

I AM



Lent 2023

Madison First
United Methodist Church



LENT 2023

Madison First

United Methodist Church

Rev. H. Grady Mosley, II, Senior Pastor

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

©2022

Cover Image and Graphics, Jen Zappa.

©2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Madison First United Methodist Church, Madison, GA.

I AM WHO I AM

A name for God so holy that mere humans fall prostrate before Him.

A name for God so sacred the Jews would not speak it or write it in its entirety.

A name for God so powerful that lightning flashes and the earth quakes when He speaks.

A name for God so glorious that no man can look upon His face and live.

A name for God so majestic that psalms and songs have been written to praise Him.

A name for God so loving that He sent His Son to save us from our sin.

A name for God so personal that Jesus claimed for it for Himself when He described the relationship He wants to have with us.

ἐγώ εἰμι

At least seven times, John recorded Jesus boldly claiming God's sacred name as His own. Sometimes **I AM** was used when He described His place in the Kingdom of God. Sometimes, **I AM** was used in conjunction with a miracle He performed. Other times, **I AM** was used as He responded to the challenges to His authority by the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders. In each case, Jesus revealed some aspect of how He wants to relate to us. During this Lenten season, may we come to know Jesus in all His glory as . . .

The Bread of Life
The Light of the World
The Gate for the Sheep
The Good Shepherd
The Way, the Truth, and the Life
The True Vine
The Resurrection and the Life

Through Scripture reading, prayer, and contemplation of these Lenten devotions written by members of our congregation, my prayer is that we will see Jesus as the Great **I AM**—everything we could ever need to face this life with the certain assurance the He is with us, has a purpose for us, and is waiting in heaven to welcome us into His presence. Just as the apostle John desired, may we see “His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

Roberta Watson
Director of Education

I AM

Who I Am



ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

I AM WHO I AM

Exodus 3:14-15

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."

For context, God is speaking to Moses, who is tending his father-in-law's sheep near Mr. Horeb when he sees a burning bush. Upon investigation, Moses hears a voice speaking to him from that bush. During the conversation, God calls Moses to be the deliverer of the Israelites. Moses asks God what name he should use for God to identify Him to the people, and God speaks these words.

Surely the people would recognize Moses was sent by the same God of their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Maybe not—they have been in captivity, horribly oppressed by the Egyptians, for nearly 400 years. They might need reminding who the God of their ancestors was. God is proclaiming His name: *YAHWEH* (or *LORD*).

Many of God's familiar names are ones men have given Him: *El Shaddah*, Lord God Almighty; *Adonai*, Lord, Master; *El Elyon*, The God Most High. This name is the one He gives Himself. Correctly interpreted, His name is "I will be what I will be." In His name lies the promise not only for Moses and the Israelites, but also for us. God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He always has been, is, and will always be. He is absolute, self-existent, eternal, and self-created. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, He is all that we need. If we need a deliverer, He is. If we need a healer, He is. If we need a friend, He is. If we need a Savior, He is. If we need a loving Father, He is. There is no circumstance, problem, illness, or sin so great that He cannot give us victory over it. In Him, and in His powerful name, we can put our trust because He will never fail us.

Deborah Mosley is a wife, mother, grandmother, and educator. She and her husband, Grady, have been members of Madison First UMC for thirteen years where she is a Sunday School teacher and small group leader.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

I AM WHO I AM

Exodus 20:2-3

² *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*
³ *“You shall have no other gods before me.*

I have pondered the name of God in order to achieve a deeper, stronger relationship with my Creator.

Jonathan Cahn’s writings seek to explain spiritual obscurities. In *The Book of Mysteries*, he claims we say God’s name all the time. YHWH (Yahweh) translates as “I Am.” When we speak of ourselves, we say God’s name first, because our existence comes from His existence.

God is the Source of all life. We not only live for Him, but also after Him. Nothing we can ever think, say, or do will separate us from our Creator, or His perfect love to us through Christ, His Son.

“Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 8:39 NIV)

I once told a friend that I picture God, in my finite mind, standing in the middle of a circle of events. As these events (my representation of human time limits) encircle Him, He is touching every one of them at the same time. God is always in the present, not “was” or “will be.”

If I would always see God in this way, as my only Source of Life, I believe my petty little problems would fade and disappear. My life-changing troubles would have new, profound meanings. We are finite, but thankfully, our Heavenly Father is not.

May we consciously speak God’s power into our lives every time we say His name.

Macy Johnson is the pianist for our traditional worship service and a retired accountant. She and Jeff have two children and three grandchildren.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

I AM WHO I AM

Isaiah 45:18

For this is what the Lord says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited — he says: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

God is the creator of all that is seen and unseen. He even created us humans to have senses to fully experience this. He designed our brains and mind to comprehend, to experience, and to express back our feelings of His creation in words, prayer, art, and song. David wrote in Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” We and the earth are His and that is what He intended from the start.

God is sovereign and purposeful in all that He does. Nothing is done without a reason. God, with just a thought, created this beautiful planet, the air we breath, the very ground we walk on—all flying through a vast universe of unimaginable beauty. Look up at the beautiful blue dome over us! Pretty amazing isn't it?

We humans brought sin and imperfection to the earth, but God has plans to restore it and us one day in the future. Isaiah 55:12 says, “The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” Paul says in Romans 8 that the earth—all creation—“groans” for this day of renewal. Recently on my daily walk, I was praying and contemplating this very thing and found myself giving “high fives” to leaves on branches to tell them that I know how they feel.

Chris Cook is a husband, father, artist, owner of Madison Studios and a member of Madison First UMC for 20 years.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

I AM WHO I AM

John 8:54-55, 58

⁵⁴ Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. . . .

⁵⁸ "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Storytellers have always been fascinated with time travel. In the *Outlander* novels, a WW II nurse stumbles upon a time portal and finds herself in 1743. There she cares for ill and battle-wounded Scots and, big surprise, falls in love with a strapping Highlander. Marvel Comic characters, from Dr. Strange to the Guardians of the Galaxy, have the ability to flit between parallel worlds, universes, and alternate realities. Honestly, I can't follow all their time dimension pin-balling, but in the end, they annihilate the evil forces. For a while anyway.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (v. 56). Sounds like a movie premise. Rebel rabbi time traveler communes with father of Israel, who happens to be 2000 years his senior? The Jerusalem elite sneered at Jesus' declaration of Abraham's good favor. You who are not even 50 years? How could Abraham have known you? Obviously, the first-century Temple leadership was not up on digital-age special effects.

But it wasn't this outlandish claim of jumping through time that so enraged them. Jesus knew His audience, as does any great storyteller. Amping up the tension, Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was, I Am." God's sacred words declaring His identity to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus could not have used a more evocative reference. This wasn't fiction. He clearly claimed to be Jehovah. No subtitles needed. This so enraged the Pharisees, they picked up stones to kill him. Jesus had stated He was Creator of all history, matter, and dimension. A superhero of superheroes. One transcendent of life, death, and time. Now there's a movie idea.

Jamie Miles is a wife, mother, caretaker of dogs and cats, filler of bird feeders, and lifelong Methodist.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The Bread
of Life*



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:35

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

I personally believe all that is written in the Holy Scriptures. I have always found it to be true. And yet, it is full of metaphors because, well, how else can we mortal, finite humans speak of eternal truths and describe God? Our language can't keep up. So, Jesus tells us that He is the Bread of Life.

At the end of the gospel, John tells us he wrote the book so that we may believe Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and, by hearing that, have eternal life. But the crowd in this passage is so fixed on getting a free meal that they completely overlook the fact that God's own Son is in their midst. They'd settle for Wonder bread when they could have the Bread of Life.

Jesus demonstrates through signs and wonders who He is. They saw the signs: they saw the sick healed, they heard Jesus's words, but they were impressed by the food, and not even a great meal at that—fish and barley loaves! "Always give us this bread," they said. "What sign will you give?" they asked. He offers eternity and they want a bologna sandwich.

How often do we forget that Jesus is the Bread of Life which not only saves and sustains us, but *sanctifies* us? The way of Wonder bread is a temporarily full belly; the Israelites were hungry the day after eating manna. But the way of Christ is the way of holiness that lasts forever, and eating that Bread of Life sustains you for all eternity.

