Something to Ponder on the Lenten Journey, A Gift of DuBois Center & Green DuBois

A Lenten Devotional written for and dedicated to DuBois Center, the camp and retreat center of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ and to introduce a new initiative Green DuBois, which celebrates, honors and shares the wonder of the biodiversity of God found in this sacred setting

Written by Donald C. Wagner
Photographs by Angela Hausmann, Marty Kemper, Scott Kuether, Jason Petry and other DuBois Center Photographers
Edited by Jill Baker
‘Never make a suggestion in a Committee meeting that you are not willing to take on and complete.’

That is the lesson I have learned here . . . and it is a lesson I have delighted in undertaking. In a small group meeting of those interested in the Green DuBois initiative several months ago, our Chairperson, Dr. Jill Baker, asked for suggestions which might assist in getting the word out about Green DuBois into the churches and the wider world. First suggestions had to do with developing a website, creating a Facebook page, having Green DuBois ambassadors reach out into the churches and communities of our Conference, contacting the Missouri Botanical Garden, the University of Illinois Extension Service and a wide variety of other Master Gardener, bird watcher and botanist groups. In each case, the desire is to promote DuBois Center as a hotbed of year-round biodiversity which, until now, has largely gone unnoticed, undiscovered and undeveloped as a sacred trust.

With the perseverance and dedication of Mr. Marty Kemper, whose research, photographs and direction have opened up the biologically diverse treasure chest of DuBois Center to the world, not only has the Green DuBois Committee and the DuBois Staff become keenly aware of the gifts around us in this place, but there is a heartfelt desire to share these wonders with the wider community. DuBois Center is a one-of-a-kind setting where ‘Church’ happens all the time and now the congregation has the potential to be expanded in a very intentional, stewardship-focused and environmentally-friendly manner. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Marty Kemper for his untiring work and kind guidance to this difficult task. We also owe a similar debt of gratitude to Dr. Jill Baker for recognizing in Marty’s work the potential which is just down the trails, across the lake, next to the cabins and near the horse barn of DuBois Center. When either of them speaks of this adventure, they smile from ear-to-ear, inviting those with whom they speak into another world of wonder. Thank you both!!

The Lenten Devotional, Something to Ponder on the Lenten Journey, A Gift of DuBois Center & Green DuBois, is the result of making a suggestion at the end of meeting and having the Chairperson simply and powerfully look at you and say, “Good idea. Will you take care of that?” How does anyone ever tell Dr. Jill Baker ‘No’? I certainly couldn’t. Neither could the photographers whose work is on showcase throughout this work.

Many, many thanks to Mr. Martin Kemper, Mr. Jason Petry and Ms. Angela Hausmann and other DuBois Center photographers for sharing their visions and understandings of DuBois Center as seen through the unblinking lens of a camera. Hundreds of photographs have been distilled to arrive at these few for this devotional – and this is just a sampling of what DuBois Center is year-round, patiently awaiting your personal visit.

So this serves, too, as your invitation to experience God, in the Presence of Jesus Christ and in the Power of the Holy Spirit as only DuBois Center and Green DuBois might offer their insights and understandings on this holy ground. Come, everyone is welcome here!

The scriptural basis for each of the daily devotionals is a verse from the Psalm of the day, as prescribed by the Revised Common Lectionary. They seemed to me a common thread, a rooting of our Christian Lenten journey in the hymnody of our Jewish sisters and brothers. I
hope you find this helpful to you, as well. All passages are from the Common English Bible translation, abbreviated CEB.

You are free to share this devotional with whomever you choose, but please remember to credit all photos as they are credited throughout, either to Angela Hausmann, Martin Kemper, Scott Kuether, Jason Petry, Don Wagner, or other photographers. I would ask that you would do the same with all of the printed materials which I have written and offer to you. They are copyrighted to ©Donald C. Wagner, 2019.

A word of thanks needs to be extended to the St. Paul United Church of Christ, Lebanon, faith family which allowed me the time and space necessary to create this piece – and to our Office Manager, Ms. Becky Harrison, who rode herd on the office visitors, edited copies and prodded me on to conclude it when time seemed limited. Thank you.

Special thanks, too, to my lovely, patient and forbearing wife, partner and helpmate, Nancy. She put up with my odd moments of inspiration, the challenges along the way and kept me focused on our mutual love for and admiration of DuBois Center. I love you.

Lastly, I need to take a moment to thank God. You have called me to a ministry I never expected, sustain me when I am weary, share the joy in my heart when your people ‘get it’ and You never let me go. The Christ of my faith is beside me always. The Spirit of my heart is in me always. All because of You. May this work and all that I am be a glory to You, now and forever. Thank You. Amen.

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ASH WEDNESDAY
The Holy Season of LENT begins

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.”
Matthew 16:24-25 CEB

I remember a time when I thought of Ash Wednesday and the Season of Lent as a lonely time, a solitary time, a time designed to encourage individual prayer, repentance and preparation for the One who comes to save. I dreaded Ash Wednesday and Lent much as a child shies away from nearing discipline: Though you know you are going to learn from the event, you aren’t anxious for the potential pain through which one must go.

Then one sunny Summer afternoon, while a part of a Work Camp at DuBois Center, a church camp of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ, our Counselor invited the members of our group to make a cross using only our fingers joined together. As we took time figuring out how to make that cross happen, our Counselor read from his ratty old Bible the Matthew 16 text and Jesus’ call to the disciples, after which he used his hands to complete the bottom of the cross.

In that moment I realized for the very first time that taking up the cross and times such as Ash Wednesday and Lent were never meant to be lonely, solitary places for individual prayer, repentance and preparation. Taking up the cross is a communal moment, one meant to remind us that we are never alone, that Jesus goes before us, with us, in us, above us and below us. As my friends and I joined fingers together, so our lives were simply, powerfully bound together in a mutual pledge of strength and support wherever this thing called ‘faith’ takes us.

Ash Wednesday and the entire Lenten journey is for the community, the community of faith desiring to grow in faith, daring to follow in the example of Jesus and humble enough to understand that there is more, much more to learn and do than any one of us can accomplish alone. Maybe that is why God sent Jesus, maybe that is why Jesus gathered 12 disciples around Him... and maybe that is why during Lent we gather still. God will never let us alone. The (finger) cross and the empty Tomb are our guarantees of this Good News in every age.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In the ashes of my perceived isolation, remind me of your Holy Community, O God, and give me the heart to walk with You, even as You walk with us all in Jesus. Amen.
DAY TWO OF LENT

“Living in the Most High’s shelter, camping in the Almighty’s shade, I say to the Lord, “You are my refuge, my stronghold! You are my God – the one I trust!””

Psalm 91:1-2 CEB

Sometimes it is the slow walk, the mindful journey, the measured steps, which bring us to the heart of who and Whose we are.

In the rush of all that is progress, artificial intelligence, information technology, virtual reality and the ever-nearing crush of the world community upon everyday existence, it is becoming increasingly important to find time to be apart with God. It is that simple – and that difficult. The Psalmist invites us to begin the journey of Lent where Creation resides, to claim the One who breathes into dust and calls forth all things, and to trust the Most High as our Refuge and Stronghold, regardless our station along the road. In establishing such a sure root each new morning, we are not held to one moment, but freed to fully celebrate the journey of Life, grounding our every moment in the Being of the One who holds us in Love and honors our steps, more than we could ever know.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In our need to be relevant in the current age, Lord, remind us of our even deeper need to be true to You and each other along the way. Grant us such a heart for a quiet walk, a simple prayer and a lifetime of pitching our tent in You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
Almost lost in the milieu of a summer’s evening near the lakes and woods of DuBois Center is the quiet flight of the Dragonfly. Flitting from one outpost to another, constantly assessing available food sources, resting on one reed before setting sail into the shadows and cool of a neighboring tree, the Dragonfly trusts life as it encounters it. Living for only an average of seven months, from larva to adult, the Dragonfly rides the currents of life’s journey as it searches for mosquitoes, mayflies, flies and small insects, while seemingly casting a knowing look at all who stand in awe of its beauty.

Believed to be a symbol of good luck and new life, the Dragonfly invites creation to slow down, rest a while, eat what you need, move when you are inspired, watch out for predators and, occasionally, bless the casual passerby with a close flight or even a landing. Though seemingly whimsical in all it does, there is purpose, even spirit, in the life of the Dragonfly as its wings slowly move in the sacred prayer of adoration before the One whose Breath gave it air currents to soar upon.

“Because you’ve made the Lord my refuge, the Most High, your place of residence . . .” The Psalmist does not call us to the life of the Dragonfly, but to the trust of the Dragonfly for the life it enjoys. The Lenten journey invites us to reconnect with Dragonfly and daily grind alike, considering where our heart finds its home and our spirit finds its purpose. By whose hand are you fed? In whose soul were you imagined? In what place or time do you find refuge?

As you consider the lilies of the field with Jesus, do not forget the example of the Dragonfly which flits among them. To such as these, to such as you, belongs the Kingdom. Trust it. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In my rushing from soccer practice, to work, to home and back to the gym, slow me down, Lord, to watch and value the life of the Dragonfly. May my trust be in you for all I am and ever will be, that I may find my rest along Your way. Amen.
DAY FOUR OF LENT

“They will carry you with their own hands so you don’t bruise your foot on a stone.”
Psalm 91:12 CEB

The thought of a horse being one of God’s messengers to help and protect you probably never crossed your mind unless, of course, you are a horse lover. If you are a horse lover, you have probably never thought of horses as anything less than a messenger of God, a divine gift from the Divine Giver to be a great protector and helper. Quite simply, there is something between a horse and its human. If you have never experienced such a feeling, arrange to take a ride on one of DuBois Center’s horses, they have a lot to teach you.

The resident hooved theologians of DuBois Center come with a wide variety of names and from a myriad of places. Some have aged out of former vocations, others just needed a new home, some have been rescued, but all of them are messengers of God in the current age speaking deep truths to those budding or skilled equestrians who would dare to listen.

There is something about a quiet walk in the woods mingled with a horsey sigh, a light neigh or a shuddering flank. Trees seem smaller, the thickets less dense, the sounds more clear. Somewhere above, a red tail hawk observes your progress, keeping a keen eye to the ground in the event your walk or trot causes its next meal to scurry into an opening.

