped to his barest bones, all for our sake? Finally, my dad took off his stole, too, and dramatically dropped his pectoral cross on the bare altar, as he, too, disappeared behind the altar.

What remained was a light shining on the simple scene: a naked table, a silent sanctuary, one single cross sitting on the table. Yet even in the midst of the sadness and drama, there was such a beauty to it. On Maundy Thursday we hear the Greatest Commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. When I picture that altar stripped bare, what I see there is that simple commandment: love. I see the love of a God who would go to all extremes to show us that love. I see the beauty in that simple (yet so rich!) truth.

Gracious God of love: as your Son was stripped bare to show us your love, grant us courage to strip our lives of the things that would keep us from loving you and our neighbors, as difficult or inconvenient as that may be for us at times. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Day 39 (Good Friday)

The Seven Last Words of Christ:

- ~ “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*”
- ~ “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*”
- ~ “*Jesus said to his mother: ‘Woman, this is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple: ‘This is your mother.’*”
- ~ “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”
- ~ “*I thirst.*”
- ~ “*It is finished.*”
- ~ “*Father, in your hands I commend my spirit.*”

Countless composers and artists have tried to capture the emotion and experience of what have come to be known as the Seven Last Words of Christ. They are his final utterances from the cross, before he finally died for us and our sins. Even in their brevity, their depth captures so many aspects of Christ’s human self, even as they look forward to his return to the right hand of God.

The one that has always captured my imagination and attention is the fifth: “I thirst.” How basic. How human. That Christ would hang dying on the cross and think to notice that his mouth is dry. As I reflect on this in light of our simplicity theme this Lent, what strikes me is that even in these last moments, when Christ feels pain unlike I have ever felt – both physical and emotional – he still feels the most basic of human needs. Just before he finally gives up his spirit, he feels something that I feel every day: he thirsts. Oh, that God would know and feel my needs!

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal: thank you for feeling with me not only my greatest joys and my deepest sadness, but also the simplest struggles I face from day to day. May I, too, feel the joys, sadnesses, and simple struggles of my neighbors near and far, and move me to compassion. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Day 40 (Holy Saturday)

Abundance

[Our culture] defines abundance one way – plenty of food, clothing, stuff, and money to spend – but God defines it another.

I struggle with the concept of abundance. Is it about contentment, about wanting what we already have instead of always wanting more? That’s what I believe when I’m sitting on the back porch with my coffee, face warmed by the sun, taking in the garden. All those experiences are gifts from God, available practically free.

Is it about being able to recognize and accept the gifts of others? That seems plausible when Dottie, who's about 83, stands up and shares a couple of old-fashioned jokes during coffee hour. ("A little boy asks his mother, 'What's that brass plaque on the wall of the church?' 'Oh,' she replies, 'it honors men who were killed in the service.' 'Which service, Mom? The 9 o'clock of the 11?'"")

Is it about sharing our abundance with one another, so that all will have enough? Maybe.

All I know for sure is that God's abundance is not ours. Abundance is not about my stuff or my bank account. It might be about the amazing blue of Lake Michigan this afternoon, as I rode my bike along the lake, or the scent of the basil in today's box of vegetables.

Where the Lord's Prayer bids, "your kingdom come," a pastor I knew says, "your culture come." I like that. Imagine how well we will understand abundance and how little we will worry when God's culture comes. Meanwhile, a culture sounds easier to create than a kingdom.

From *Sustaining Simplicity: A Journal* by Anne Basye

Easter Sunday

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." (John 20:18)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Easter is a day (a whole season, actually!) when we celebrate the new life that God provides, and remember that death has been swallowed up in the victory of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a day of mystery and promise. It is a day on which we strive to see the Lord in new ways, and, with Mary Magdalene, to announce it to others.

Have you seen the Lord through this adventure in simple living? Have you noticed more the world around you? Have you grown more aware of how your actions affect our neighbors around the world? Have you been more conscious of the food you eat and how it makes you feel and how it energizes you to do good work in the world? Have you made more of an effort to take time for rest and intentional time with God? Have you simplified the space around you and eliminated some of the distractions so that you can truly appreciate and be grateful for what you have in life, rather than always long for more or be bogged down by what you have? Have you striven to overcome an attitude of scarcity, and instead lived into God's abundance? Have you made an effort to be more grateful?

When we started this journey of walking simply with Christ, the hope was that it would bring us closer to God – in the above ways and perhaps in even more! If any of this has been true for you, I pray that it has, indeed, helped you to say with confidence, “I have seen the Lord!” We can see God in all kinds of simple ways of life – prayer, a walk in the sunshine, sitting quietly with a friend, laughing, cooking from scratch, sharing a meal, giving thanks – and I hope and pray that your journey toward simple living will continue, so that you might continue to see the Lord in all you do.

How have you seen the Lord during this season? How have these practices helped with that? What of these practices will you continue?



A Covenant Prayer

*I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou
wilt.*

*Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted by thee or brought low by thee.*

*Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.*

*I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.*

*And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen*

(from The United Methodist Hymnal)