Jim Killman is retired and lives on Lake Oconee. He and his wife, Lynn, have eight grandchildren and Waylon, the French bulldog.

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Exodus 16:4-5, 31

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions." ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." ³¹ The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

What difference would it make in my life if I woke up every day with the utmost confidence that God will provide exactly what I need for that day? That even on the bleakest of days I can be certain that God's presence and provision will not only sustain me, but also nourish me and never ever fail me.

Throughout the Bible, God shows us His miraculous provision for His people: deliverance from slavery and famine, daily manna from heaven (this passage), and protection from vicious rulers killing first-born children. The examples are endless. But there is nowhere more evident of this provision than in the Last Supper when Jesus, knowing His fate, tells His disciples (and us) that His body is the bread and it was broken for us. Through Him and His broken body we have all that we need: forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, grace for every moment, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to sustain us at all times.

This knowledge is the manna from heaven sweetened with honey that we should remember, praise God for, and pass along to generations ahead. Jesus is the true bread from heaven who gives life to the world (John 6:33). May we never hunger for anything more.

Jesus, thank You for being the bread of life and the manna from heaven that sustains and nourishes us daily. Amen.

Julie Speyer and her husband, Steve, have lived in Madison since 1999. They have two children Annie (28) and Jack (26). Julie owns Pure Bliss Spa & Shop in downtown Madison.

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

¹ Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. ² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Most of us will fall into one of two categories. Either we “eat to live” or we “live to eat.” Well, I, for one, am a FOOD LOVER and my default position is to “live to eat.” For me, this does not end well. It leads to struggles with weight, low self-esteem, and physically feeling rotten. When this happens, I need to refocus and try to view food as fuel. I need to learn to “eat to live.” This means being intentional and having to start over every time I slip up. It’s hard but when I get it right, it’s almost effortless.

Our spiritual lives often mirror our dietary lives. We pursue things we think will give us pleasure only to end up feeling miserable. Following Christ is hard work. Over and over, we want to do it our way when Christ’s way is so much better. He is the “Bread of Life” that we must eat to live. But it is so easy to get off course. Then we must refocus and start over. However, Christ reminds us that we never have to do it alone. He does not want our guilt. Instead, He wants us to embrace our failures and learn to depend on Him more. It’s hard, but when we get it right, it’s almost effortless.

During this Lenten season, what in your life needs to be refocused? What steps can you take today to be intentional?

Bob Dickson is a husband and father of three adult children. He enjoys camping, fishing and riding mountain bikes.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Matthew 4:1-4

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Why should the I AM require a wilderness experience?

Seems His departure from Heaven to dwell in a sin-ridden earthly world would be enough wilderness.

According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so the devil could tempt Him (vs 1).

Why should the I AM require a temptation experience?

Seems a forty day fast would be enough temptation—the fast *did* leave Jesus weak and hungry (vs 2).

According to the Bible, the devil's temptation was for Jesus to question who He was and His ability to work miracles (vs 3).

Why didn't the I AM send the devil sailing into a pig and out of His wilderness?

Seems the devil was a necessary part of the wilderness/temptation experience.

According to the Bible, Jesus defeated the devil with the Word (vs 4).

I love that Jesus *became flesh and dwelt among us*. I can't whine, "You don't know what I'm going through!" HE DOES because HE WAS flesh and blood and experienced every pain. Therefore, HE IS the One who defeats the devil when I claim His Word.

For all the devil's clever whiles it's funny he tried to tempt Jesus to make bread. The Bread of Life was looking him in the face!

The I AM who satisfies/saves my soul.

Teresa Wallace is a lifetime member of Madison First UMC and associate member of Rutledge UMC. She hosts a daily devotional blog geared toward teens and applicable for adults at www.worksofherhands.com.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, MARCH 2

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:48-51

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they were fed directly by God—manna from heaven. Their hardened hearts caused them to look away from God, thinking they didn't need Him, and could do things for themselves even though God was providing for them everything they needed. God knew then, and still does, that we need food to sustain our lives. We need it to survive. To live. God knows we need more than that which sustains the body, we need spiritual food as well. We need to satisfy our deepest desires of belonging, of communion with others, our sense that we are loved by our God and that we belong to Him and He loves us and He has a purpose for us in this world and the next.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." This means that the only way to be truly satisfied spiritually is through Him. He invites us to faithfully follow Him. In John 6:48-51, He told us that He is the one and only one who can satisfy our needs and deepest desires. We eat His bread metaphorically by reading and studying the Scriptures, by worshiping and praying to God both in private and with other Christians, and by reaching out and sharing the good news with those who don't know God loves them. If we are obedient to Him, He has promised we will be with Him as brothers and sisters in heaven eternally and not end up like the Israelites who never got to see the Promised Land.

Sharon is married to Tommy Wood. They have been members of Madison First UMC for four years. She leads the Good News Sunday School Class. They live in Buckhead, have two grown children, three grandchildren, and Tater, the dog.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, MARCH 3

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

1 Peter 2:2-3

² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Scripture often uses parables, analogies and symbols to represent and better explain spiritual truths. In fact, the Bible uses many to describe work of God the Holy Spirit. Often, I find that it is described in words through use of all our senses. Vision for example is in numerous songs and passages. Explaining spiritual truths by sight or the loss thereof is common.

In this Scripture we “taste” the Word. I can relate sensually to my spiritual journey and growth through Scripture. I always thought I was a Christian, but not until I lost most of my sight was I able to truly see, taste, hear, and feel God’s Word. Like a newborn I have had to learn to use all my senses. As a new Christian I thirst for the Word and tasting spiritual milk helped me to understand without sight. I am growing daily reading and sharing in two Bible studies plus Sunday School. By being in the Word I can envision my salvation.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” and I now hunger for it. The child grows and goes from milk to bread. I find that I am tasting the bread of the life that was sacrificed. I not only taste it, but I also touch it in the love of Christ through His Words and His people. I hear it in the singing. I feel it move through me. I can even smell it when I hug people with their cologne or open my Bible or light a candle. My salvation grows daily, and it tells me GOD IS GOOD.

Teri Johnson moved to Madison in 2014 and joined Madison First UMC. She became visually impaired the previous year and feels the church has helped her to see Christ’s light. She is a retired US Army Officer who enjoys Bible studies, Walk to Emmaus group, and 10 Alive Sunday School Class. She is a member of the Living Life Team for the visually impaired and Madison Lions Club. She has a non-profit helping with the Greenway Trails of Madison called Journey of Life Trail.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, MARCH 4

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Luke 22:7-8, 19

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

How does taking the Lord's Supper (communion) remind us that Jesus is the Bread of Life? The elements of the Lord's Supper are bread and wine and Jesus has said that He is the Bread of Life. When God sent His Son to earth, He said that Jesus' flesh was the spiritual Bread of Life, fully divine and fully human. That's a good starting point.

During the Lord's Supper, as we repeat the words, we are reminded each time that God provided His fully divine Son for us. Jesus, fully human, accepted the cross and became the provider that satisfies our hunger for heaven.

During the last communion with His disciples, Jesus said that the bread He broke at the table was His "body which is given for you." So, we not only learn that communion bread is broken for us, but we also learn that Jesus' broken body on the cross is the spiritual Bread of Life that is our avenue to eternal life.

We Methodists think something mysterious occurs during the Lord's Supper. At the communion table, we find ourselves hearing, thinking about, and repeating the words that reinforce the truth, our understanding, and belief in the fact that Jesus is the Bread of Life sent to save us. Remembering Jesus as the Bread of Life is essential to developing a strong faith and belief. At the Lord's Supper, let's remember and accept the communion elements as the life-giving Bread of Christ—Jesus our Savior.

Jack and Nancy Miles have been members of Madison First UMC for more than 28 years. They are volunteers in the Intercessory Prayer Ministry. They have three married children and 11 grandchildren.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The Light Of the
World*



SUNDAY, MARCH 5

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8:12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

Most of us would agree that it is harder to drive at night than in the daytime. We don't question why this is so, we simply understand that light changes the way we see our surroundings and the road ahead. In today's verse, Jesus tells us that He is the source of true light and guidance in our lives.