Then your mount shakes its mane as to attract your attention and, having brought you to alert, you begin to notice the puddles over which you travel, the rocks which might have bruised your foot and the critters which scurry about from tree to tree. This world is about far more than you, yet God comes to walk with you, to carry you when necessary and to protect you before you ever knew you needed a protector.

With a swish of its tail, the diving horsefly is dispatched and the resulting breeze cools your sweat dampened skin. Sometimes not every biting enemy meets you face to face, sometimes not every humid day can be met with a fan and, sometimes, not every lesson is taught by a teacher in a classroom. Sometimes our best lessons are learned from God’s messengers who carry us, nip at us, tease us, nuzzle us and love us. Sometimes, it is our saddled weight upon their backs which make us feel the master, but it is their sure and certain strength, wisdom and faith which carries us through.

Who is it that carries you? Helps you? Protects you? They are God’s messengers among us. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Allow me the grace to recognize and thank all of Your messengers among us, O God. Amen.
On this First Sunday in Lent the Psalmist reminds us of God’s untiring willingness to save those who devote themselves to God, not because they deserve it, but precisely because God chooses to do it. God saves.

As God protects the nesting turtledove, so God encircles our lives in troubling times. As God hears the cries of the dove, so God hears those who call out to God and God answers. All our days are spent in the heart of One whose Covenant Love spans the entirety of creation history. What is a lifetime for us on earth is but a moment for the One who is Eternity, still God chooses to spend that moment fully with us that we might experience the salvation God intends for all.

We are reminded of Jesus’ first words as He comes out from the wilderness after His Baptism and temptations, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1.15 CEB)

Now is the time, indeed, to turn around and nest ourselves in God’s Goodness, come to us in Jesus of Nazareth and present powerfully in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Turn around and experience the wonders of God’s salvation, even as He walks with us towards Jerusalem. Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Grant me a heart truly and deeply devoted to You, O God, that I might walk in your way with the Christ of my faith, and in the Spirit of your Abiding Love. Amen.
DAY FIVE OF LENT

“My steps are set firmly on your paths; my feet haven’t slipped.”
Psalm 17:5 CEB

As lightly as a butterfly alights, so are to be our steps upon the face of the earth. In the course of all which is Creation itself, our steps upon the earth are measured, whether by seismograph, carbon footprint, dust displaced or in the number of them each day. Every step matters.

We cling, much as the Psalmist, to the paths of the Lord for the Lord’s protection and salvation, yet many times fail to connect the impact our steps on that path have on others, who pray just as fervently, deserve just as deeply and hope just as passionately for deliverance. If our prayers for a sure and certain hold on the path do not include advocating for others who seek such a safe path, who may not look like us, dress like us, live in the same nation, have the same advantages or even believe in the same God, have we let slip our place in the fullness of God’s family?

The cause of the just, rooted as it is to be in the paths of the Lord, must be to correct the injustices levied upon the marginalized, the forgotten, the unseen. In so living we sing a psalm of glory to God in all our days, setting our steps firmly on the Lord’s paths.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

DAY SIX OF LENT

“Manifest your faithful love in amazing ways because you are the one who saves those who take refuge in you, saving them from their attackers by your strong hand.”
Psalm 17.7 CEB

If you are a nut or berry or small insect, a ground squirrel may not be your best friend. If you are an owl or a hawk or a falcon, a ground squirrel may represent your next meal. Some refer to that phenomenon as Food Chain Economics, others call it nature yet, regardless how you name it, at one time or another, we have all sought refuge in the One with a strong hand from those who pursued us.

The inherent, often under-noticed beauty of a place like DuBois Center are the life lessons offered at every turn, along every trail, sometimes in nearly every moment. The casual observer perceives trees, lakes and campsites. The one attuned to God recognizes the amazing ways life itself is revealed, named and given new meaning and direction.

Sometimes our climb up the ladder of success becomes in itself a run up the outside of a dead tree, bringing us closer to our goal of a meal, but also making us increasingly vulnerable and visible to those who want nothing more than to consume our efforts for their own benefit. Being able to take refuge in God, wherever we are on the journey, is a gift of God’s covenantal grace. Extending that refuge to those who still cry out for asylum, safety, opportunity, even a home, is our calling in thanksgiving to God for all we have received along the way.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us refuge in You, for hearing our cries, for delivering us from those who would consume us. Use us, Lord, to extend such Good News of salvation to others. Amen.
DAY SEVEN OF LENT

“But me? I will see your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be filled full by seeing your image.”
Psalm 17.15 CEB

“Quiet. There is a stranger in our home. Stand very still and wait for it to move away - or run if you must.”

You can almost hear the mother’s voice running through the mind of this fawn in the woods of DuBois Center. “Steady, steady. Don’t flick an ear, don’t blink your eyes. If you cannot smell them in the wind, wait to see them clearly or, if you are scared, just run back to me.”

The image of God peers at us unexpectedly, holding our attention, causing us to smile in joy and be filled with expectation. Just when we think we have it figured out how God looks, a fawn meets us on the path and invites us to consider other possibilities. God has a delightful sense of imagination in Creation and both doe, unseen, and fawn before us give reason for Psalmist and camper alike to rejoice.

Keep your eyes open on the Lenten journey and try not to move too fast down the paths, God is waiting to meet you and God’s image may surprise you.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Thank You for meeting me in the morning, where I am, and in ways which allow my soul to smile with joy. Thank you, O God, for the fawn’s message in this Lenten season. Amen.
DAY EIGHT OF LENT

“The Lord is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The Lord is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be frightened of anything?” 
Psalm 27.1 CEB

The night sky has captured the imagination and attention of humanity from the very beginning. The shepherds were surprised by what the night sky revealed to them in hosts of angels. Magi, watching the night sky, were drawn to what a singular star could tell them. In the dark of night, within a garden praying, Jesus looked up into the sky and prayed fervently for God’s sake – and ours.

In a world filled with dusk-to-dawn lamps which drive the dark away, in a nation full of cities so gleaming that astronauts in a space station thousands of miles away mark their passage by the illumination the city lights cast upward, in neighborhoods where porch lamps have given way to motion detectors and artificial light makes blind our capacity to see the galaxies, DuBois Center humbly savors the night sky and invites those who are present to join wise people from every generation in looking up to see what next God will reveal in God’s ongoing Creation.

“The Lord is my light and salvation” is a statement of faith in a world so darkened by fear that we would rather trade the dark for electronic illumination than take the risk of standing in the dark and waiting for God’s Word to be revealed. “Should I be frightened of anything?” the Psalmist asks. ‘No!’ answers the One whose servants are the stars, planets and moons themselves. ‘Be bold to protect the places you can see Me and discern my next Wonder.’

On this Lenten journey look up! Look up in the day as much as in the night, then listen. Who knows what angel songs you may hear? Who knows what salvation will be revealed to you? Who knows when Gethsemane prayers will be answered in empty tomb Wonder? Then strive to protect the places, like DuBois Center, where such holy visages may next be announced.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Open my eyes, Lord, to see the Light beyond the darkness of my fear. Amen.
DAY NINE OF LENT

“Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling during troubling times; He will hide me in a secret place in his own tent; he will set me up high, safe on a rock.”

Psalm 27.5 CEB

Not every secret place is hidden, not every high place is upon a mountain and not every rock is made of stone, this is God’s wisdom revealed in the lowly spider.

Growing up on a farm and having spent lots of time in hay sheds, barns, equipment sheds and around a fair amount of lumber, steel and spare parts which are stacked and stored for long periods of time, spiders – and spider webs – became a part of my daily journey from early on. You never knew where you would encounter the next one, whether in the garden, along the grape arbor, in the outhouse, in the milk house, or up in the loft where the straw was stacked, but know this: There is always another spider and its’ web just around the corner. So, be watching. There is nothing quite like walking in regular stride and face-planting into the unexpected web streaming over the sidewalk or reaching over a bale and feeling the thick silk of a spiders home upon your hand or reaching into a parts bin for a cultivator shovel and having that sudden realization of finding unexpected company. Always look before moving.

God’s spiders are an important part of creation, managing the insect population, binding disparate places into a home and creating greeting card worthy pieces of art, complete with morning dew catching dawning sun rays ever so lightly. God shelters the spider and provides for its safety and home even as God watches over you. We are lifted up, held close, provided for with sustenance and set up high on a rock. Though the spider’s rock may look thin, it is as solid as a shield and God’s purpose will be done through God’s humble arachnid.

How is God at work sheltering you? Giving you purpose? Placing you where you need to be that you may flourish?

As with the spider, so may it be with us all – and when our web is torn, there is time and place to rebuild, begin again, exercising our gifts as each has ability. Of such is resurrection.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, teach me not to dismiss that the one who seems different. Help me to learn of You from them and, therein, find my own life given new meaning. Amen.
DAY TEN OF LENT

“But I have sure faith that I will experience the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living!”
Psalm 27:13 CEB

Yes, this is horse manure, otherwise called horse buns, horse pucks, horse chips, horse hooey, horse apples, meadow muffins or road apples. To the casual observer, horse manure along a road, in a pasture or spread over some trail where riders like to go, may be just droppings, the end result of a mammal’s meal or something which awaits a fork or shovel to move it away so as not to end up with it on your shoes. But, for the ones who pause and look down for more than just a second or two before giving it a quick flip of the toe to scatter it in the weeds, there is an emerging microcosm of life to behold.

Not unlike Lazarus, what once was considered dead and full of unwanted smell finds new life in the Wisdom of God. Burgeoning with whatever it was the host ate along the way, the seeds within are fed by the heat and moisture surrounding them and new plantings, new life emerges with the meadow muffin offering both fertilizer for growth and an environment which nurtures. Who knows what Good News might emerge from what others thought was dead and sealed away in a tomb?

How many times have others thought you did not have anything worth offering on the way? How many times have you been told that the idea or dream you have was just a road apple away from useless? How many times have you thought to yourself that you were at the end of your trail, the off-dumping point of repeated attempts to be relevant which found no more traction than the horse chip you saw along the way?

Look again.

Some say, ‘When life hands you lemons, make lemonade’. Maybe this lowest of equine manure awakens us to another lesson in God’s Kingdom, ‘When others deem you a road apple, grow a tree and feed others who come after you.’ There is more to horse manure than hooey and there is more to your life than what did not come out the way you or others thought it should.
Clearly, God thinks so, otherwise why empty the tomb of death and announce New Life?

