

JOURNEY THROUGH

LENT

WINTER 2017

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Over the past few weeks at Cedar Ridge we have been exploring the core life-message of Jesus: the "Good News" that we call the Gospel. This message of love breaks down the walls we've built that separate us from God and alienate us from one another. God's healing love reconciles us and calls us to partner with God in the greatest mission in the universe: the reconciliation of all things. Yet in Matthew 4, we read how Jesus' ministry begins in a barren wilderness. He goes out into the desert for forty days and nights where he takes on the challenge of the human condition, wrestles with all kinds of temptation and resists the power of evil.

Lent mirrors this episode in Jesus' life. It's a season where each year we take on the same challenge to let God's love overcome all that is broken in us that we might be ambassadors of good in the world. In this season of quiet, honest and courageous self-examination, we reflect first on our humanity. Without condemning it, we consider what needs to change; what do we want (or need) to diminish in our lives, and what needs to grow? Second, we reflect on God's love for us and look to open our lives more to God's Spirit working in us, accepting us and empowering us to live more fully. The ashes we receive at our Ash Wednesday service are a symbol of these two elements. This small mark on our forehead symbolizes our humanity, our fragility and the fact that we belong to this earth with all its struggle, darkness and transience – "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." But we also

belong to God and bear the divine image. God has breathed the spirit of life into us, and we are vessels of the divine spark – all of us. So the ashes also symbolize the fire of God. Not a fire of judgment but a fire of passionate love for us, and a fire of hope that purifies and transforms us. At the outset of Lent, we embrace these two truths: acceptance that we need transformation, and hope in God's love that empowers us.

As we journey through Lent over the next 40 days (not including Sundays!), let's take full advantage of the season. Let's make time each day to reflect on our lives and what needs to change. Let's invite God to transform us and burn up what needs to go. Beginning Sunday March 5, we'll be going through a series about prayer called "And All the People Said Amen." Together we'll grow in the art of prayer in all its many forms, and draw closer in our experience of God and deeper in our connection to one another. Together, during the wilderness experience of Lent, like Jesus, we can receive the good news of God's transforming love and emerge more empowered to be this good news and share this good news in a world that desperately needs it. ■

Matthew



Cedar Ridge Hosts Interfaith Screening of “I Have a Dream”

By: Ruth Campbell

On January 16, Cedar Ridge hosted a special intergenerational, interfaith event to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. We invited members of neighboring faith communities to join us for tasty snacks and stimulating conversation—and well over one hundred people turned out. After a time of socializing, we watched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s historic “I Have A Dream” speech together. A panel of leaders from different faith traditions then addressed how Dr. King’s speech about racial unity applies to how our various faith traditions relate to one another, and how we can work together to foster peace and love in our community. Meanwhile, children explored the ideas and principles in the speech through crafts, art projects, books and games. At the end of the morning, participants were encouraged to take home resources and suggestions for ways to serve and build loving and inclusive community in honor of Dr. King.



At a time when racial and religious tensions are running high, this event was a small step in demonstrating our commitment to interfaith understanding, respect and collaboration. We are grateful to our guest panelists (Pastor Tori Butler of Good Hope Union United Methodist Church, Imam Sheikh Jalil of Idara-e-Jaferia, Rabbi Sarah Meytin of B’nai Shalom Synagogue, Dr. Sovan Tun of the Cambodian Buddhist Society, and Dr. Amjad Chaudhry of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) for joining with us. And we look forward to continuing to build bridges of love and support with these and other neighboring faith communities. ■





An Evening at the Creative Cup

by: Will Corvey

It says something wonderful about a church lobby that so little has to happen to convert it into a coffee house. A few candles here, some chairs over there, the repositioning of plush couches, the dimming of lights, the expert brewing of gourmet coffee, a buffet of desserts. But the magic of the evening started weeks before, as Cedar Ridgers signed up to sing, to play, to read, to show art, to host a night of sharing and community. And the wonder of that willingness to sign up was kindled well before that. This is in part the work of the church: to be a safe space for sharing, for expression, for risk, for showing who we really are.