When we follow Jesus, we no longer have to face life's hardships with uncertainty. He has shown us the way to live a meaningful life and to be filled with hope and peace even on our darkest days. In work with the Holy Spirit, Jesus illuminates the path ahead of us through the challenges we face. When we trust in Him, we can have confidence that He will always be with us and lead us in the right direction.

In this "I Am" statement, Jesus declares that He is the light of the WORLD. He did not come for a select few, but for all people. He offers salvation and grace to all who come to Him. He welcomes everyone, regardless of their background or past mistakes. Jesus offers hope, grace, and mercy to all who follow Him.

In John 12:36 Jesus says, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light." Shortly before His death and resurrection, Jesus reminds His followers that by knowing Him as the light, we become like Him. The light of Jesus Christ in us points others to our Savior.

Melissa Martin is wife to Brian and mom to James, Charlie and Thomas. As a YogaFaith teacher, she loves to share the light of Christ with others on a yoga mat.

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, MARCH 6

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Exodus 13:21-22

²¹ *The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.* ²² *He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*

Have you ever felt like you are walking through life wandering around lost? I know I have, many times. However, God provides a guide—a way to follow Him and find our way out. The verses today could be counted as one of the most comforting verses in Scripture.

God showed His love and His guidance in this passage for His people. The Israelites were wandering through the desert, away from home with no idea where they were going and no map to get there. God provided a way for them to see Him. During the day, a pillar of clouds. Clouds usually stand out during the day but it is hard to see them in the night. However, in the darkness of night God provided a pillar of fire, which I'm sure was so bright it was hard to miss.

God always provides a way for us to see him, no matter the circumstances. All we have to do is look. Second, God is the guide. The pillar of cloud and fire were always in front; not beside, not behind, not among, but in front. We just have to follow God and allow Him to be our guide. Third, and the most important, He never left them. He was always there, leading the way, providing Light for them to see. It still holds true today. He is always there guiding us and providing the light to guide the way.

Anna Ross is the assistant Children's director and Children's music director as well as a teacher in the Morgan County School System. She lives in Buckhead with her husband, Randy, and their daughter, Natalie.

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, MARCH 7

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Isaiah 42:16

"I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them And rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone."

When Covid shut down the world, Tommy and I had just moved to Morgan County. We had visited Madison First United Methodist a few times and I had just joined the choir. The world went dark and so did my world. I was in the high risk group, so I did not venture out into the world much at all. I went from living in McDonough for eighteen years to living here for about six weeks and not knowing a soul. I was going house crazy and having minor panic attacks.

I decided that I was going to try and read my Bible from cover to cover and started daily devotions. As I became devoted in my daily Scripture readings, I became more at peace. My sweet husband made sure I got out of the house every day to enjoy the new neighborhood.

Slowly the world opened back up and we started attending church again. We joined a new Sunday School class that met outside on the church lawn. We made new friends and as summer progressed Madison began to feel like home.

In Isaiah we learn that God will turn our darkness into light and make our rough places smooth. We may go to dark places, or go through rough places, but God is always there showing us the way to the light. Sometimes it is hard to remember this as we travel through our life and all our ups and downs. Jesus is always there for us. He is our Light.

Kathy Thompson and her husband, Tommy, have lived in Madison and attended Madison First UMC for three years. They have two grown children. Kathy is the Worship Team Leader and sings in the choir at the traditional service each Sunday.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 1:9-12

⁹ *There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.* ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.* ¹¹ *He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.* ¹² *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*

There are bold statements in the Bible about Jesus. Jesus was the true Light. Jesus gives light to everyone coming into the world. Jesus was in the world and the world was made through Him. Many people in Jesus' time did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. The people who did believe were given the right to become children of God. The same is true today.

Throughout history there have been people making bold claims. Joseph Smith wrote *The Book of Mormon*. He claimed he received the message from an angel known as Moroni. Politicians make bold claims (many claims they do not keep). We live in an age where you can make outrageous claims and some will believe.

We are fortunate to have the Bible which gives us evidence that Jesus' claims are true. He is the second person of the Trinity; the Son of God. We are fortunate that we live in a county that allows us the freedom to read the Bible, attend the church of our choice, and to proclaim that Jesus is the Light. So the questions are, "Are you living in a way to show others the light of God? Are you telling those you come in contact about Jesus?" It's our job to tell others about Jesus and the Holy Spirit's job to convict and convert.

Scott Webb and Betty have been married for over 28 years. They have four grown children and one at home.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, MARCH 9

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 12:44-46

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Do you ever have strange dreams? I often don’t remember my dreams, but one I remember most vividly is a dream in which I am lost in the dark woods. I am in a panic—running, yelling, and trying anything that I can to escape the unknown darkness. Finally I see a light peaking through the trees, and I run to it. This light serves as a lifeline to me and an escape from the darkness.

In John chapter 12 verse 46, Jesus “cries out” that He is the Light sent by God to lead the world on a path to safety—just like the light peaking through the trees to guide us to safety. In verse 44 and 45, Jesus is pleading with us to understand that to believe in Him is to believe in God and to see Him is to see God. Jesus is wanting to be sure that His people know His intimate connection with God is something different. Jesus “cried out” these words as the last public proclamation before going to the cross.

If we knew a statement would be our last before death wouldn’t we yearn to make it impactful? Jesus is begging us to understand that belief in Him is belief in God and that this is the only path to light in a dark world. This was the message that Jesus came into the world to deliver. His father, God, sent Him to be His presence here on earth. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God, to see God and to receive the gift Jesus was sent here to deliver—light, or escape from the darkness.

Ashley Johns is married to Clint, and they have two wonderful children, Charlie (8) and Harris (6). She is a lifelong member of Madison First UMC who spends most of her free time volunteering in the community.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

1 John 1:5-7

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

As I sat on the balcony of our room on the Georgia coast awaiting dawn, I watched the sun rise out of the Atlantic. As this brilliant light rose to greet the cloudless sky, I thought of the entrance of our Lord into the world and the glorious light that He brought to all of us. He erased the darkness and gave us a beacon to lead us through all the challenges of this sinful world.

Isaiah 9:2a tells us, "The people walking in the darkness have seen a great light." Like we who see the sunrise, so the Lord has risen to light our paths. Psalm 27:1a assures us, "The Lord is my light and salvation." This light and salvation is the greatest gift of all. And we can be assured of this truth from Matthew 4:16a which tells us, "The people dwelling in the darkness have seen a great light." May we, as people of faith, always follow this great gift of light and life.

Every day, in our earthly lives, we face the darkness of the world. Each dark situation we encounter is an opportunity to shine the light of Jesus into this darkness and bring joy and love to others who may be in the darkest night. There is no darkness in our Savior and He will banish darkness as He is the true Light of the World. We need to carry His light to those have not found the illumination He brings. We have the privilege to show all the world how Jesus banishes darkness.

Linda Young and her husband, Jim, have lived at Lake Oconee since 1998. Their blended family includes 4 children, 13 grandchildren, and 7 great-grandchildren. They are enjoying all the ministries of Madison First UMC.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

One of my favorite times of the year is Christmas. I love to see Christmas lights shining as I drive at night, and I enjoy a Christmas tree shining bright in my house. Seeing these lights helps to brighten my mood during this time of year. I am always a little sad when it is time to take down the decorations. It seems as if everything is so bland for a while after all the decorations and lights have been removed.

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the World.” Fortunately, He allows our lives to stay decorated year-round, unlike temporary Christmas lights. When my Christmas tree is up, I rarely forget to turn it on. However, when things are always accessible, such as the eternal light of Jesus, we can easily forget about them. Many times, blandness in our own lives is a result of our simply forgetting to allow His light to shine. Sometimes when I am feeling a little discouraged or down, I need to remind myself to flip the switch and allow Jesus to shine His light in my life.

Jesus also tells us, in our Scripture reading for today, that we are “the light of the world.” Not only do we depend on Him for light in our lives, we are also called to share His light with others through our actions and words. As we share His light, hopefully, someone’s bland life will be transformed into a life of light, year-round, through the Light of the World, Jesus!

Jessica Crawford and her husband, Michael, have attended Madison First UMC for almost 7 years. They have 2 daughters, Brooke (12) and Blake (10), who are active in the children’s and youth programs at church.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The Gate and
The Good Shepherd*



SUNDAY, MARCH 12

I AM THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP

John 10:7-9a

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.