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, remind me not to quickly kick aside or step over that which seems to be just a nuisance. As I pray You see more in me than I see in myself, open my eyes to see as Your New Life in all things. Amen.
Today is a good day to sing your song of praise, from whatever limb upon which you are perched, with whatever voice you have been given.

Sing! Do not hide yourself in the shower or close yourself away in modesty, sing of God’s Presence in your life. Sing of troubles still working themselves out in God’s understanding. Sing of unexpected joys experienced throughout this last week. Sing of the color you are, the places life has taken you, the others you have met along the way, the choices which have worked out, the pains you have endured, the worries which still trouble you and the laughter you see in this moment.

Sing! Sing of sunshine through the day and starlight through the night. Sing of enemies who pursue you and the Lord who protects you. Sing of rough branches on which you land and smooth places which give you peace. Sing of many colored leaves around you and for trees which hold you. Sing with happiness in the morning dawning, letting your voice inspire others through evening’s gathering. Sing with brown tufted marveling about mercy received which you did not deserve, of blue winged majesty which opened the world to your heart and of mottled perceptions which keep you hidden from the predators circling around.

Sing! For the Lord has given you a song unlike no other, whose variant tune can only find voice in your willingness to declare God’s sovereignty. Your nearest audience is God’s own ears and your farthest reach is God’s own Creation. Sing, for your Hope is in the Lord! Sing, for you are strong in the Lord! Sing, for your heart takes courage in God’s song in you! Sing, for you are God’s own!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: God of every creature’s song, hear our songs of praise to glorify your Holy Name on this Sabbath Day! For we strive to sing, Lord, on earth as it is in Heaven. Amen.
DAY ELEVEN OF LENT

“Give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make his deeds known to all people!”
Psalm 105.1 CEB

There is a place in Southern Illinois where the Holy Spirit of God dances. The music to which She moves is in the songs of saints whose lives have faithfully stewarded Creation’s Holy Habitation there. These generations of servants have invested sweat equity in sacred trails, opening them to others who would follow in their footsteps in search for, and in service of, God. Their witness was not in powerful homilies or lectionary-based liturgies, rather they announced Authority and Grace in the buildings and cabins they built for fellow pilgrims on their way Home. They made their good witness in the docks and swimming shores they established that would later serve thousands of God’s children throughout the summertime of their youth.

They knelt down in the fashion of Wise Men before their Savior as they split timbers for fences, cleared trees for pastures and sowed acreage for hay. They rested on the hillside listening to Jesus, even being filled to overflowing with loaves and fishes, as He guided their quest in faith and measured their steps in justice. They stand in the crowds which welcome Him as carloads of eager campers make their way to Registration and Check-In, patiently checking every name, every form and every parent’s worries at the door. They stay as those alongside Jesus in Golgotha, long after the dust has settled and others have gone home, still providing assurance and care to the members of His Body whose initial eagerness to be in camp has been quelled by the quiet and apartness of this place. They celebrate the surprise of Life when those who thought they had been sent to the end of the world suddenly realize they are in the middle of it – and are becoming a part of the Spirit’s delightful dance.

There is a place in Southern Illinois where the Holy Spirit of God dances – and Her dance is upon the floor of faith spread out for her upon the nooks and crannies, the ponds and lakes, the woods and plains of DuBois Center by those who love Her most deeply. This Lenten journey, take time to dance with the Spirit, to listen to Her music, to see where She sets her feet in Holy Joy. Come to DuBois Center and, there, see the face of God and give thanks.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, let me join in the Spirit’s dance as I make my witness for You each day. Amen.
DAY TWELVE OF LENT

“Remember the wondrous works he has done, all his marvelous works, and the justice he declared . . .”
Psalm 105.5 CEB

There is nothing quite like the smell of newly fallen rain or the sight of the sun shining through after the storm or the awe in blooms, once closed before the wind, now reopening in praise of God’s marvelous works.

In such things I am reminded that God does not depend on my sense of justice to determine God’s sense of being Just. It rains on the just and unjust alike (Matthew 5:45), the sun shines on the just and unjust alike and God’s blooms send forth their beauty for both the just and unjust alike. In practicing God’s justice in our living we are not qualifying for special treatment along the way. We are, in some small manner, attempting to live the faith as Christ teaches because that is Whose we are in Baptism, not because of what we want to achieve over others.

God is God, always. When we cry out for justice and mercy, God hears and responds. Sometimes, though, I have to confess that God’s justice and what I was asking for are not always the same. I am me-centered, God is God-centered – and God loves all of creation and is a God of multiple chances for all God’s children. So, if I want rain for our farm, the rain for which I pray is for everyone, not just me.

As it is with rain, so it is with God’s salvation. It is for the just and unjust alike. That is God for you. Thanks be to God!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Let your Justice be declared in my life, my heart, my soul and my living, O God, that your Name be forever glorified. Amen.
DAY THIRTEEN OF LENT

“The Lord – he is our God. His justice is everywhere throughout the whole world.”
Psalm 105.7 CEB

It is a standoff at the OK Corral. Upon a blossom of God’s goodness rests the butterfly seeking sustenance, when suddenly there appears a wasp in search of dinner. One eyes the other, each considers the other, while the blossom serves as an impromptu stage for what may come next. Yet, what comes next we will never know, for this is a picture of a moment in time as Nature behaves as only Nature might and we are afforded a glimpse, a peak of what goes on twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year at DuBois Center.

‘Green DuBois’ is a new initiative celebrating the unique biodiversity of this wonderful sanctuary in God’s world which is DuBois Center. Master Gardeners, Botanists, Astronomers, Ornithologists, Entomologists, Herpetologists, Malacologists, Mammalogists, Ichthyologists and scores of other scientists, not to mention the average person in the pew who simply loves to observe God’s Creation at work, are all invited to come to DuBois Center and enter into the labors of identifying the species of plants, insects, animals, fish, snails, clams, reptiles and amphibians which call DuBois Center ‘home’. Additionally, migratory patterns through and over the grounds and lakes of DuBois Center, along with the heavens themselves, call out for our attention, our observant heart and our patient willingness to be sentinels in the current age inviting others to bear witness with us that God is Just and God is at work in Creation, all the time.

Our Lenten journey is, perhaps, the very best time to open up ourselves to God’s ongoing work of Creation, for sometimes in life we are the blossom, sometimes we are the butterfly and sometimes we are the wasp, yet always we are God’s – and always God’s justice prevails. The integrity of the environment depends upon it as none other, so do we – and now is the time to become a part of that understanding through Green DuBois.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: God, we may study, and sometimes we are studied, but forever remind us we are yours. Amen.
DAY FOURTEEN OF LENT

“God! My God! It’s you –
I search for you! My whole being thirsts for you!
My body desires you in a dry and tired land, no water anywhere.”
Psalm 63.1

There are just some days when the love of God, the quenching Baptismal waters of the Spirit and the salvation of Jesus all seem so very far away.

Our journey becomes dry, the daily grind feels harsh, no one has ears to listen to our complaints, the eyes of others avert from us as we pass, the water fountain at work quits functioning, our partner is self-absorbed in projects currently deemed as more important, prayers seem unanswered, angels songs seem far away, no star of Bethlehem offers to light the path and religious leaders seem not to care. Ministry is for the minister, religion is for the religious, faith is for the faithful and understanding is for the understood yet, for me this day, for you this day . . . there are just some days when the love of God, the quenching Baptismal waters of the Spirit and the salvation of Jesus all seem so very far away.

The Psalmist captures our cries, our anguish, our dismay and even our disbelief, “God! My God! It’s you – I search for you! My whole being thirsts for you!”

The songs of the Israelites in Egypt, the Chosen in exile, the marginalized in every age, the invisible and forgotten in all the lands become a part of our own moaning, our own singing, our own lamentations.

As though God could ever forget or forgo the beauty God places in life itself, in your life, in my life, our voices rise from the dust and ashes of our own sinfulness and self-centered ways seeking deliverance. Still, God loves. Still, God comes to save. Still, God forgives. Still, God . . . and we are heard, lifted up and given New Life.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Ever-Present God, forgive our uncertainty to trust you along the way. Still, give us a song to sing when all we have are tears and dust, that the world would see You. Amen.
DAY FIFTEEN OF LENT

“Yes, I’ve seen you in the sanctuary;
I’ve seen your power and glory.”
Psalm 63.2 CEB

When I was young ‘church’ was the place our family attended when gathering in worship. As the years passed I began to understand ‘church’ as the body of Christ’s people gathered in worship and the place where we gathered was our sanctuary, our place of safety, in the midst of the world.

Today my faith continues to form and be shaped by God’s gentle nudging and revealing along the way. God’s Sanctuary will not be limited to boards, blocks, bricks or buildings. God’s Sanctuary, where God makes all things known, is the fullness of creation itself, tended to by the heavens, warmed by the sun, cooled by the breezes, crafted in wonder and beauty by the plants and animals along the paths and streams, stewarded by the nations and peoples and set for worship by the Spirit. The Authority and Grace of Jesus announces the liturgy, evokes the response and articulates the Missio Dei, the Mission of God, to be lived along life’s shores and pathways.

DuBois Center is one setting of God’s Sanctuary among us, one expression of God’s design and imagination, one gathering place of God’s people to rejoice, pray, lament, hope, sing, pour out, take in and find a place of quiet before the One who is Lord of all. With the Psalmist this day, we say of DuBois Center and all such places throughout God’s cosmos, “Yes, I’ve seen you in the sanctuary; I’ve seen your power and glory.” Thanks be to God!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: God of unexpected Sanctuary spaces, open our eyes to see You where You are. Evoke in us a sense of worship, a devotion to the sacred and a heart for service in the Home of Your Being. Amen.
DAY SIXTEEN OF LENT

“... whenever I ponder you on my bed, whenever I meditate on you in the middle of the night—”
Psalm 63.6 CEB

Restless and sleepless nights are often the result of worried living. New expectations have been placed upon you at work, the kids have a lot of activities which require your presence, your spouse has announced a change in vocational direction, the congregation has need of more volunteers and the pastor looked directly at you when announcing it, money has gotten tight, the economy is not managing well with the challenges in Congress, your parents require more of your time and energy, the diagnosis from the doctor troubles you, the cars need repairs, and the list goes on and on. Every little thing sneaks into your thoughts as you lie down and every endless details preys upon your attentions as you try to close your eyes. The proverbial molehill quickly becomes the mountain before you, denying any peace until; finally, you stop, slow your breathing and, in absolute submission, give it over to God.