A lot of "who we are" was easy to see: we are creative, we are diverse, and we are thoughtful. But perhaps most of all we are present; we are a congregation that shows up to celebrate one another. So we got caffeinated and situated and all sugared out and laughed and sang along. We started out with an agenda and then let it be overcome by joy as we yawned together late into the night (I was happy to see many of the same sleepy faces bright and early the next day.) Many of us finished the evening talking about the next time around: about doing this more often, or in new and different ways. After all, those are the kinds of things friends say to one another after a time of hearty fellowship together. Thanks to all who were able to come and to the community that makes all of this possible. ■



In January, the middle school youth group went on a retreat to summit lake retreat center for a Star Wars-themed weekend of snow tubing. The group of sixteen students was led by pastoral team member Trish Audi, along with volunteer leaders Ethan and Rebecca Stryker, Abdulloh Sayfidinov and Ariel Gantt. ■



INSIDE STORY



Three Perspectives On Prayer

Rachel Bibee and Sarah Burke interviewed three Cedar Ridgers to gain insight into prayer from their different perspectives.



CREATIVITY AND PRAYER

With Kate Thomas



Kate has had the privilege of calling CRCC home for the last 8 years. She loves serendipity, caring for those around her, and serving on the Prayer and Healing team and the Co-Creator's team. By day she designs digital experiences and by night she crafts and has fun with her husband Jeff and daughter Amelie.

Where do you see the intersection of creativity and prayer?

"Creativity" can be an intimidating word, bringing out our internal doubts about our artistic abilities. I'm not endorsing that thinking, but it is a reality! "Creativity" applied to my prayer life can mean something simple and freeing, like trying a new prayer practice, doing something I love prayerfully, or feeling the freedom to connect with God in ways that most resonate with me personally.

For example, I'm an experiential and visual learner. So sometimes I close my eyes and visualize something on my heart—like how I can serve or what is my life's purpose (I know, big questions, right?). Then I physically move around as I feel led to interact with what I see. I probably look insane, but it's an incredible way for God to speak to me in my own language, reveal truths, and help me return to that visual that is captured on my heart.

How do you find that creativity affects prayer and vice versa?

To me, both require an open mind and a letting go of expectations and my own personal limitations. If only it didn't take a lifetime to get good at practicing that!

What is a memorable experience you've had around creativity and prayer?

I was once vacationing in Pennsylvania. As I sat at the edge of a beautiful, lush lake on a perfectly warm and sunny day, I was in awe of God's creation. I just sat quietly and did my best to listen, to reflect, and be open. The lush colors and textures and sounds of birds were wonderfully calming. After a while I noticed how crisp and clear the reflection of trees were in the lake. At that moment, it symbolized the reflection of earth and heaven—that we are made in the image of God. Then someone in a kayak moved past, creating ripples in the water and distorting the reflection—as if the distractions in our life prevent us from fully reflecting God. But heaven on Earth IS possible. I imagined this moment captured in a snow globe, and visualized space in my chest (where I most often "feel" God) to hold it close as I went along with my life. It is a reflection I regularly come back to, and focus on as a motivation to quiet my life, be still, and know God. I think these "snow globe" moments are something we can all capture.

What creative prayer practice could you share with others?

Get messy. Try something new. Follow your intuition. Seek meaning, even if you look silly in the act. Spend time taking in your surroundings and be open to what God's

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saying through your environment. Prayerfully knit or garden or do dishes, and find symbolism in the everyday. Bring awareness to your body, or dance, walk, or swim as a reflection with God. Make cards or bake or visit others when you see needs. Embrace your learning style and the language of your heart (what feels most comfortable) to interact with God. God has no limits. And God SO desires to just BE with us. Make room. ■



CARING AND PRAYER

With Bev Whitmer



Beverly has learned over the years that the donut and bagel cart has another, less obvious role in the lobby . . . as a place to leave prayer requests. Bev Whitmer plays this dual role, as a long time Care Circle member, and the friendly face behind the donut and bagel cart most Sundays. Rachel talked to her recently about the two unique ways she serves at Cedar Ridge.

How did you first get involved in Care Circle?