Today we have an endless amount of anything we want or need from which to choose. Cars, sneakers, jeans, vitamins, even deodorants are all available to us in a dizzying array of options. We pick and choose based upon our preferences. And that's fine for the utilitarian items in our life. The trouble comes when we take that approach to matters of faith.

People from most religions today are "fond" of Jesus because they choose to see Him as simply a wise teacher, a good moral example to follow, etc. The trouble is, Jesus claimed to be much more than that. So the question is, are we going to respond to Jesus as many people view Him, or on the basis of who He claimed to be?

In John 10:7-10, Jesus issues one of His "I Am" statements when He says, "I am the gate for the sheep." Jesus's own words here tell us that He is not only the gate or way for salvation, but also for protection (v. 9). Many are offended that Jesus has the audacity to make such an exclusive claim. His "I Am" statement actually refers back to Exodus 3:14, where God introduces Himself to Moses with the expression, "I am who I am." Jesus' use of this expression is His way of explicitly identifying Himself as God.

How about you? Is your response to Jesus and His claims like many people who simply see Him as a great teacher and moral example? Or will you choose to take Him at His word and His claims of deity, the only way of salvation?

Dan Knudsen is the High School principal at Prince Avenue Christian School outside of Athens. He lives in Madison with his wife, Paige, and has four adult daughters.

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, MARCH 13

I AM THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP

Psalm 95:6-7a

⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. ⁷ For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

I am the one who bows down to listen to the Lord. The Scripture that immediately came to mind is, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10a). When we bow down a sacred pause comes over us and we surrender to the palpable presence of God.

But how many of us abide in His presence? How can we remain without distractions as we walk through our day? We seek approval from others and strive to be more, do more, and ask for more. But we gradually lose focus on the One who can calm our hearts. When the Shepherd is present the sheep sense His protection. The sheep quiet themselves and listen to the stillness, and in the void His word speaks exactly what our hearts are longing to hear.

Kathleen Bryant is the Morgan County Middle School Theater Director. She is the daughter of PopPop and mother of Madison and Michala.

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

I AM THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

In Revelation 3, Jesus is talking to the church in Laodicea, which is lukewarm, self-satisfied, and too busy enjoying worldly pleasures to really have Christ's presence in their daily lives. We, too, can many times be accused of being lukewarm in our attitude to church, our faith, Bible study, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Jesus will not force Himself on us . . . that's why He is outside the door where the handle is only on the inside. We are the ones who have to open that door to Him. As Christians, we must leave that door open at all times and be available and willing to hear His voice and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. What a joy it is to know He is there, inside already, and we don't have to worry about hearing His knock. I am so happy to be one of Christ's sheep. He restores my soul, and He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He is my Shepherd, and He knows me by name. Hallelujah!

Cindy Spence is a wife, mother, Mamaw, and Great-Mamaw to a loving family. She is also the chairman of the Intercessory Prayer Ministry which she loves dearly and is so blessed to work on.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:11. 14-15

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . .

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

I was listening to a sermon about The Good Shepherd the other day, and the preacher was explaining things we need to know about sheep—they’re dumb, they can’t take care of themselves, they walk away from something safe or someone who is taking care of them, and then can’t find their way back. I’ve never really wanted to admit that I could be the “sheep” in this metaphor—and then an old hymn came to me. “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” has a line that I have recently found myself connecting to: *Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.* All of a sudden, it made sense to me. I do this. I wander. I don’t feel like I have left God, but I have often taken a different path to seek fulfillment in other places when my current place is safe and secure.

But, God knows me, and you. He knows that we all wander from time to time, just like sheep. And that the shepherds in our lives (our families, our churches, our city/state/national leaders) are also human, and therefore don’t always lead us correctly. So, God sent Jesus, who told the crowd that He is the Good Shepherd, the One God told the Israelites He would send (Eze 34:15, 23-24) because their shepherds were not taking care of the flock (Israel).

And not only does God know us, we can know Him. He has given us Jesus and the Holy Spirit and our Bible to teach us, guide us, and remind us that we are loved. We can trust His Goodness, even in our wanderings.

Kathryn and Joe Cardwell have been members of Madison First UMC for 19 years. They enjoy time with family and friends, fishing, and beaching, while still trying (not) to shepherd their grown children, Mary Claire and John.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Luke 15:4-7

⁴ “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

So what does the Good Shepherd do? As described in the 23rd Psalm, one of the most comforting passages in the Bible, He leads, guides and protects the sheep. Today’s passage focuses on the concern a good shepherd has for a sheep outside the fold.

Luke records this parable to reveal the shepherd’s response when just one of His sheep is lost. Although there are still ninety nine in the fold, the larger concern is for the one who is lost. Just like we often do, one of them has gone astray. The shepherd goes searching, finds the lost sheep, and even carries it home on His shoulders. Friends all gather together to rejoice.

Have you ever been lost—really lost—in an unfamiliar and even scary place? How about losing a personal item, say a wallet, purse, or goodness forbid, a CELL PHONE! How excited we are to find our way or to find the lost item. We are so comforted and probably can’t wait to tell someone about it.

Jesus says there is great rejoicing in heaven when one of His lost sheep is found. There is even more rejoicing when one lost sheep is found than for the ones who have never strayed. At one time or another, we have all strayed from His leadership, guidance, and fold. How happy He and all of heaven will be when we return to the fold!

Eddy Crumbley, and his wife Cathy, have been members of Madison First UMC for about 6 years. They and their extended family of 12 enjoy the fellowship and participation of the various aspects of this church.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Psalm 23:1-4, 6b

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. ³ He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. . . . ^{6b} And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The 23rd Psalm is comforting in its simplicity. He is the Great Shepherd; we are the sheep—defenseless, weak, and vulnerable to all kinds of evil and danger. A lamb without a shepherd cannot survive for long. A lamb needs protection, strength, and the wisdom of a skilled and loving shepherd to survive. Sometimes we face earthly trials of such magnitude that survival seems impossible. Traveling through these “valleys” can render us forgetful, shallow, and prideful. We falsely believe we can shoulder burdens our Shepherd never meant for us to carry alone. He stands ready to comfort, protect, and wage war against darkness on behalf of all who believe. His only request is that we prayerfully cast the burdens and desires of our hearts onto Him.

Our shepherd’s help and reassurance in these times can manifest in a multitude of ways. Whether He comes to us in the form of a faithful friend, a loving church family, a trusted relative, or even the sweet peace of quiet time in His Word, He never leaves us. He designed our human spirits to commingle with the Holy Spirit so that when we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” we will “fear no evil,” because we know, without a doubt, that He is “with us.” Our shepherd desires for us to turn to Him and lean into His power and grace in times of joy and despair. May we all remember this great blessing and immediately turn to Him when earthly troubles loom large in our lives.

Courtney Thomas is New Member Connection Leader and serves on the Intercessory Prayer Team. She, her husband, Travis, and three daughters, Caroline, Emily, and Mary Georgia live in Madison where they stay busy with church, school, community, and athletic activities.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, MARCH 18

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Isaiah 40:10-11

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. ¹¹ Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

My grandfather was a farmer who herded cattle, not sheep, which he tended with utmost care. On weekends and during the summer, my brother and I often went with him when he checked on his livestock. Twice each day, morning and evening, he rode through the pastures counting the herd to be sure none were missing. He continually monitored their health, supply of food and water, and the condition of the pastures. In the rare event a calf was orphaned, he brought the calf to the barn and provided bottle feedings—around the clock if necessary. His intimate knowledge of the herd allowed him to provide the best care for each animal.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He continually tends the sheep in His flock—that's you and me. But rather than doing a head count each morning and evening, He walks with each of us through every moment of every day (and night). He assures us that He will never leave us or forsake us. He tenderly cares for us. When we are weak, He is our strength. When we are threatened, He protects us. When we are distraught, He comforts us. If we are injured, He tends our wounds. When we are lost, He diligently seeks us and guides us, or if necessary, carries us to safety.