Odd, how frequently, even when finding quiet in the most out of the way, rough places, rest becomes your companion, rather than your goal, when you ponder God more than the troubles which claim your attention. Why does it take us reaching the deepest depths of despair before we are willing to admit that there is nothing going on in our life which is outside of the love of God? Why do we cling so tightly to the illusion of control that the mere thought of losing control causes our fists to clench and our muscles to ache? Why do we stress our hearts with worry over that which cannot add a moment of life to our living?

Today the Psalmist invites us to ponder God, when we lie down and in the middle of the night, remembering with joy that, in Christ, we are never alone . . . and that is just enough.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Center my thoughts in You, Lord God, in my lying down and in my rising up, in my going out and my coming in, in my breathing in and exhaling out. Be my Peace along the way with Jesus. Amen.
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

“My whole being clings to you; your strong hand upholds me.”

Psalm 63.8 CEB

Sabbath Peace be with you.

In the midst of the forty day Lenten journey are the Sundays of continuing Easter celebration. Sabbath is God’s respite at the door of the empty tomb, reminding us that our homage paid to poor choices and other cultural idiosyncrasies is to be abandoned for the Joy waiting in the Risen Christ.

God has got this. Do not despair. “Woman, why are you crying?” asks Jesus of Mary. The strong hand of Christ lifts her, and all of us, up from our ashes and sackcloth. “Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” And she left and went to the disciples and said, “I’ve seen the Lord.” (John 20.15-18 paraphrased)

In the truest sense of the word, Mary is the first Apostle for she is the first one sent, the first one to go, the first one to declare the Good News. She is the first one lifted up, the first one holding on and the first one to let go that she might go out and tell others. She is Sabbath reimagined.

Have you ever wondered when a young salamander first discovered it could walk on the sides of a building or up the bark on the trunk of a tree? Could it be that such a discovery was never really necessary because the inherent genetics of a salamander instinctively causes such behavior?

So it could be for you and me – and for the entirety of the Christian community: When the ingrained behavior of the faith community is such that we hold on to Risen Jesus from little on up, and practice that each Sabbath, then go out and tell others Who we have seen and heard and why it excites us, could it be that our children and their children after them for generations to come will all grow up ready to do the same? Or are we so busy rationalizing that we have lost the instinctual gift of a faith which will carry us on every surface we dare to try?

It is something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Holy God, Parent of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, all praise be unto You! Thank You for giving us Joy which lifts us up, a Hand to steady us, and a Heart to go out and tell others. Amen.
DAY SEVENTEEN
OF LENT

“I promised I would watch my steps so as not to sin with my tongue; promised to keep my mouth shut as long as the wicked were in my presence.”

Psalm 39:1 CEB

There is an old tongue-in-cheek prayer out there that goes as follows:

“Dear God, So far today, I’ve done alright. I haven’t gossiped. I haven’t lost my temper. I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I am thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I’m gonna get out of bed: And from then on, I’m probably going to need help. Amen.”

Though I am not certain of the source, the sentiment certainly resonates with my life and, as we find out later in the Psalm, with that of the Psalmist. Keeping our mouths shut is hard work, especially when those who are clearly idiots (not like us at all) just keep getting everyone riled up over useless stuff. Then, no more than we have spoken our piece, this little internal mirror pops up and we see ourselves as we remember our, now, broken promise . . . and there builds a brooding fear of a vulture circling for our soul.

How many promises have we made to God in the early morning hours of a day, certain we can keep them all? How many promises have we made to God in the late hours of the evening, hoping God did not clearly hear each word, yet feeling better we at least made an attempt? How many promises have we made to God, vainly negotiating an outcome which was never ours to claim?

In the gift of the Christ Child, God keeps the only Covenant which matters: You are my people and I will be your God. God is not out to destroy us, nor to feed off of our soiled and broken promises. God comes to save, to walk us along the way, to inspire the faith in us, to call out of our souls the service which announces the nearing Kingdom and to forgive when most our promises remain unfulfilled.

Do not promise to do something you cannot do. Better yet, just keep your mouth shut and live the faith to the best of your ability. It will take you off the hook for having to look up for vultures and it allows God to be God, no matter what.

Something to ponder along the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep my mouth shut and stop judging others. Simply guide me in accepting Your Love in Christ and follow in His way. Amen.
DAY EIGHTEEN OF LENT

“You’ve made my days so short; my lifetime is like nothing in your eyes. Yes, a human life is nothing but a puff of air! Selah”
Psalm 39.5 CEB

Selah

Seventy-one times the word appears in the Psalms, three times in Habakkuk. Though there appears to be no one agreed upon meaning of this word, general consensus holds that when Selah appears in the text, the singing congregation is to ‘Pause in the music and quietly think on what has been spoken’. An instrumental solo may or may not occur during this time.

Selah

The gate along the path, barring entry into the pasture, may either be viewed as an obstruction to the direction a person is going or a beautiful way for morning dew to be displayed by the Hand of God. Either way, pause on the journey and quietly think on what it is you are seeing. Perhaps you will even be blessed by the song of a solitary meadowlark as you pause, adding to the moment.

Selah

The grass in the pasture can either be viewed as a potential meal for a horse, a place for a wonderful morning walk in the emerging sunshine or a good place to get your pants wet from the morning dew you have already noticed from its sentinel presence on the gate. Either way, pause on the journey and quietly think on what it is you are seeing. Do you hear the distant train whistle as you stand there taking in that which is before you? It is a lonesome iron opera being sung just for you in this moment.

Selah

The Psalmist reminds us that our days are short, our lifetimes as nothing in God’s eyes, a puff of air in the majesty of the cosmos at the very best. Still, you are here, in this moment, in this place, before God, in the Presence of Jesus and tended to by the Spirit. You might either dismiss the thought regarding brevity of life and simply move on with life or you might ponder what life is to be lived and savored in faithfulness to God, regardless the length of our days.

Selah

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the meaning of Selah in this song of life, that I might ponder more deeply the life of song I have been given. Amen.
DAY NINETEEN OF LENT

“I’m just a foreigner – an immigrant staying with you, just like all my ancestors were.”

Psalm 39.12 CEB

Our lives are more like that of the Purple Daisy than that of the sun which shines upon it. In our season we sprout up and, depending on the harshness or friendliness of the environment, grow towards the heavens above. Then, when the time is right and our energies are set, we send forth our blooms which reflect our genetics, abilities and gifts. The sun above us makes our blooms sparkle. The Son above us makes our lives shine.

Yet, as the Psalmist wisely observes, we are just foreigners, immigrants staying with God, like all those who went before us. We are here for a season, then gone. We bloom for a bit, then our luster leaves and our lives refocus on preparing the way for the next generation of foreigners. The sun, it shines in the Way of God all our days, as it has before and will continue long after.

Hear our prayers, O Lord! Listen closely to our cries for help! Please don’t ignore our tears. It is humbling, indeed, to observe the Purple Daisy and savor its color, journey and presence along the path. It is even more humbling to know that we are more like the Daisy than the sun which shines upon it. Too often, we are caught behaving as if we were the sun, moon and stars themselves, Then, in a moment of stifling reality, our color fades, our petals drop off and all that is left is the pod of what once was our existence.

Hear our prayers, O Lord! Hear our prayers and guide us in your way, all our days, whatever they may be. Allow the light of your Son to shine in us always, from beginning to Beginning.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, though I be a foreigner, allow me always to be at home in You. Bless my days, whatever they may be, with sunshine, growth and beauty. Amen.
DAY TWENTY OF LENT

“The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy!”
Psalm 32.1 CEB

The Fall of the year at DuBois Center is arguably one of the prettiest, most colorful seasons to be there. In the very best of years, it is as if God simply tips over several million gallons of God’s most favorite colors and allows them to just drip over creation. It is aspersion, renewal of Baptism, with the broadest of boughs and the longest of brushes over the entirety of God’s congregation on earth. It is forgiveness melting away what is past and new life shining through. It is God.

Whether on the dock or on the dam, near the barn or in front of the boatshed, walking in Rustic or riding along the lakeside, in this display of creative imagination God invites you and me to happiness, to giddiness, even to Joy, for what once was now is changed. What once held our hearts has given way to the compassion of the soul and what once promised only shade from the heat of the sun now delights in, both stunning and stirring our feet to dance.

Migrating ducks and geese overhead serve as sirens announcing the change still to come, yet for this day we rest for a moment from our work and take in the splendor before us, giving thanks to God whose works truly make us happy.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: In the midst of our Lenten busyness, Lord, cause us to pause and take in that which is your gift of forgiveness, grace and mercy along the way, giving thanks that in You our truest colors shine for all to see. In Jesus’ name. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-ONE OF LENT

“So I admitted my sin to you; I didn’t conceal my guilt. “I’ll confess my sins to the Lord,” is what I said. Then you removed the guilt of my sin.” Selah
Psalm 32.5 CEB

My parents always told me that if I did something wrong I should admit it right away. Not telling the truth or not admitting to having done something wrong would have more grave implications as to the outcome than would simply saying what had happened. Admission of sin didn’t free you from consequence, but admission of sin changed the nature of the consequence. This was a basic tenet of truth in our family which I tested time and time again as I grew up on our family farm – and it was a lesson I had to learn over and over again until, finally, I came to understand there are some essential truths which will never change.

The same is true for God. God’s love is steadfast and God’s capacity to forgive is eternal. When it comes to having done something wrong, having hurt someone’s feelings or, worse yet, hurt someone, none of us likes to stick out in the crowd. “Blend in”, they told us as we prepared to go to Europe. “Try not to look like an American tourist”, “Don’t wear shirts/blouses that have bright colors or with big logos on them”. Yet, when we own up to what we have done, said or thought, it is as though we are the lone flower sticking up above the rest of the plant, we are the American tourist in a sea of erstwhile residents. Either we will put our lives at risk for having stood out or we will be the first flower to be blown over in the storm to come. Blend in, don’t own up, just keep your trap shut and everything will go away.