When we joined Cedar Ridge, in about 1994, I tried out different ways to serve in the church. I started out in the elementary school kids, 4th grade, I believe, and it was not the right fit. I realized they knew more than I did! So I went to helping in the nursery, rocking the babies. Then Ginny and Ian McLaren, who were the first people to greet me when I first visited Cedar Ridge, invited me to join Care Circle. [Care Circle is a prayer group that prays regularly and confidentially for needs and requests and for the staff and volunteers at CRCC. They write and send cards with notes of encouragement to people who are ill, in long-term care facilities, in the military, away at college, or welcoming a new baby.]

I was so lucky, because there were no better mentors than they were. Ian and Ginny would invite us to the pool, or picnics. Their generosity and hospitality brought a lot of people together. They were a blessing to so many people.

How about your most famous role as the Donut Lady?

I think it's been about 18 years since I took over the "role." It's a great way to serve. I get to greet people, see new and old faces, and best of all, there's no homework! I just need to call in how much cream cheese we need on Saturday and that's it. I sometime feel like Lucy [from Charlie Brown], "Get your bagels and donuts here and leave a prayer request."



What's the value you've seen over the years of praying for and with other people?

Praying with people creates a deeper spiritual connection. It's brought me closer to people. Both the people I pray with and those I pray for. It's a blessing and it's a privilege to pray for other people. It's also made me more compassionate and empathetic.

There are times that life can be so miserable, you are in so much pain, or you are going through emotional or spiritual struggles and you just can't pray yourself. I've gone through times like this before and I've heard other people say this too. "I just couldn't pray." Knowing other people are praying for you, interceding on your behalf, it brings comfort.

When my husband Lester went through surgery recently, we had so many people praying for him. He's recovering so well. They set about to heal his neck, but he also has less pain in his knees and legs now. The neurologist called it a "surprise blessing". When you hear about what people go through, and hear and see the surprise blessings that God brings about, that's a learning experience. It has been very fulfilling to be in Care Circle.

Do you have anything else you want to share?

I wanted to leave you with this verse. It's my wish for myself and others to live out. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." - Philippians 1:21

What does that mean to you?

Imagine every waking moment that you are living out God's plan for you. You are completely surrendered to the Lord. Any minute you are ready to go; you are always looking forward to being with the Lord. It would be incredible to live that way. Looking forward to being with Christ, with no fear of going. That's how Christ desires us to live. ■





COUNSELING AND PRAYER

With Roger Sandberg



Roger and his family have been attending Cedar Ridge since 2000. He can be found preparing coffee or praying with others on Sunday morning in his role as a prayer servant. Roger Sandberg is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, which made him a great person to talk to about counseling and prayer. In his interview with Sarah Burke, he discusses the concept of mindfulness as a prayer practice.

When you consider the topic of counseling and prayer, what comes to mind for you as a professional counselor?

The idea that comes to mind for me is a practice that has been gaining a great deal of traction in the counseling field, known as "mindfulness."

Can you share more about what mindfulness is?

"Mindfulness involves paying attention, on purpose and with kindly acceptance, to our current experience" (*A Brief Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation*, by Roger Hyam). It is not so much thinking about our current experience, but is better described as feeling or experiencing our current experience. Mindfulness is more than a special kind of concentration. It involves developing a calm, focused attention, from which insight begins to form and develop, much like someone might experience in prayer.

Would you say, then, that mindfulness can be used as a prayer practice?

If we see prayer as communication between God and us, then the mindful awareness of being filled with God's presence seems to fit very much within the realm of prayer. Shaun Lambert, in his book titled, *Book of Sparks: A Study in Christian MindFullness*, writes that transformation comes through what he calls, "MindFullness" – the practice of being filled with the awareness of the presence of God."

Where do you see the linkage between the practice of mindfulness and prayer?

The linkage between mindfulness and prayer comes through prayer practices such as Lectio Divina, The Jesus Prayer, Breath Prayer, The Welcoming Prayer, and Examen. These are all prayer practices that require mindfulness in order to allow them to impact and transform us. Of course, mindfulness can be practiced without any spiritual component.

From your perspective, is there a preference toward the

concept of mindfulness over prayer in the realm of counseling?