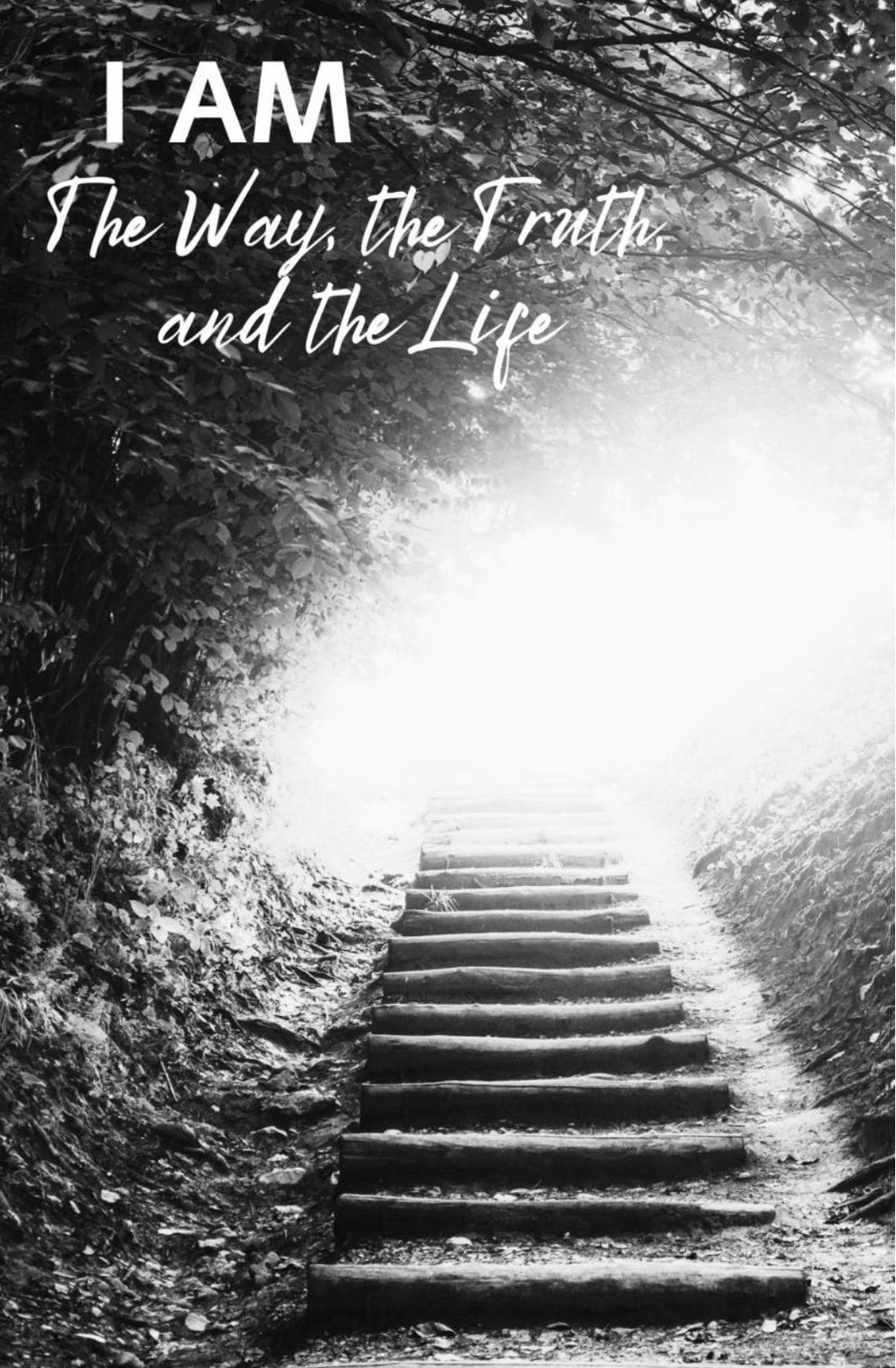
Sometimes I find myself tangled in the bushes of daily life—the demands on my time, the worries about family members, and concerns for the future. Whenever these things draw me away from Jesus, I know He will come looking for me, providing the care I need. He is my good and trustworthy Shepherd.

Roberta Watson serves as the Director of Education. She and her husband, Todd, have been members of Madison First for nine years.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The Way, the Truth,
and the Life*



SUNDAY, MARCH 19

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

During the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus is asked by Thomas, "Lord we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" The question is in response to Jesus telling His disciples that He will soon be leaving them, but they will know the way to the place where He is going. Jesus responds, "*I am* the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

More importantly to me, He is telling them all they need to know to fulfill the first thing He tells them in John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." He knew their hearts were troubled by His news. He knew the hearts of His beloved disciples were about to become increasingly more troubled as they were about to endure the arrest and crucifixion of their Lord. He knew their path would become confusing, their faith would become unsettled, and their very lives would be threatened. But He tells them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

He knows sometimes we will lose sight of our path and veer in the wrong direction. He knows our faith will be shaken and we will doubt God's promises, and He knows this world can make us feel weak and discouraged. So how can we know our way? Jesus tells us I AM the Way. How can we trust our faith? Jesus tells us I AM the Truth. How can we persevere in our life? Jesus tells us I AM the Life. Following Him and trusting Him is the Peace for our troubled hearts.

Laree Zant has lived in Madison and been a member of Madison First UMC and the Milestones Sunday School class for 21 years. She and her husband, Dan, are parents to Maclane (25) and Carolina (24).

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, MARCH 20

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

John 1:14-17

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is **THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIGHT**. There has never been anyone like Jesus. He is unique in that He is one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God. John tells us that the Word became flesh. Mosaic Law on two cold tablets of stone was replaced with grace, love, truth, and mercy. Before Jesus came, people knew that God was with them, but there was a missing piece to the relationship. When Jesus became Man, He completed the picture. He was and is a visible expression of God in human form.

We are a blessed people as we celebrate this first day of Spring. We have seen God's gift to us with the coming of Jesus. Now we don't have to be concerned with numerous rituals and legalistic rules. Instead, we can have complete assurance that we are living with the gift of grace if we only accept it. We know that Jesus was really here on Earth. He walked, ate, taught, and fished with His disciples. He showed us how to love and care for each other and taught us forgiveness (grace).

The light from Jesus exposes the darkness of sin and meanness. This is a light that will outshine the Sun. As we approach the sadness of the crucifixion and the joy of the resurrection let us all give thanks that God gave us the perfect Man as an example of how to live.

Ray Spence is married to Cindy. He is a father, grandfather, and great grandfather. He loves his family very much and also loves his two rescue dogs, Dixon and Gracie. We are a blessed people.

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, MARCH 21

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

John 8:31-32

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

We’ve all heard the phrase “the truth shall set you free”—whether in politics, academia or even humor. But when Jesus Christ coined this phrase to the Jewish religious teachers and their followers, He was giving them the key to their ultimate freedom. He confronted them with a both a challenge and a reward.

Jesus said true disciples of Christ must “*continue* in the Word.” Other translations use words like *dwell, abide, remain, and hold to*. All of these translations suggest an ongoing relationship—one that continues to grow and progress. Our challenge is to do all that we can to search, learn and live His truths—not allowing our relationship to become stagnant or task driven or influenced by things of the world.

And the reward: Our freedom is gained in the dwelling. When we find ourselves overwhelmed with schedules, budgets, illnesses, relationships, or even church politics, Jesus promises us that *if* we dwell in the TRUTH, all of our troubles will be released, set free, even eliminated. I don’t believe this means our troublesome situations will be wiped away. Instead, the magnitude of them and His walk with us through the storm, compared to an eternal life, will make us keenly aware that the troubles of this world are temporary, and nothing compares to what is to come. In my own life, I have found that when I focus my heart and mind on the ultimate Healer of all things, when I set my truths on His Word, and when I dwell on His teachings, I am truly set free from the burdens of this world.

Margaret Ligon is a lifelong member of Madison First UMC. She and her husband, Tim, have been married for 32 years and are parents to adult children—Mary Baldwin, Kitty, and Sarah Grey.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

When Jesus saw the crowds, He called His disciples and began teaching them. These verses in Matthew are known as the Sermon on the Mount. Within these passages, Jesus shares some very valuable lessons with us. Although it is short, this verse really packs a punch. Jesus tells us the gate that leads to *life* is narrow, and few will find it. Many will enter the wide and easy gate that leads to destruction, but few will find the gate that leads to eternal life.