Yet, when we admit our sins to God it isn’t as though we are sticking out. When we don’t try to conceal our guilt, when we confess our ways, God removes the guilt, precisely because God is God – and God’s love is steadfast and God’s capacity to forgive is eternal. The consequence of truth is Life. The consequence of silence or lies is silence or lies before God, which is its own pain.

God’s love is steadfast, so is God’s forgiveness. Trust it on the journey. The consequences are amazing.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: God, help me to own up to my mistakes, to name my sins and to trust Your forgiveness always. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-TWO OF LENT

“You are my secret hideout! You protect me from trouble.
You surround me with songs of rescue!” Selah
Psalm 32.7 CEB

Of all the exciting possibilities the Green DuBois initiative offers, perhaps one of the most compelling is the opportunity for folk from all walks of life to experience God’s own Sanctuary in this little piece of heaven so many know as DuBois Center.

Tucked away in South Central Illinois, somewhere in the midst of corn fields, pastures, verdant alfalfa, rolling hills and timber lots, DuBois Center is, indeed, a “... secret hideout ...” for the weary and wandering pilgrim on the journey. Years of faith-filled and sometimes back-breaking volunteer labors, combined with the loving, caring stewardship of full and part-time Staff on site, have made this setting a renewal and retreat center like no other. Home to a wide variety of plant species, animal and insect families, abundant trails, beautiful lakes and a continual and heartfelt welcome, DuBois Center quietly imbues God’s ongoing history with the richness of peace, joy, hope and love which can be experienced in meandering walks, sharing the paths with deer, discovering the hiding places of rabbits and quail, delighting in the surprise appearance of Buffalo Clover, and simply ‘being’ in the midst of a stunning biodiversity unlike any other to be found in the region.

The Lenten journey is already over half completed, the days and nights might sometimes be long, pondering on the gift of Jesus’ Presence and Love among us looms large and Jerusalem seems not so far away. Still, there is a place of safety, there is One who sings songs of rescue, there is a Spirit of refreshment and courage to be embraced, and all are to be found in the land between the roads, away from the busyness, in the heart of Love. Still, along the journey, God summons you to ponder your place in faith at DuBois Center. You are welcome here.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: When the days seem long and the nights even longer, when peace seems elusive and quiet a foreigner in the land, summon me, O Lord, into You, wherever I go. You are my secret hideout. Amen.
FOURTH SUNDAY
OF LENT

“You who are righteous,
rejoice in the Lord
and be glad!
All you whose hearts are
right, sing out in joy!”
Psalm 32.11 CEB

Its scientific name is Schizachyrium Scoparium, but you would be more likely to know it as Little Bluestem. Ranging from 1.5 to 2 feet tall, Little Bluestem is native to prairies, fields, clearings, hills, limestone glades and roadsides, from Northern Quebec to Florida, primarily in Mid to Eastern North America. Interestingly, the website of the Missouri Botanical Garden lists the flower of Little Bluestem as, “Insignificant”, yet there it is in full array, an image captured by Martin Kemper on the grounds of DuBois Center. Beautiful in stunning delicacy, persistent in reaching out to the sun, faithful in adding to the splendor of God’s creation, this Little Bluestem knows nothing of what botanists may think of its bloom. The Little Bluestem only knows it has a bloom to share and a life cycle to complete in the time it is here on earth.

So it is with you and me. Strip away the scientific names by which we are known, disregard the height and weight charts, ignore what others may think of your gifts, and bloom anyway. Allow God’s imagination in you to shine in stunning array, be persistent in reaching out to the Son, be faithful in allowing your life to reflect God’s Life – and discover the cycle of life which is yours to complete on the way.

After all, once upon a time someone also asked, “What good can come from Nazareth?” ‘Insignificant as it is’ was the implied. Then remember what good came from there.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: God, grant me the Sabbath Peace and Strength to be who you created me to be. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-THREE OF LENT

“Fools say in their hearts, There’s no God. They are corrupt and do horrible deeds; not one of them does anything good.”

Psalm 53.1 CEB

You know them, maybe you have only met them and maybe you are one of them, but there are people on the road to Jerusalem who, for lack of a better description, ‘know everything worth knowing’. The world is no mystery to them: politics is based only on money, government is a conspiracy, the global community is a sham, diseases and plagues are inevitable and God, if there is a God, cares little about what anyone is going through. Humanity is just a mass of carbon, water and dark desires, with little redeemable qualities and is more to be endured than enjoyed.

These are the same people who, on a walk through DuBois Center hosted by Green DuBois, would see the Coral-root Orchid and say, ‘Pffft! It is only nature’, dismissing both the beauty of the Orchid and the myriad of other plant and microorganism species which have found their root and home on the side and in the shade of the Oak which protects them. They are the fully-sighted, yet nearly blind, the fully-hearing, but never listening, the fully-sensate, yet rarely feeling of God’s people among us.

Let it not be so with you.

Rather than take umbrage with the fool, seek out the Wisdom of quiet appreciation to be found in the unhurried walk to Jerusalem. Allow the Spirit of God to open your eyes to visions of multiple layers of community, in the woods as in the city. Invite the Spirit of God to unplug your ears that you might hear the songs and purpose of migrating geese, in the skies and along the roads. Pray for the Spirit to cause your senses to tingle with understanding in the sight of Coral-root Orchid, while not turning away from the child playing in the war-torn lands of the Middle East.

Anyone can be a fool. The wise among us seek the way of Christ.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord God, Holy God, forgive my moments of disbelief and open me to new treasures of Faith each day. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-FOUR OF LENT

“God looks down from heaven on humans to see if anyone is wise, to see if anyone seeks God.”

Psalm 53.2
CEB

Sunrise is the moment we are reminded God is With Us, Immanuel. God is not a sneaky God, glimpsing around the corners of buildings, hiding in the shadows, running from tree-to-tree. God is the Bold, Pungent, Piercing, All-Encompassing, Filling-Every-Crevasse, In-Your-Face, From Sunrise to Sunset to Sunrise, again, kind of God. God searches out our searching, ponders in our pondering, waits for our waiting, listens to our listening, and is aware of our awareness. God’s breath is our breathing, God’s beating heart is the rhythm of our living, God’s prayers are for our prayers, God’s hope in our hope, God’s joy in our joy, God’s love builds our love. God never stops seeking our eagerness to move forward with God in faith.

The Psalmist envisions a God who can only ‘look down’ from the Heavens. Jesus introduces us to the God who is With Us, Immanuel, leading us on the pilgrimage of the wise, the journey of those who seek God. At sunrise God takes us by the hand and, with wind-sweeping movement, stirs the leaves to dance and shutter, the streams of sunlight to glisten and the song of the meadowlark to carry across the hills. At sunrise God rebirths us in the opera of woodland creatures and the sky ballet of hawks and eagles. At sunrise God opens us to the skitter of chipmunks and ground squirrels who hearken our attention to the changing of seasons and remind us that, in one manner or another, we are all to be busy living into the Name by which we are called.

Sunrise is the moment we are reminded God is With Us, Immanuel.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Yes, Lord, I am eager for Easter to be found in this very sunrise, but the way is long and the days, my days on this earth, are numbered. Make me wise in this sunrise to walk with You always. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-FIVE OF LENT

“Let Israel’s salvation come out of Zion!
When God changes his people’s circumstances for the better, Jacob will rejoice;
Israel will celebrate!”

Psalm 53.6 CEB

I don’t remember us ever feeding the hummingbirds when I was growing up on the farm. Yes, there were always hummingbirds around: they were around the flowers Mom grew, they were in the garden Mom and Dad had, they were even found in the clover fields and pastures where I walked to bring the cows in for milking, but they were never found at a feeder in the backyard such as this. Whether it was because we didn’t have or take the time for them or because we didn’t need one more thing to feed and keep up with on the farm, I really cannot say, but in my life, hummingbird feeders are a fairly recent addition to our home.

So, I have to wonder, do we feed hummingbirds so that they have enough food throughout the season to mate, raise a family and prepare to migrate South in the Winter? Or do we feed the hummingbirds so they can entertain us? Is it a necessary thing we do or a self-serving thing we do? Is it we who are training them to come to us? Or is it they who train us to prepare the feed for them? Perhaps we will never fully know the answer to that, but I suspect the truth is somewhere in the middle and, in the end, everyone benefits.

The hummingbird feeders at DuBois Center fairly hum with the attentions the hummingbirds give them. Hummingbirds are territorial, often chasing off the competitors for what is an ample food source, though they probably are not aware of it. The hummingbirds stake their claim to the goodness of God, the affability of their human stewards and the geography of abundant food sources. When their circumstances are changed for the better the hummingbirds rejoice... and become protective of the gift.

Unlike hummingbirds protecting their turf, the gift of God’s love is not ours alone, nor is it ever to be protected as if there is a limited supply. God’s goodness and care is for all and for all time. Rejoice! Then, share the gift! The more of us at the feeders, the more gracious the Gift.

Think about it. Israel certainly did.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Though we hover about your precious Food, set upon the Table by the hand of Christ, never allow us to ‘own’ it, only to share it with the Grace You give to all, O God. Thank You. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-SIX OF LENT
“When the Lord changed Zion’s circumstances for the better, it was like we had been dreaming.”

Psalm 126.1 CEB

Whether in the Spring of the year as the first flowers emerge, the Summer of the year when long lays the heat and humidity, in the Fall of the year when trees begin to unveil their true inherent colors and wonder or the Winter of the year when snow deepens and the echo of Snow Geese calling high above carries throughout the countryside, there are few better places to dream God’s dreams than DuBois Center. There is something which sparkles in the soul as one settles in for a walk along the dam road or puts in a canoe to traverse the lake or seeks the most darkened open spot in the woods to observe the stars and planets. Here at DuBois Center one encounters the Lord who changes Zion’s circumstances, freeing the exiles from forced labors, healing the broken-hearted of their pains, bringing a balm to Gilead and leading the children Home.

ly, sacred and needful in taking time to step back and assess where one has been, where one is and where one is to go . . . and there are few places on earth so ready to facilitate and nurture such spiritual, holistic endeavors as is DuBois Center. For academic and spiritualist alike, this is a place to ponder the deeper questions of pilgrimage, to face the harder issues of self, sin and redemption or to seek out that which has seemed elusive in coming to terms with loss, grief or transgression. In the New Community of God’s own people, God’s Light shimmers across the waters, stopping, as it were, at the place where our dreaming begins and our journey continues.