The use of mindfulness in counseling is not to say that there is not a place in counseling for what we would see as traditional prayer. Some important questions regarding prayer in counseling include whether or not prayer should be used in any particular counseling context. If so, when and how? Someone coming in for counseling may have had negative experiences in church, or with Christians in the area of prayer. For example, some Christians may inadvertently (or intentionally) promote a sense of guilt or shame, declaring a person as lacking faith if their prayers aren't answered, or if a person doesn't pray "enough." If a counselor were to suggest or prescribe prayer in this context, it might be a negative experience for the person receiving counseling. The other side of this is that sometimes a counselor praying for their client can be a rich, meaningful experience where the person feels very cared for.

Prayer can be very influential in counseling. Praying for someone is a meaningful way to connect with the person, as well as to ask God to intervene on their behalf. My concern is that the counselor not use prayer as a way to "preach" to the person or give them advice. For example, saying something like, "God touch Sarah's heart and do your healing work in her. Show her how much you love her," is a lot different than, "God touch Sarah's heart and show her where and how she has strayed from you. Help her to return to you." My guess is that you would feel supported and cared for by the counselor and by God in the first example. In the second example, you might feel like God (and/or the counselor) is displeased with you, and that you have to do something to earn back God's favor.

Can you share an experience in which mindfulness was valuable in bringing about healing or growth?

I was working with a young mother in her mid-30s. She was a cancer researcher. She was very bright and hard-working, and was married with a 2 year old son. She came to see me because she was having great difficulty sleeping due to anxiety about many things (career, motherhood, marriage, family of origin issues—her mother died of cancer when she was in High School). She was taking a strong anti-anxiety medication every night to be able to sleep so that she could function the next day. She learned mindfulness, mainly in the form of Relaxation Breathing while bringing her focus into the present moment. She started to practice mindfulness

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nightly as she lay in bed trying to go to sleep. Within two weeks she had cut her anxiety med usage in half. Within a month, she had quit her anxiety med completely and was sleeping through the night. I joke that she is my “poster child” for mindfulness.

A second scenario involves a man in his 40s who was a Christ follower. He was dealing with moderate depression and anxiety. He learned mindfulness and guided meditation/visualization. He described his use of these tools as helping him actually connect with Jesus in a very experiential way. In other words, he came to experience Jesus loving him. He began to feel in his being that Jesus loves him, not just know this intellectually. This eventually led to his feeling better emotionally because he felt loved and accepted by Jesus, just the way he was.

Can you share how you would guide someone through a mindfulness prayer exercise in facing similar issues in their own lives?

For me, mindfulness begins with the breath. When I begin a mindfulness exercise I start by slowing down my breathing. This is what I teach people to do to start cultivating mindfulness:

This breathing is sometimes called diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing, or relaxation breathing. In order to slow down our breath we need to breathe more deeply, allowing our upper and lower lungs to fill with air. If we take a slow, full breath of air, the lower lobes of our lungs will fill up with air, causing the diaphragm muscle to extend downward, which pushes our stomach out. We can slow down our breath by inhaling slowly for a period of time (for example, 5 seconds), then exhaling slowly for the same period of time (5 seconds). As you are doing this, start to pay attention to the breath. What do you notice as you inhale? For example, I notice that the air I inhale is cooler. What do you notice as you exhale? I notice, for example, that the air is warmer when I exhale.

Mindfulness means paying attention to, or *being mindful* of something—in this case, your breath. You can also notice anything else that might be going on in your body. For example, you might notice tension in your neck and shoulders, or clenching your jaw, or tightness in your chest or stomach. Don’t try to relax those, just notice them relaxing.

You will also notice your mind being distracted with other thoughts: “What’s for dinner?” “I have to pick up my daughter from her play date,” etc. It is normal, human nature for your mind to be distracted. Don’t judge yourself when it does, just notice it and return to your breath. Do this

for 2-4 minutes. I recommend doing it 3-4 times per day, and or whenever you are feeling particularly stressed or anxious.

As a Christian, you can add to this exercise by meditating on a spiritual notion such as “God is love,” or “peace,” or “joy,” or you can utter prayers to God as you are breathing slowly. You can also meditate on a short passage or partial passage of scripture. Some ideas might include:

“God is love.”

“His love endures forever.”

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.”

If you practice this type of mindfulness meditation a few times per day, it will become easier and easier to do, and you will likely notice your thoughts and feelings about yourself, your life, and God changing for the better over time.