Reading these words, along with the rest of the words in the Gospel of Matthew, gives me mixed feelings. Sometimes it is hard to remember that just because we surround ourselves with other Christians, there are many people in this world who have yet to find the One true King. It is easy to forget this and think everyone knows the wonders of God, when the reality is there are many people who do not.

I find this passage a true wake up call. We are asked to help lead others to Christ. We must remember that the gate to true eternal life with Jesus is open, and He is there waiting for us with open arms. We need to sing that from the rooftops. We need to share that message with our friends. We need to spread the Good Word and lead more people down the narrow road, because the true joy is found in Jesus!

Brighton and Jesse Patrick have lived in Madison for 11 years. Brighton works in the medical field, and Jesse works in real estate and agriculture. They love raising their three young children in this beautiful small town.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, MARCH 23

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

John 5:19-21

¹⁹ Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

In this section of John’s gospel, Jesus comes to Jerusalem for what was possibly the Feast of Tabernacles. There He encounters a lame man and asks him if he wants to be healed. When the man replies that he does want to be healed, Jesus heals him, but soon after Jewish leaders persecute Jesus for healing the man on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by saying He is only imitating His father. The way Jesus describes His intimate relationship with God further fuels the Jewish leaders desire to kill Jesus.

In verse 19 Jesus claims that He is equal to God, while still being subject to God’s will. In verse 20, Jesus reveals that God has given Him insight into everything that He is doing. In verse 21, Jesus also claims that God has given Him the power to raise the dead, or give life. This can be interpreted in different ways: as the giving of new life to believers and the resurrection of the body at Christ’s second coming.

Jesus’ response in this passage was nothing short of shocking to the leaders of His day. It is also revolutionary today. All other world religions attempt to tell their followers how to get to God. However, in the Christian faith, God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ and paid the debt that we owe. His death and resurrection fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. His atoning blood allows for the restoration of our relationship with our heavenly Father, and by accepting Him we are granted eternal life.

Kay McLeod and her husband Jeff are both retired. They have two daughters and one granddaughter.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

Romans 6:3-5

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

I was fortunate to grow up in a family where I was loved and affirmed. We lived in safe and stable communities with friends and neighbors who shared our faith and values. Death and disease rarely made an appearance in my world. I was in my twenties before my first close relative passed. If you'd asked me then if I was a Christian I would have answered, "Of course." However, I had no true appreciation of what Christ offered or my need of a Savior.

It's been said that wisdom comes with age and experience, and that has certainly been true for me. God has blessed me and, compared to many others, my life has been free from suffering. Nonetheless, I've experienced enough to realize that I have little control over my life and that, if I'm honest, I do little that isn't self motivated. The longer I've lived, the more I realize that I need Jesus. My family needs Jesus. Our world needs Jesus.

I once heard a pastor say, "Don't come to Him because you want a change in your circumstances—a better job or a better marriage. Come to Him because it's true. If it's true, then He will give you more than you can hope for or imagine.

John Miles is a husband, father and business owner. He leads the 10 Alive Sunday School class.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, MARCH 25

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

Romans 10:8-11

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

Sometimes the Bible can be very confusing and hard to understand. But to me, this passage is like a golden nugget—it puts it very simply. Here we are given the sum of what the Gospel (the Good News) is!

The word of faith is what we are preaching. It is not complicated, but very simple. When we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. When faith and confession are genuine, the heart and mouth agreeing together, then the consequences are righteousness and salvation.

The Great Commission calls us to preach the gospel to everyone and let the Holy Spirit save the ones who believe. Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and believe in Him are the children of God. Our salvation is based only on personal faith in Jesus Christ, no other conditions apply.

As the last of the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed,” but as I have heard said, some may be surprised when they get to heaven to see who is there and who is not there!

Betsy Briley is a retired pharmacist. She and her husband, Steve, have two sons. Their youngest, Tyler, is married to Katie and lives in Denver, Colorado. The oldest, Ryan, is married to Melissa and lives in Atlanta with their two grandchildren, Hayden and Maddie.

My Response and Prayer:



I AM
The True Vine

SUNDAY, MARCH 26

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:1-2

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

I would have to say that one of my favorite things about Jesus, of which there are many, is His desire to make sure we understand the importance of His "withness." On what would be the last night spent with His disciples, Jesus taught them what a right relationship with Him and His Father should look like.

He didn't use random imagery when He spoke of vines, branches, and gardens. From the beginning of creation we see the gardener, our Heavenly Father, planting, cultivating, protecting, and providing care. Abundance and fruit bearing were His clear intent in Genesis. He wants us to bear fruit.

You know the neat thing? For a branch to bear fruit, all it has to do is stay connected to its life source. That is its only job. Everything the branch needs for survival it gets from the vine. The method for increasing fruitfulness is pruning. Listen to this, pruning can also be translated as cleansing. Vineyard care often included cleaning the grapes as they were ripening, which would enable them to ripen to perfection. The vinedresser would lift a vine up off the ground, enabling it to receive more sunshine and thus provide for its healthy growth. The vine and the branch are truly cared for, provided for, and set up to flourish.

Jesus wants us to thrive and bear much fruit! He is with us and He is for us! If we stay connected to Him, even in the mystery and what can sometimes be painful, His "withness" changes everything!

Paige Knudsen is married to Dan and mom to four beautiful girls, Savannah (married to Trevor), Madison, Emily and Caroline. Her rescue golden retriever, Duke, is super special to her as well. She and Dan lead the young adults Sunday School class, The Vineyard.

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, MARCH 27

I AM THE TRUE VINE

John 15:5-8

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

As I dug into my study for this passage, I was struck by how clearly Jesus tells us that we are to be dependent upon Him. We cannot truly live a life of service to God without being attached to Him—constantly connected. How incredibly humbling!

If I am honest, it goes against my human nature. In college I was voted most likely to take control of a situation (I am sure my husband would agree with this sentiment). Our human nature has a natural inclination toward independence and self-reliance. We want to do it our way, on our terms, following our time tables—not His.

However, as Christians, our purpose in life is not about what we can do for God, but it is all about what God can do within us and then through us. Our daily connection to Christ is essential to our Christian journey. Just as a plant needs daily nourishment, we need to have a constant supply to Christ—reading God’s Word, praying, surrounding ourselves with other Christians. We should not be passive in our daily walk. We should constantly strive to be intentional in our personal lives—allowing Christ to rule over our decisions, thoughts, words, and actions. Apart from His supply, our efforts are unfruitful and leave us living a barren life! May we all daily strive to become more dependent on His nourishment and less on our own.

Talarie Hayes is a Kindergarten teacher at Morgan County Primary School. Her husband, John, works as CCO for Longview Wealth Management. They have two children, Natalie (12) and Coalson (8).

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, MARCH 28

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Even though Paul spoke directly to the Philippians in these verses, his message applies to us today and to all future generations. The good work that God began in us at the moment we believed in Jesus is grace. These good works continue throughout our lifetime and will continue until the time we meet Him face to face.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross marked the beginning of God's work for us. This work began when we first believed. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us, enabling us to become more Christlike every day. While salvation from the penalty of sin happens at the moment a person accepts Christ, the process of becoming more like Christ is exactly that: a process. God does not save anyone and then not turn them into the likeness of His Son one way or the other.

Paul is completely sure that "sanctification" will continue in the lives of all believers. God will not leave us on our own, but He has a plan to sanctify us. He will make us holy and will do in our flesh what He has done in our spirit. As we live and serve God, we receive His blessing and are kept for all eternity. He never forgets the good work that He began in our lives. God saved us by His great mercy, and because of His love for us, we are born again (1 Pet. 1:3) and made into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

As faithful Christians, we seek to grow in godliness until the day we die or Jesus returns. Just like the Philippians, we are to stand fast in unity in defending the faith. God will help us grow in grace until He has completed His work in our lives.

Don and Patty Krup live in Rutledge and have been members of Madison First UMC for four years. Patty is a retired middle school teacher and Don retired from FedEx. They both love our church family and enjoy raising and training their dogs.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

I am saved by grace; without God's grace, I am nothing. Every good thing that I can accomplish is only because God has blessed me with the talent and ability to do so. When I am looking for opportunities for growth—whether in my personal or professional life—I will grow successfully when I first seek God's guidance and ask Him to show me "...what YOU would have me do to glorify YOU."