On this day consider why it is and where it is you go to dream of Zion’s deliverance in your own life. When was the last time you were there? When will you go again?

God is at work changing your circumstances for the better each day. Today would be a good time to return the Gift in faith.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Glisten in my life, O God, like a dream awakening my senses to incredible Glory. Then, in my awakening, use me to guide others to your Goodness in Christ. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-SEVEN OF LENT

“Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts. It was even said, at that time, among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them!”

Psalm 126.2 CEB

It is one thing for snow and ice to melt leaving the landscape less treacherous, it is quite another thing when the blooming trees begin their annual fashion show. Suddenly the entire land begins to fill with robin chirp and cardinal song. Bees begin the humming of flight and turtles find their way to the banks of ponds and lakes to take in the warming sun. There is a smell in the air, a pungent aroma of beauty and joy, as though such things could produce their own fragrance like the earth itself. Dogs stretch out on softening blankets of grass in the yard and cats curl up on perilous perches warming their coats in sunray streams.

When redbud bloom and crab apples blossom, when magnolia trees open and tulip trees push forth color, the world fills with laughter and children’s voices sing the hallelujahs of hope once again on playgrounds throughout the land. When what once seemed dead finds life, when Lazarus walks out of the tomb, when Spring announces her triumphant return, is there anyone, anywhere not caught up in the dance of earth’s budding newness?

There have been times in my life when it seemed Winter overstayed its welcome, times when darkness could not be lessened by light, when optimism found no root, nor joy any voice. There have been times when the distance between my life and God seemed to be a chasm which could not be crossed, like the abyss between the rich man and Abraham who had poor Lazarus by his side or as the exile of the Israelites from the land which they knew to be their destiny, their home. There have been times when the winter of my sins dispatched my soul to the furthest reaches of the coldest regions, freezing solid my heart and leaving desolate my future. Then a friend spoke His name, “Jesus”, and everything changed.

In that Name alone is the metamorphosis of ‘trudging along in life’ to ecstasy-filled confidence and expectation. In that Name alone is redbud bloom and crab apple blossom. In that Name alone is magnolia tree opening and tulip tree color. In that Name alone is New Life on the journey. Do not allow your Lenten pilgrimage to be without it. The Lord is doing great things for you.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Thaw me out, O Lord, and blossom in me as we journey together towards Jerusalem this day. Amen.
DAY TWENTY-EIGHT OF LENT

“Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts.”

Psalm 126.5 CEB

There is an Australian Aboriginal Proverb which says, “We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love . . . and then we return home.”

The Green DuBois Initiative opens the meaning of that Proverb to Master Gardener and novice herb grower, to learned Magi and amateur star gazer, to trained Botanist and one who just likes to walk and look at the trees, to Veterinarian and pet owner alike: “Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love . . . and then we return home.” What brings Green DuBois into being is a shared desire to turn tears into joyful shouts, sadness into singing and pain into Divine pleasure. Green DuBois reminds us that we are not alone on the journey of life, that we are interconnected with people in Illinois in the same way we are interconnected to people in Botswana, that though we may be different in birthing we are one on the pilgrimage . . . and all which is around us is ours only for a moment, but that moment is ours to steward collectively for the next generation to come. It is God who is at the heart of our shared DNA – and it is to God we return.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30.5b)
On the Lenten journey to Jerusalem with Jesus, live for the joy. Recognize the reasons for tears, address the causes, repair the breaches, tend to the wounded and hurting, comfort the sorrowing and sighing, but live for the joy. For such Jesus made His way in the midst of those who longed for a Savior. For such Jesus made His way in the midst of those who knew Him not. For such Jesus turns tears into joyful shouts, still. The Green DuBois Initiative is a powerful example of such joy living today. Thanks be to God!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Set my tears, O Lord, as seeds in the soil of your Love that they may rise with You in joy. Amen.
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

“Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed,
come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain!”

Psalm 126.6 CEB

Sabbath Peace be with you!

There used to be a show on television called, “The Beverly Hillbillies”, and the theme song began with the words, “Come and listen to a story ‘bout a man named Jed, Poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed . . .” Those of you old enough to remember this show are probably beginning to smile right now and have started singing that theme song word-for-word as you remember Jed Clampett, Granny, Elly Mae, Jethro, the constantly scheming banker, Mr. Milburn Drysdale, and his very intelligent, yet often caught in the middle secretary, Jane Hathway, and a large cast of others. It was a comedy spoof about a backwoods country family that came into a huge amount of money as the result of an oil strike, moved to Beverly Hills, California, then proceeded to not fit in very well. Most often there were comical disasters in every show, cultural and otherwise, but nearly always there was something of a lesson to be learned. In many ways, this show shaped the attitudes of a generation of folk concerning the common sense of country people and the scheming ways of bankers and city folk. Mainly, it gave the audience a reason to smile during some very hard times in our nation’s history.

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent where is it you will go, or have gone to, ‘Come and listen to a story ‘bout a man named Jesus’? In the midst of government wrangling over walls and ethics, politicians posturing about who is right and who is wrong, television personalities trying to direct your attention to particular causes or attitudes, growing concerns around the emerging conversations focused by #Me2, LGBTQ, Black Lives Matter, civil unrest around gun control, and with ever increasing consideration being given to the growing rate of the un- or underinsured and the inaccessibility of quality affordable healthcare: Where is it you go? To whom is it you listen? Who has your undivided attention? Where do you find respite?

Or do you simply find yourself, much like Mary, waiting outside an empty tomb crying, wondering what happened that the world has changed so? For you, for me, and for all of Creation, there is Good News!

Let your tears turn to joy! Come and listen to the story ‘bout a man named Jesus! He Lives that we might live and tell a new narrative in faith! Thanks be to God!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, when I am ready to give up, toss in the towel, hang my head and cry because I cannot take it any longer, lift me up, dust me off and tell me Your Story that Joy might fill my soul. Amen.
In the midst of the lengthening Lenten discipline of reflection, repentance, prayer and re-dedication, have you thought outside the person which is you about the journey of others? Have you considered the lilies of the field, which neither sow, nor reap? Or perhaps about this Starry Campion, an Illinois Wildflower, found in abundance upon the grounds of DuBois Center?

Have you ever seriously pondered where the first one emerged? Who nurtures them? Who tends to them? Who causes their blooms to spring forth? How long it is they live? Why they come back each year? Do they have a purpose? How do they shape God’s Creation around them? What possible good might they offer to others?

The Starry Campion is pollinated by moths and, in lesser degree, by bumblebees. It reproduces by reseeding itself and is found throughout the prairie lands of Illinois . . . and it is a beautiful gift of God in the eye of the seeker. It is a host plant to a variety of insects and caterpillars and provides a deep root which holds the soil around it in place.

Now, ask the same questions of yourself that you might have directed to the Starry Campion: Where did you first emerge? Who nurtures you? Who tends to you? Who causes your blooms to spring forth? How long will you live? Why do you keep coming back? Do you have a purpose? How do you shape God’s Creation around you? What possible good might you offer to others?

As with the Starry Campion, only God knows all of the answers for any of us, yet now is the time to reckon our course, to consider our potential, to ponder the God who knows us and to follow in the way of the One whose root holds us all in our place. Now is the time to listen for God’s answers, not only in the times of trouble, but in the times of resplendent, dazzling beauty.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen more than I speak, to care more than I seek attention. Show me your Way and protect me in the Home of Your heart. Amen.
DAY THIRTY OF LENT

“Let God grant what is in your heart and fulfill all your plans.”
Psalm 20.4 CEB

There is a very real problem with kneeling down in prayer and telling God your plans: God may have other plans for you. An old saying in ministry is, ‘If you want to hear God laugh, just tell God the plans you have for your life,’ and, bottom line, it is true.

From the youngest of my years of recollection, all I ever wanted to do was be a farmer like my Dad. I grew up on my parent’s dairy farm, was one of four boys in our family who learned to feed calves, fork manure, milk cows, bale hay, stack straw, drive tractors in the fields, keep a careful accounting of production records for both the dairy and the crops, build sheds, construct waterways, work with neighbors and advocate on State and National levels for the agricultural industry. I loved it. Oh, some days were harder than others, there were some things about which my Dad or brother and I disagreed as to how to proceed in accomplishing, times were tight, money was scarce and not everyone around thought farming to be a glamorous or very profitable vocation, still, it was all I could ever imagine doing.

Then one evening, five years into the newly established farm partnership my Dad, older brother and I had formed and as I was entering herd records and balancing production lines in my basement office, I heard a voice, as clear as you speaking to me a couple of feet apart, “It is time.” Until several minutes later when that Voice finished speaking, my knees were on the floor, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end, and there was no question in my heart and soul as to Who was speaking. I knew in an instant my life would never be the same, nor would the lives of my wife, young son and the rest of our family. God had changed my plans in an instant, calling me from the fields of Southern Illinois to the fields of ministry. ‘If you want to hear God laugh, just tell God the plans you have for your life.’

As God guided and fulfilled God’s plans in Jesus through faith and love, so God will fulfill the plans you have in your life . . . as long as you understand, God will be God – and you are God’s.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord God, please grant what is in my heart, even as You fulfill your plans in my life, as You continue to do in Jesus. Amen.
“Some people trust in chariots, others in horses; but we praise the Lord’s name.”
Psalm 20.7 CEB

For most kids and many adults, there is something fairly exciting about even the thought of going for a trail ride on one of the horses at DuBois Center, regardless the time of year. Among the many of God’s gifts for which DuBois Center is steward, the small herd of horses stabled there are amazing. Friendly, strong, sure-footed, playful, loving and trustworthy, these horses provide their riders an opportunity to explore God’s creation from a whole new vantage point.

The gentle clumping of their hooves upon the trail as they walk, or the rhythmic feel of a trot through the trees, to even the adrenaline-rushing wonder of a gallop through a field gives to both horse and rider a sense of what distances can be accomplished, what goals can be met when human and animal work together. At best, it is a gift of the heavens, a sense of connectedness and a feeling of unity in creation. At worst, it is just another really good ride over the grounds of a beautiful setting.