A guided meditation and visualization can fit in with the mindfulness explained above. Dr. Curt Thompson, in his book, *Anatomy of the Soul* (pg 143), has a guided meditation that has made a significant difference in my life. This meditation is based on the retelling of Jesus’ baptism by Luke in chapter 3: 21-22. I have reproduced it below:

Take a deep breath and begin to imagine yourself in a physical environment that is peaceful and calm. You may visualize yourself beside the ocean or a lake, in a forest or a meadow, or surrounded by mountains—anywhere that exudes beauty and



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A Closer Look at



By: Kevin Richardson

By this time of the year, most of us have given up on our New Years resolutions. At the start of the year we had decided this would be the year that we would exercise more or stop drinking sodas or eating sweets. During the season of Lent, many Christians decide to make some of the same changes. But Lent is more than denying one's body of chocolates or fast food for 40 days.

Lent is a time to examine our inner spiritual life, a time of reflection, repentance and meditation. It's a period of 40 days that comes before Easter in the Christian calendar. We observe the 40 days of Lent and replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert as written about in Luke 4:1-13:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

When the devil tried to tempt him with the very thing his body craved—food, Jesus reminded him of the scriptures. In verse 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

Even as the devil repeatedly tempts him, Jesus answers using the scriptures, setting an example for us to follow when we are tempted. We should turn to the Word of God to direct our steps. In verse 8, Jesus says, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

This season is called Lent because that is the Old English word for spring, the season of the year during which it fell. This is something unique to English. In almost all other languages its name is a derivative of the Latin term Quadragesima, or "the forty days." Just before Lent, at Cedar Ridge Community Church we often celebrate Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day, a day observed for centuries in many churches. Some suggest it was originally a Pagan holiday that celebrated the arrival of spring, before the Christian era. Some believe pancakes have been traditionally eaten on Shrove Tuesday to use up foods like eggs and milk before the 40-day fasting period of Lent began. Traditionally, the Tuesday before Lent begins is a day of self-examination to consider which sins an individual should repent of during Lent. The term Shrove Tuesday comes from the word shrive, meaning to confess.

After Shrove Tuesday, we observe Ash Wednesday the start of Lent and the 40-days, by fasting from certain food or a bad habit. But Jesus taught that fasting should be done discreetly:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to

men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen. (Matthew 6:16-18, NIV)

Lent should not only be a time of fasting and boasting of one's sacrifice. We should follow Jesus' example and focus on scripture, prayer, interceding, helping others and preparing our hearts for Easter. When Jesus was tempted during his forty days, he turned to the scriptures. When he was offered the things of this world that would turn him away from God, he looked to the scriptures. Whether you observe Lent in a small or major way, you'll be amazed at what happens when you devote a part of each day to reflecting on Jesus Christ and God's word. ■



Photo: Kevin Richardson has been attending Cedar Ridge since 1997 and currently serves on the Board of Trustees.

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF LENT

By: Melanie Lynn Griffin



I love Lent. I know some people dread it — the darkness of the season, the talk of our bodies returning to ashes and dust, the focus on sin and repentance and sacrifice. The Bible verse often associated with Lent (Joel 2:12-14) is certainly no bowl of cherries: "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." And it all leads up to that darkest of days, Good Friday. Ugh, right? Easter can't come soon enough.

And yet I see Lent as a time of great hope and expectation. It's a time when we get to press the re-set button, a time to step back and take stock of our lives and decide how we want to change. It's humbling to admit how much we "miss the mark" (sin), yet empowering to know that we have the power to change!

Lent encapsulates my favorite part of the Cedar Ridge vision statement: "Imagine a community of peace and safety where it's possible to shelter from the frenzied pace of life, in order to slow down and explore the mystery and meaning of our existence; where we can take time to address the roots of our anxieties and pain; a place of hope where we can find help and healing and the power to change, no matter how desperate our situation."

In Isaiah 30:15, God tells Israel how to access this transformational healing power: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." And then God laments because the people "would have none of it." They "flee on swift horses" from God's prescription for repentance and rest, quietness and trust.

If I'm honest, I have to confess that I spend a lot of time on swift horses, seeking meaning and significance and avoiding inner dissonance by going and going, doing and doing. Lent is my time to dismount and to accept God's promise of salvation and strength through rest and repentance.