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul states, "For we are God's masterpiece..." (Ephesians 2:10). However, when I hear the word "masterpiece," I think of the "finished product." I believe I am more of His "work in progress," and the only way I am going to grow into His masterpiece is to glorify God in everything I do. I must stay connected to Him by studying the Scriptures, praying, and networking with fellow Christians. The only way I can keep growing is by being nourished through Christ's unending love and abundant grace.

God created us in His perfect image, but we will not achieve that perfection unless we first turn to Him and accept His gift of grace.

"Holy Father, please help me remember that salvation is a gift from you, and there's nothing I could ever do to deserve it. Guide me to share Your gift with others and to look for Your masterpiece in everyone I meet."

Maria Davis is a mom to three grown children, a Gigi to three grandchildren, and an Adult Education Instructor at Athens Technical College. She has lived in Madison since December 2019, and enjoys running with her dogs, gardening, reading, and exploring history.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, MARCH 30

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Colossians 1:9-10

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

As a mom of 13- and 15-year-olds, these verses instantly resonated with me. They are so very similar to the prayers we plead as parents. We start praying for our children before they are born and continue throughout all phases and ages . . . praying for them to have spiritual wisdom and knowledge to make good choices . . . to know and draw near to God . . . to bear good fruit in their lives . . . and so much more as they mature into tweens, teens, and ultimately, adults.

Paul wanted the same growth for the Colossians and all children of God. First, he prayed for us to have a full knowledge of God's will. Like the vine that eventually bears fruit, we will gain knowledge, understanding, and Godly wisdom through steady, deliberate, day by day growth through His Word and prayer.

We may endure storms and bad weather, but if we are rooted in Him, we will continue to grow as we depend on the living water and light of Jesus. The full knowledge of God's will blooms through a personal, intimate relationship with Him. As we mature in our spiritual life and stay attached to the vine of Jesus, our connection with Him will supplement and influence our daily thoughts, attitudes, plans, desires, actions, and the resulting fruit we bear.

As we counsel our children, we may encounter situations where we have to make a choice between pleasing God and pleasing others or, even, pleasing ourselves for the moment. Let us continue to learn more about God's will and always lean on that knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to ensure we bear good fruit in the good and the challenging times.

Alicia Braswell and her husband, Kim, have a son, Cad (15), and daughter, Cate (13). They have been attending Madison First UMC for seven years.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

I AM THE TRUE VINE

1 John 4:11-16

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Morgan County High School drama students recently presented the famous Broadway musical *Les Miserables* (it was wonderful!) which is based on an historical novel by Victor Hugo, considered to be one of the greatest novels of the 19th Century. One of the most powerful lines in the play, “to love another person is to see the face of God,” aligns beautifully with our Scripture today. John writes that while “no one has ever seen God, if we love one another, God lives in us.”

There is probably no concept in the entire Bible that is more important than love. God’s love should be the foundation for everything we think, do, and speak. Is it? We don’t need to be reminded (especially right now during the season of Lent) that God loved us so much that He shared His son, Jesus, with us... Or that Jesus is love. He taught us how to love others. He modeled love. He shared love. He embodied love. He taught us to rely on the love God has for us. Love is the core of Christianity! Jesus’ love continues to branch out everywhere! I want my love for others—all others—to branch out everywhere, too! And just where is “everywhere?” I think we know.

This really should be an easy thing for us to do! “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.” This is how I want to live.

Sarah Burbach is the daughter of a United Methodist minister. She is a Sunday School teacher and President of the United Methodist Women (now known as Women of Faith). She is the Executive Director of the Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Hebrews 10:22-24

²² Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

The unknown author of Hebrews addresses a group of former members of the Jewish faith that have converted to Christianity. These Hebrew Christians may have been considering a return to Judaism because of persecution or due to a lack of understanding of Jesus' teachings. Hebrews has many references to Old Testament passages. These connect Scripture that would have been familiar to them with Jesus' life and teaching and fulfill the words of the Old Testament prophets. Though we may think we are advanced in our understanding of the Scriptures, I believe in reality we have more in common with these early Christians than we tend to recognize.

Jesus' sacrifice removed the barrier between us and God, allowing us direct access through prayer. When we are baptized in Christ, our hearts and bodies are cleansed (Eze 36:25) and we can come to Him without a guilty conscience. Without doubt or hesitation.

Jesus is the vine that provides nourishment to the branches and leaves. Real and significant growth only occurs when there is an overall healthy plant. More strong and productive leaves and branches add to the overall vigor of the plant. Much like the leaves of the vine, as a group of believers we have a responsibility remain hopeful for each other, aspiring to spur others toward love and good deeds.

Tommy Wood serves as the Director of Facilities and Missions here at Madison First UMC. He and his wife, Sharon, live in Buckhead and have two sons and three grandchildren ages one to five.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The Resurrection
and the Life*



SUNDAY, APRIL 2

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

John 11:25-27

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”

Jesus had come to the home of His beloved friends, Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus was dead and his loved ones had gathered to mourn him. As Jesus approached, Martha came out to meet Him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

If only. If only Jesus had not waited to come to them. If only Jesus had gotten there sooner. What was he thinking? Oh Martha, we get it. Don't we all feel that way when the hard things happen in our lives? When God doesn't answer our cry and our hearts are shattered with a grief that we simply cannot bear? And just like Martha, we feel this way because we put our faith in what we think God should do instead of in Who God is.

In Martha's darkest hour, Jesus didn't tell her He was going to do; He told her who He was: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Friends, even if you are tired and heavyhearted... Even if a piece of you has already died... Even when it seems that it is just too late... Jesus is calling you back to life today. There is nothing in all of creation—no death, no sorrow, no mistake—that is as defiant or as powerful as the resurrection of Jesus and the new life that He brings. Martha, standing there in His presence, knew it and confessed it. Today, we can know it too: Yes Lord, we believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world.

Ruth Bearden and her husband, Rob, have lived in Madison since 2001 and raised their four children here. Rob works in the software industry and Ruth is a would-be writer who co-leads a women's Bible Study and volunteers where she can.

My Response and Prayer:

MONDAY, APRIL 3

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Grace. We all need it. And thanks to God above, we were given grace and love in an inconceivable way.

We are constant sinners. Filled with judgment, envy, greed, comparison, gluttony and more. As humans we fail. And if you are like me, you fail daily. God knew that we would never reach eternal life if He did not intercede on our behalf. He sent the ONE true perfect human to die a sinful death for my sins, your sins, and the sins of those all around us.

How am I supposed to ever repay Him?

How can I ever live up to earning that kind of gift?

Truth be told I can't. But what I can do is live in a way that shows I believe. I honor Him. I go to Him in times of struggle and when times are good. I lead others to Him to share the story of how through Him I am saved and redeemed. My life is not mine. It is His. And I am thankful He loves me. Even when I am hard to love or don't deserve it, He loves me still and leads me to a life far better than the one here on earth.

Ginger O'Neal is a Christian, a wife, a mama, and an educator. Our family moved here eight years ago and we are active members of Madison First United Methodist Church.

My Response and Prayer:

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

Romans 6:22-23

²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Have you ever had to pick a side? Between two places for lunch, in a disagreement between friends, or even who to cheer for on your kid's little league team? (OK, that last one should be easy to pick.) It's hard, though, for us to just stay neutral.

Why do you think some Facebook posts garner SO many comments? For some, it's even harder to not let the world know which side they pick. Even in a sporting event where I have "no dog in the fight," it's hard for me *not* to pick a team or player and cheer them on in a game.

It should be that easy to pick a side in our walk through life, but it's not. Everyday God expects us to pick a side - Him or the other team. The other team being sin. The good thing about life, though, there is no referee! God doesn't care if we strike out 100 times or have to punt every possession. He only expects us to shake it off, ask for forgiveness, and make better choices the next go around even if we have to ask for His help.

A Christian is not someone who cannot sin, but we as Christians must not be servants to our sins. We must be servants of God. No one is without sin, but through Him alone, even when we pick the wrong team sometimes, He can steer us back to the winning team with grace and eternal life through Christ our Lord.