I know of folk who would rather have a really good horse beside them or under them to share the journey of life (or just around camp) than a whole host of other people or things who would never appreciate the visions before them or the manner in which they arrived at their destination. As a good horse elevates its rider’s abilities, a good rider enhances a horse’s potential. It is a team-thing – and DuBois Center teaches it with great intentionality and care, mainly because such teamwork begins in praise of the Lord’s name.

You cannot do with humans and horses what you are unwilling to do, first, with God. Conversely, you cannot do with God that which you are unwilling to do, foremost, with the rest of creation. God is at the center of every wise and wonderful relationship, on earth as it is heaven, just as we pray it. You can have the most elaborate of chariots, whether Ford, Chevy, Toyota, Dodge or the host of others; You can have the most expensive and best bred of horses, whether Secretariat, Seabiscuit, Affirmed . . . or the horses of DuBois such as Apache, Cisco or Clover; but if God is not front and center, you may win the race, but you will lose the Victory.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Let me live this and every day in praise of your Name, O Lord, in praise of your Name. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-TWO OF LENT

“Have mercy on me, Lord, because I’m depressed. My vision fails because of my grief, as do my spirit and my body.”
Psalm 31.9 CEB

Lord, I am at the point in Lent that all of this ‘discipline’ stuff is getting old. There is a part of me which is ready to climb up in a tree like Zacchaeus did to see you along the road – and there is a part of me which just wants to blend in, become invisible, disappear and become forgotten. Looking at You, Jesus, reminds me just how far I am from the vision of the Kingdom You lived each day of your ministry – and hearing Your teaching reminds me just how far I have come and makes me yearn for more of You.

On the one hand, I am elated to be with You and, on the other hand, I cannot stand how the world – and my choices along the way – make me appear in Your eyes. Still, You love me. Still, You heal me. Still, You call me down from my perches above your travels, even as You call me out of my hideaways, my invisible places and my darkened despair to meet You in Love, face-to-Face.

Quiet me, Lord, to hear your Voice. Open my eyes, Lord, to see You summoning me to You. Restore my heart in You, Lord, that Hope would be my constant companion on the way. Soften my soul, Lord, to believe the Gift of mercy and grace You are. Finally, quicken my steps, Lord, which take me to Your side wherever that may be. Remind me that as You near Jerusalem, You near all the pain, depression, despair, hopelessness, timidity and restlessness in me – and that it is for such as me that You continue your journey. You are, that I might know Life. I am, that You might Live in me. Such a blessing is beyond my capacity to understand, so I simply, profoundly say, Thank You, Lord Jesus. Thank You.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, You have never given up on me, so don’t let me give up on myself. Fill me, use me, guide me guard me, that each of my days would be spent in your Presence, now and forever. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-THREE
OF LENT

“But me?”
“I trust you, Lord!”
“I affirm, “You are my God.””
Psalm 31.14 CEB

Winter brings snow and cold, Spring arrives with lush grasses and emerging crocus, Summer’s heat and long dog days reflect the nearness of the sun, then Fall’s emerging colors and crisp evenings gather our journey in the nearing night of earth’s renewal. Who, other than God, can stack the flowers on end or cause the bullfrogs to echo across the pond? Who, other than God, can pillow the sky with clouds or soften the morning with hushing fog and nurturing dew? Who, other than God, can dry the hay in the field or cause the corn to grow? Who, other than God, gives direction to migrating geese or shows the doe the best place to birth a fawn? Who, other than God, guides the squirrel to the stash of nuts or give the chicken hawk its watchful eye? Who, other than God, can guide the path of the botanist exploring the woods or beckon home the child whose way has been lost? Who, other than God, can break the bonds of slavery or bring refreshing water from a rock? Who, other than God, can cause a lake to blossom in July with the flowers of the lily pad or make the sound of a leaping bass echo across the land?

Who, other than God, causes the Psalmist to cry out, “You are my God” or the centurion to kneel in awe and witness to the Son of God?

Who, other than God, causes the wind to blow and flames to leap in Pentecost power or can place scales upon a man’s eyes until he is ready to see with the Vision of faith?

Who, other than God, knows you as a child of God and loves you just as you are or is willing to go to the ends of the earth for your sake, regardless the price?

The world is full of questions, doubts, allegations, presumption and cynicism, but only God can give the final answers, as simply as in the stacking of blooms.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: O, Holy One, give me the patience to wait on Your answers, the heart to consider their meaning and the soul to allow belief to transform my days. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-FOUR OF LENT

“My future is in your hands. Don’t hand me over to my enemies, to all who are out to get me!”

Psalm 31.15 CEB

The shadow of Jerusalem looms near, yet outside the walls, somewhere along the paths, prayer is lifted to God as lightly as a Monarch butterfly descends upon a branch. Imperceptibly both limb and leaf bow ever so slightly as feet find their place, first holding on, then tasting the goodness the host has to offer.

Prayers, bold and distinctive as Monarch colors, whose supplications rise above the dusty road being followed, ascend to the Holy One on the eve of what is to come. Only Jesus knows. Only Jesus understands. Only Jesus can name that which is yet to be revealed.

“My future is in your hands” is more a witness than a confession. To trust God deeply enough to be rested in the thought that what is before you is not of your own design, yet is that towards which you must go bespeaks the awesome and awful nature of being Christ. Still, there it is, the prayer rising to the Heavens above from the earth beneath, “Don’t hand me over to my enemies, to all who are out to get me!”

There is no known connection between the words of the Psalmist as they were written and the journey of Jesus as He moves towards Jerusalem, still they intertwine, still they mirror the other, still they reveal a dark premonition. ‘Migrate away, Jesus! ‘Flutter your wings or call upon the angels and do not dash Your foot upon the stones of our hatred, prejudice and bigotry, Lord!’ ‘Listen to Your own prayers and turn away, for Your sake and for those whom You have already saved!’

Motionless He stands on the road, sighing a prayer, resting in the moment, looking at those around Him, wondering if they will be able to drink the cup they so desire, to fulfill their calling to which they have been called. Then, as though by the breath of the Spirit, He moves on, the Monarch releases its hold on the limb, the prayer spoken, the prayer answered and, in a twinkling, the shadows around Jerusalem give way to a stark clarity none but He can perceive. Stay with Him, if you can.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, when my feet will not move forward out of fear, cause my soul to lead on anyway because of faith and trust in You. Amen.
SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT - PALM SUNDAY

“Shine your face on your servant; save me by your faithful love!”
Psalm 31.16 CEB

“Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!”
Jesus answered, “I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout.”
Luke 19.39-40 CEB

There is arrogance among the humans of creation, as though they are the only ones with voices to praise or the good sense to be silent. Haughtiness consumes them, conceit controls them and ego directs them. ‘Do as I say!’ ‘Do it now!’ ‘Do it my way!’ ‘Only I/we can be correct!’ ‘You should listen!’

Their folly continues to sound in every generation and they know not the Judgment coming upon them. The foolishness of believing their language, even perfect interpretation, carries the day before God causes to the stars to giggle.

Have you ever listened to the sound of waves upon the shore? Considered the thunderstorms through the mountains and valleys? Tended to the singing of the cricket? Were stopped in your tracks by the magnificent silence of a sunset? Pondered at the wisdom of a hoot owl on a darkened night? Or took into account the language of palms as they are laid in processional tribute?

God’s Voice will not be silenced and those who wait for Salvation will not be turned away. How loud must have been the Red Sea when its’ waters were turned loose upon the pursuing Egyptians? How deafening must have been the falling of Jericho’s walls when God’s trumpets of triumph and marching feet of victory surrounded that self-serving city? How loud were the wailing cries of those led into exile after forgetting their birthright and abdicating their identity of being God’s people called to care for the least among them?

God’s Voice will not be silenced and those who wait for Salvation will not be turned away. On this day we are invited to join with Creation in loud ‘Hosannas!’ as we welcome the Son of the Living God into the city of our existence. Such a Savior, God’s own Chosen, arrives as He will, loves as He can, heals where He is welcomed and restores Life in a place where the rock and stones themselves are the first to sing, ‘Alleluia!’ Listen for the Song, sing with Creation, be at Peace. He comes!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: O Holy One, ride into my heart and silence my mindless droning. Give me your Song to sing on this journey of faith. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-FIVE OF LENT

“The Lord was my strength and protection; he was my saving help!”
Psalm 118.14 CEB

Few things have seemed quite so precarious as the moment when, in beginning to pursue my degree at Eden Seminary and my class was gathered on our first retreat, the Professor in charge told us to look first to our left, then to our right, after which he intoned, “Now, know this: at the end of the three year journey towards your degree, one of those around you will be gone. The class averages show that one in three do not complete their degree work.” My first thought was, “Lord, what have You gotten me into?” and my second thought was more a prayer, “Let it not be me!”

By mid-way through my second year I was fairly certain I had wandered out on a very thin dry branch of a tree, then handed a chainsaw to an institution to cut me off. My situation was perilous and there appeared no help in sight. I could hear the chainsaw starting up, could see the ladder at the tree limb, and just didn’t know what to do.

You have been there, haven’t you? That moment of sink or swim, cut-bait or fish, turn to the trouble or turn away and run. If so for you and me, then how much more for others along the way? What of the LGBTQ communities? What of the #Me2 communities? What of refugee communities seeking asylum? What of Black Lives Matter communities? What of local congregations who are aging out in communities where there is little chance for growth? What of Pastors who are aging out but will not retire because there are an increasing number of small churches which need their care? What of seniors who have to choose between healthcare and food? What of those who must choose between holding multiple jobs and trying to be there for their children? What of those who live in the war zones of gang violence?

As with Jesus in Jerusalem, God will not leave us alone to face the adversary. God shuts off the chain saw, forms new communities of health and wellness, shapes culture in hope and joy, and gives God’s people reason to walk forward with Jesus in Peace. We are never alone. Thanks be to God!

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lord, steady me on the limb, make sure my steps on the path, give confidence to Your ways of faith in me, that the world would know You are near. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-SIX OF LENT
“The sounds of joyful songs and deliverance are heard in the tents of the righteous:
“The Lord’s strong hand is victorious!””
Psalm 118.15 CEB

What color of autumn yellows and gold cannot be found in the biggest box of Crayon Crayola’s? Look up into the sky and count them. The shades and hues of Fall cannot be numbered, nor can they be repeated. The most skillful of artists try their level best, the authors of books run out of descriptors and prayers cannot echo their wonder, yet there they are, God’s best for you. Look up at Victory!