Spiritual practices can help us open to divine grace and guidance during the Lenten season, which this year

stretches from Ash Wednesday on March 1st to Maundy Thursday on April 13th. Fasting is commonplace during Lent, foregoing a luxury, habit, or activity that takes up time or mental space and replacing it with an intentional turn towards God. The point is not the "sacrifice" of caffeine or chocolate or Facebook, it is the resulting time spent meditating on the Bible, taking a morning walk, or listening to music that touches your soul.

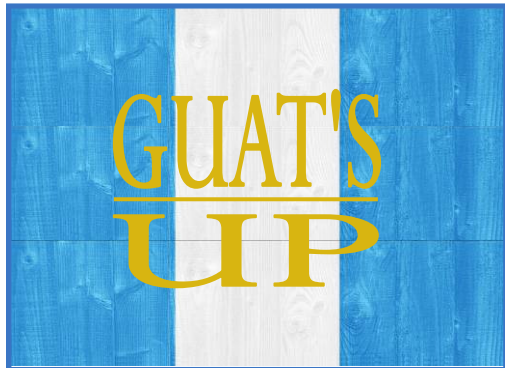
The point of a Lenten sacrifice is to seriously reflect on an area of your life that you would like to change and then consider what practice you might engage in that would help you move towards that change. The point is not the practice, it's the transformation.

The surest way to open your heart to God's gentle guidance and to the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit is through prayer, and that's why we are devoting the season of Lent to a teaching series on the meaning, purpose, and power of prayer.

I'm planning on creating a simple prayer altar for the season. I'll put it on my dining room table so that I'll be reminded to pray and reflect during every meal. I'll include a candle, rich colors and textures, natural objects, and a few items that hold meaning for me, such as small icons, several special crosses I've picked up in my travels, and the prayer of Saint Francis.

Why not make a prayer altar for your own home? At the very least, will you make a forty-day Lenten commitment to come to church every Sunday (on time, even!) and to attend a Discipleship group and try the prayer practices we'll be offering?

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Holy Week in Ipala

By: Gina Richardson

Each year our friends in Ipala participate in the strikingly beautiful and traditional observance of the Easter Holiday. Starting on Ash Wednesday, weekly celebrations continue throughout this 40-day period and get more elaborate leading up to Easter Sunday. During this festive season, colorful church processions parade through the streets in which the Passion, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus are commemorated.

Semana Santa (Holy Week) is a very special time for the people of Ipala as they celebrate their faith and culture. Schools are closed as well as many businesses. On Palm Sunday there are processions through the

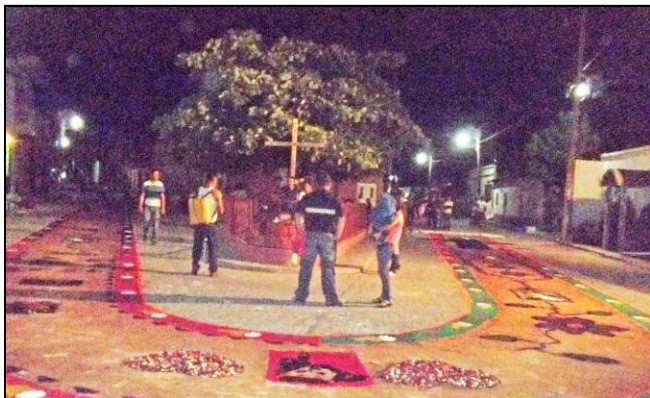
streets with men, women, and children singing and carrying palm branches to commemorate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. There are men dressed in purple robes and hoods, carrying floats with large sculptures of Jesus on their shoulders.

The figure of Jesus is adorned in a different color for each day of the processions during Holy Week.

Residents along the route often create elaborately designed carpets of pine needles, flowers, fruit and colored sawdust in the

street for the people to walk over. On Good Friday the figure of Jesus is blind-folded, and the ceremony includes a re-creation of the 14 Stations of the Cross. Early Easter Sunday there are joyous marches and church services celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

Thanks goes out to our friend Rosa Alidia for providing photos and details of Holy Week in Ipala. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

You can see Ipala first hand this August (5th-14th) with a team from Cedar Ridge. Learn more at the Informational Meeting after the service on Sunday, February 26 in the barn. Contact Bryan Peterson if you can't attend but would like to find out more. ■

... PERSPECTIVES CONTINUED

Begin by coming to the Ash Wednesday service and receiving the cross of ashes on your forehead to remind you that “you came from dust and to dust you shall return.” We have only a short time here on earth to become the unique people that God created us to be. Let’s live fully into this transformational season of Lent! ■

Photo: Melanie Griffin is a member of the Pastoral Team at Cedar Ridge.



... INSIDE STORY

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tranquility. Allow yourself now, in your imagination, to take a few moments to be aware of your surroundings, simply taking in what you sense, visually, tactilely, and audibly.

Next, allow yourself to sense God’s presence. There is no right or wrong way for God to appear or be revealed. You may even perceive God physically to the point of being in bodily form.

Now, if you are a woman, imagine hearing God clearly saying to you directly, calling you by name, “You are my daughter, and I do so love you. I am so pleased with you and that you are on the earth.” If you are a man you would imagine hearing something like, “You are my son whom I love. I am so pleased with you and that you are on the earth.”

Sense if you can, God looking you directly in the eyes as he says these words. Do not turn away from God’s gaze. Do not resist God’s voice. Allow yourself to be in God’s presence for several minutes. Do not leave this place in your mind quickly. What do you feel? What do you feel God feeling as God looks with tenderness and strength into the windows of your soul?

Remember that people have different reactions to this exercise. There is, in fact, no right response, only a true one.

Try this daily for six weeks, and see if it impacts your relationship with Jesus. ■

For Further Reading:

- Hyam, Roger. *A Brief Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation*, version 1.2. Available as a free digital download at <http://www.hyam.net/pamphlet>.
- Lambert, Shaun. *A Book of Sparks: A Study in Christian MindFullness*, second edition. Watford: Instant Apostle, 2014.
- Lambert, Shaun. *Putting on the Wakeful One: Attuning to the Spirit of Jesus through Watchfulness*. Watford: Instant Apostle, 2016.



The farm at Cedar Ridge produced over a ton and a half of fresh produce last year—feeding hundreds of people in need. We welcomed onto our property scores of volunteers who were new to Cedar Ridge, and we deepened relationships and laughed together as we weeded and harvested.

Although the farm team was very happy when Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow and predicted six more weeks of winter, time is now running out and it will be spring before we know it! Are you an avid gardener? An eager novice? Do you have a passion for addressing issues of hunger in our neighborhood? Do you have rubber boots and nowhere to wear them? If the answer to any of the above is: “yes!” we’d love to have you join the farm team this year. Shoot me an email (ruthc@crcc.org) or grab me at church (not too forcibly!), and we’ll answer all your questions and get you plugged in. ■

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- Link to our people directory (login required)
- Look for the "Cedar Ridge Community Church" app for your iPhone or Android and download it today.



Imagine a community that dares to dream of heaven on earth; a community where **everyone is accepted** and respected and their journey cherished, regardless of their background, beliefs or place in society; where **everyone looks out for the concerns of others** and **no one is alone**. Imagine a community of peace and safety where it's possible to shelter from the frenzied pace of life, in order to **slow down** and **explore the mystery** and meaning of our existence; where we can **take time to address the roots of our anxieties and pain**; a place of **hope** where we can find help and healing and the power to change, no matter how desperate our situation. Imagine a community of people devoted to following **Jesus together**, learning to live like him and **helping one another grow** in their relationship with God; where we are gradually **transformed** to become better people: better friends, better family members, better workers, better neighbors; **becoming people who enjoy life to the full** and who can also deal with adversity well, **learning to grow through failure and suffering**. Imagine that community scattered throughout the region around Washington, Baltimore and beyond **working as agents of love, peace and hope** wherever they are: **serving** our neighbors, **caring** for the poor, **helping** the oppressed. Imagine a community of people who **live simply** and ethically, who **share their land and resources** with their neighbors; a community that treasures the Earth and **reaches out** beyond global, cultural and political barriers to **offer friendship** and practical support.

Imagine a community of people who make the world a better place.



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