Shanna Addison and her husband, Drew, have two children, Caroline (6) and Drake (4). She serves on the Flower Share Ministry and as Vice-chair on the Madison First UMC Preschool Board of Directors.

My Response and Prayer:

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

1 Timothy 6:11-14

¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

During this Holy Week, as seekers of God and followers of Christ, we are encouraged to flee from earthly desires and exorbitant lifestyles to pursue righteousness, a strong faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

Through my many years I have learned that God knows my needs. He has blessed me and my family. We are by no means wealthy by earthly means, but our needs have always been met. We have been down and did not know how we could continue. One evening nearly fifty years ago we were traveling home late at night. Most service stations did not stay open late and many would not accept charge cards. Our empty light was glowing, the only service station open would not accept a charge card and our pockets were empty. We dug through the ashtrays as well as the glove box, then started checking under the seats and floor mats. We came up with \$2.63 for gas, and with God's blessings we made it from Fort Valley to College Park. A few years later, our daughter was born a couple of months early. Doctors did not give her a chance and refused to treat her. A nurse called a doctor at two in the morning from 20+ miles away. He stayed by her bed until time for church, and told us to pray. Today she has a family of her own.

When we pursue godliness our needs will be met; therefore, I urge everyone to seek God and to walk with Christ.

Sam Ring is a member of the Heritage Sunday School class, active in ORBEC and the Madison Masonic Lodge. He and Joanne, his wife of forty-eight years, live in Madison Lakes.

My Response and Prayer:

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

1 John 1:1-4

¹ What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

One of Jesus' most well-known statements is "I am the Resurrection and the Life." He says this to Martha, who is distraught over her brother Lazarus's death. I believe these words were spoken to comfort, but also to remind her of His power over everything (including death). Soon after speaking these words, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

When Jesus says, "I am the resurrection," He wants us to know that people who believe in Him will live, even though they die. This does not mean that He will raise us from the dead like Lazarus, but we will all experience a resurrection and eternal life with Him if we just believe.

The apostle John supports this statement in his letter written to churches where false prophets were denying Jesus as the Son of God. John explains that he and others have seen, heard, and touched Jesus who is the "word made flesh." He urges them to accept this good news and share it with others, so that all can all be brought into the family of God through the knowledge and acceptance of Jesus.

Even though this letter was written almost 2000 years ago, it still speaks to Christians today. As believers, it is our responsibility to continue to share Jesus with others. This can be done daily through words and/or actions. Unfortunately, it's hard not to get caught up in jobs, family, hobbies, and everything else. Most days, all these things seem to come before my relationship with Christ. This Lenten season, let's remember John's words and work to bring others into fellowship with Christ. In doing this, we may also "make our joy more complete."

Jennifer Braswell is a Social Science teacher at Morgan County High School. She and her husband, Ryan, have attended Madison First UMC for almost 7 years.

My Response and Prayer:

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE

1 John 5:10-12

¹⁰ The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹ And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Today Christians observe Good Friday, but as a child, discussions of that day's events frightened me. I was terrified of death, and Jesus dying on the cross made me anxious about my own death. I feared that God would send me to hell because I had not been a nice little girl. I ignored the tribulations of Christ and focused instead on eating Easter Sunday dinner with grandma and hunting colored eggs until the shells cracked and the insides turned mushy.

Time passed and through the work of the Holy Spirit and faithful pastors and Sunday School teachers, I learned about the promises of God recorded in Scripture. I realized I could never be good enough to deserve His gift of salvation, but I knew without a doubt that because I accepted Jesus as Savior, I would spend eternity with Him. Because Jesus conquered death there was no room left in my heart for fear.

Accepting the promises of Jesus prompted me to regard the events of Good Friday differently. Today I ponder and reflect upon the events of Good Friday, but I don't fear them as I did as a child.

Many people fear God and death because they think they have not been good enough to spend eternity with Him. Therefore, please share the promises of God. Emphasize to those in doubt or fear that the agony of Jesus on the cross culminated in an empty tomb and that whoever has Him has life.

Gwen Desselle and her husband Jim are retired teachers. They joined Madison First in July 2022. They are members of the Easter Sunday School class.

My Response and Prayer:

SATURDAY, APRIL 8

I AM THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE

Revelation 1:12-15

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Have you ever thought about what it was like for John, while exiled on the island of Patmos, to hear a voice speaking to him? He turns around and what does he see? He sees Jesus as he has never seen Him before. John had walked with Jesus. He knew Jesus as a friend. He had sat before the cross while Jesus was crucified. He had seen Jesus after His resurrection. He had watched Jesus ascend into heaven. John knew Jesus was the Messiah, but now during his own greatest suffering, John sees the exalted Jesus.

It is of great comfort to me to see Jesus for ALL that He is. A few months before my friend Rose died unexpectedly from Covid, we had lunch. We discussed this very passage and talked about the majesty of Jesus. Our Savior was on the throne, exalted, interceding for us. He was more than enough to help us through any troubles that came our way. Jesus is THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. It was a joyful time as we marveled at Jesus in His fullness and what He was preparing for us in heaven. I am thankful for that conversation because we had no idea what was in my friend's future. She was soon to see her Savior, in all His glory.

No matter the circumstances we face, when we catch a glimpse of Jesus in the fullness of His glory, our hope is renewed, and we can walk in the assurance that He is with us now and forevermore.

Beth Turbiville and her husband, Joe, joined Madison First UMC in 2021. They have three daughters, a son-in-law and two grandchildren who are their joy.

My Response and Prayer:

I AM

*The ALPHA and
the OMEGA*

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 9

I AM THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE

Revelation 22:12-13

¹² "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Reading Revelation oftentimes will help us center ourselves on what is reality and not merely a shadow. Jesus is coming soon. Jesus states this. How many times do we weigh the gravity of this profound statement? Are we ready? I find myself pondering His second coming more and more as the day approaches. Will He find me faithful? Will He find me doing the work He has for me to do?

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which He created in advance for us to do." Jesus rewarding us for our faithfulness and earthly work seems over the top, after all He has done for us. We work *from* salvation not *for* salvation. We are to be hearers and doers of His word. Jesus' heart was with the poor, the marginalized, the disadvantaged, and the oppressed. Our works should look like His, for we are designed to be His hands and feet to a hurting world. Be that eye that sees someone no one else sees, be the ear that listens when no one will.

He is the Beginning and the End. He is the same from First to Last. When Jesus returns He will remove all evil from this world and make all things new. His divine and eternal nature make all things possible!!

Tammy Nealy has been a member of Madison First UMC for three years. She and her husband, Barten, have lived in Madison for five years. She is a preschool teacher at Madison First UMC and loves being a part of the Prayer Team and Greeting Team on Sunday mornings.

My Response and Prayer:

ASH WEDNESDAY - February 22

*The Imposition of Ashes
in observance of the beginning of Lent*

7:11 am (Sunrise) Asbury Sanctuary

6:25 pm (Sunset) Asbury Sanctuary

PALM SUNDAY - April 2

9 am Wesley Worship Center

10 am **Procession of the Palms**

11 am Asbury Sanctuary

MAUNDY THURSDAY - April 6

*The Sacrament of Holy Communion
in remembrance of Christ's Last Supper with His disciples*

7 pm Asbury Sanctuary

GOOD FRIDAY - April 7

A Tenebrae Service

*A Traditional Service of Diminishing Light
in remembrance of the Passion of Christ*

7:30 pm Asbury Sanctuary (Sunset 7:59)

EASTER SUNDAY - April 9

7 am Sunrise Service

Pennington Lake, 1210 Maxey Lane

(Please check website in case of inclement weather)

Easter Worship Services

9 am Wesley Worship Center

11 am Asbury Sanctuary

I AM

At least seven times, John recorded Jesus boldly claiming God's sacred name as His own. In each case, Jesus revealed some aspect of how He wants to relate to us. During this Lenten season, may we come to know Jesus in all His glory as . . .

The Bread of Life
The Light of the World
The Gate for the Sheep
The Good Shepherd
The Way, the Truth, and the Life
The True Vine
The Resurrection and the Life

Madison First United Methodist Church
Rev. H. Grady Mosley, II, Senior Pastor