Throughout this week, many a Pastor is living and dying by the calendar which lays out a vast number of worship services to be prepared and led, many an Office Manager or Secretary is wading through the bulletins and paper like a Baptismal candidate wades in the water, many an Organist or Pianist is practicing page after page for the varied services for which they must play, many a Fellowship Group is planning the menus to be prepared and presented on each of the feast days of this week and many a family is making plans to worship . . . around baseball and softball games, track meets, soccer and volleyball matches. Hard days, difficult decisions and much work, so what can be done to slow it all down? Look up!

Sometimes we forget Saving Grace and Mercy are not ours to control. Sometimes we forget in all of the busyness of life that the only life God desires us to savor is that which is time spent in the Love of Christ. If our days are spent looking down at where are feet are going, how will we ever find time to look and allow our souls to soar in Hope and Victory?

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Lift up my head, O God, that my eyes would focus on You, my heart would meet You and my soul would dwell in You daily. Amen.
DAY THIRTY-SEVEN OF LENT

“The Lord’s strong hand is ready to strike!
The Lord’s strong hand is victorious!”
Psalm 118.16 CEB

We were down at the pond fishing, that time honored task of young children and older adults, when my friend asked me what I thought a particular cloud looked like. Without looking up from my bobber which appeared to be dipping a bit, I told him, “A mouse.” Looking first at the cloud, then back at me, he asked, “How did you decide that? You never even looked up to see which cloud I was pointing at!” Without missing a beat, I looked him in the eye and said, “I saw it in the water.” Just then a catfish pulled my bobber under the surface and I pulled it in on my cane pole. A nice one, a keeper!

Reflections of the Hand of the Lord are all around us. God’s ongoing Victory cannot be hidden. There are people who will point us in one direction and say, “There! Look there!” And others will point in another direction and say, “There! Look there!” And still others will implore our attention saying, “There, look there!” Some believe Victory is in liturgy, some say it is in hymnody, others in dogma and still others in law.

Yet, at the end of the day and at the beginning of the next day, Victory is God’s and God will reveal it as God chooses, whether in reflections in the pond or along a garden path near an empty tomb, whether in the gold of Fall trees or Emmaus walks, whether in Lenten devotionals or in seaside fish dinners. At the end of the day and at the Beginning of the New Day, Victory is God’s and God will reveal it as God chooses. Be watching, the time is at hand.

Prayer: Allow me the gift, dear Lord, to see into Your eyes and there find my salvation, however You choose to reveal it.
Amen.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.
DAY THIRTY-EIGHT OF LENT – MAUNDY THURSDAY

“I won’t die – no, I will live and declare what the Lord has done.”
Psalm 118.17 CEB

One of the prettiest times of the day at DuBois Center is sunrise. There is just something about looking to the West against the distant trees and observing the streams of luminescent light filling in the darkened spots along the shoreline as the sun emerges behind you. It is as if each tree, each cove, each notch along the shore bows their knee in humble adoration to the Love shining over them.

On this Maundy Thursday, so named for the Commandment Jesus gives to the disciples on this night, “Love one another as I have loved you”, in the midst of Tenebrae services, the washing of feet, the sharing of both Story and Elements of the Last Supper and in being mindful that such a moment, powerful as it is, comes at an awful cost of betrayal, pause to take in the Light. In the gathering darkness of deceit, in the stark reality of abandonment and being mindful of the isolation which is Jesus’ only companion in these moments, be aware that it is the Light and Love of God, come to us in Jesus of Nazareth, that continues to shine despite the brooding gloom of trial and beatings.

It is one thing to contemplate the moment, it is quite another to give in to it. Jesus never gave in to it. One of the disciples sold Him out. Others fell asleep as He prayed. They all ran away as the soldiers and authorities arrived, another denied knowing Him . . . still, Jesus never gave in to it. “So, you are a king?” Pilate asked. “Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice.”” “What is truth?” Pilate asked. What is truth this night, indeed? Keep your eyes on the Light. Though it may flicker, it will never fail.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Forgive the times I have betrayed, denied and run away from You, Lord. In your Light, save me. Amen.
“Yes, the Lord definitely disciplined me, but he didn’t hand me over to death.”
Psalm 118.18 CEB

“From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani,” which means, “My God, my God, why have you left me?”
Mark 15.33-34 CEB

An evening thunderstorm at DuBois Center, with lightning flashing through the trees above Hickory Lodge, gave many in our group pause and more than enough reason to seek shelter inside, but a few of us chose to stay outside trying to capture the moment. God does not pause the flash of lightning through the clouds for the casual observer yet, in the heart of the experience there is a transcendence of awe, of earthly fragility in the face of heavenly Authority, all while humanity’s fears and deeds are exposed by Celestial Light.

It must have been eerily so on the day when Jesus was crucified.

The Gospels speak of those who were left standing at the cross as Jesus was crucified, only a few from among those who had followed Him in His ministry were left: the beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome and . . . Jesus’ own mother, Mary. Heart-wrenchingly wicked and painful, soul-tearing grief had to be running through their beings. I cannot imagine it. Yet, if so for we of creation, how much more then for God the Creator?
To watch Your Son betrayed, tried, beaten, forced to carry His cross to Golgotha, the garbage dump, then . . . then to watch nails being driven into the hands and feet of Divine Love and Unswerving Grace, and the cross roughly lifted and thumped into place with Your Son upon it . . . I cannot imagine it. To observe His life-blood pouring out of his Body, to listen to His lagging, labored breathing, to know that He trusts You beyond all trust, has walked in You beyond all measure, healed Your people beyond their asking and, still, this is how they regard Him . . . this is how they regard You . . . I cannot imagine it.

Yet, God took it in, even those last words of the Son. Is there anyone among us who wouldn’t rage in anger at even the thought of such a cruel and painful death? Especially of your own son? The Son? I cannot imagine it and pray I never have to live it. Now we wait, the day dark, the ground shaking. Now we wait. The lightning flashes again . . . and I think I see God’s face.

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Forgive me, forgive us all, Lord, when we nail You to the cross again and again in our earthly desire to be in control, to shape the truth we can handle, to determine Your Vision for Creation. Amen.
DAY FORTY OF LENT – HOLY SATURDAY

“Open the gates of righteousness for me so I can come in and give thanks to the Lord! This is the Lord’s gate: those who are righteous enter through it.”

Psalm 118:19-20 CEB

Above the fireplace in Oak Lodge hangs this cross, this empty cross, a reminder of yesterday’s horror. No, it is not the same one as that upon which Jesus hung, we do not have access to such relics as others lay claim to have yet, on days such as today this cross invites our intentional remembering, our praying, our pondering, and our faith-filled waiting.

We who live on the Resurrection side of the crucifixion really do not think much about this day. We are busy decorating our naves and sanctuaries for Easter, buying the groceries needed for the family gatherings, laying in the vast collections of Easter Eggs and candies necessary to appease our children’s incessant hunger for sweets and making last minute plans as to where we will make our annual appearance for Easter worship. Even the culture, believing or not, invest in this day with expansive sales, Spring extravaganzas, special double-header softball and baseball games at school and AAU basketball and volleyball games on the road. Busyness is our business today, with little time for quiet contemplation.

Yet, for those who were there on the crucifixion side of Resurrection there was little cause for joy, little desire to eat, little reason for talking. They were grieving. They were remembering. They were wondering where it all went so wrong. They were reflecting on His words of the kingdom. They were blaming themselves for having run away. They were trying to put the pieces back together and make rational sense out of them. They were replaying in their minds the feeding of the 5,000, the cleansing of the lepers, the encounter with Samaritan woman at the well, the purging of the evil spirits from the Gerasene demoniac, Zacchaeus’ conversion and Lazarus walking out of the tomb. They were mulling on the words Jesus said about rising in three days – praying that, somehow, it could be true.

They saw the empty cross, in the midst of the other two, and wondered if they could ever be forgiven by God for this . . . and they waited . . .

Something to ponder on the Lenten journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

Prayer: Quiet me down, Lord, that with all your children I might wait and watch for You. Amen.
EASTER SUNDAY

“I thank you because you answered me, because you were my saving help. The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone! This has happened because of the Lord; it is astounding in our sight! This is the day the Lord acted; we will rejoice and celebrate in it!”

Psalm 118.21-24 CEB

“How could any grandparent hear those words and not turn around to watch and, if possible, catch a picture of Superman swooping down through DuBois Center? Then, for an instant, I saw Easter!

Excitedly running through the less than enthusiastic swimmers who just had to come out of the lake of their despair certain He was gone forever, making His way by the ‘garbage dump of Jerusalem’, soaring over the baled up traditions and laws of yester-year stacked in rows before Him and calling to all who would listen that a new day is coming, Jesus shook Creation and brought Joy and Hope to all those who would believe.

‘It can’t be!’ they said. ‘He’s dead!’ they said. ‘The stone was rolled in place to seal Him up!’ they said. Yet, there He goes, soaring into the life of the world, declaring New Life in the face of death, proclaiming Confidence in the face of despair, extending Forgiveness in the face of guilt and announcing Grace in the face of condemnation!

The storms and darkness of three days ago have bowed down to the Sunshine and Glory of Resurrection! Jesus is Alive! Jesus is Alive! Jesus is Alive! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The unexpected and incredible gift that the Green DuBois initiative brings to DuBois Center and our world can be likened to that of Easter Sunday morning: Life, God’s New Life in Christ, has always been there, just around the corner, down the path, next to the tree, emerging after the fire, thriving in the open, waiting for us to see, eager for us to appreciate, anxious for us to
discover and savor all that God intends. Now, in the dawning of a new day and with the guidance of those who have gone before, Green DuBois stands ready to witness, to make the good confession, to testify to all that God is doing in this place, in this time and among this people. Emmaus Road meets Quarry Road and the Risen Christ is seen throughout Creation! Thanks be to God!

“Papa, Papa, watch me! Watch me! I’m Superman and I’m flying!”

Thank you, DuBois Center and Green DuBois for opening this Papa’s eyes all over again to Christ’s Resurrection! Thank you, Risen Christ, for taking us on your back and, in soaring, showing us God!

Something to ponder this Easter Day, a gift of DuBois Center and Green DuBois

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for opening our eyes to Your Resurrection and for the Hope and Faith You inspire in us for the days ahead. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen!