**DM Devotionals for remainder of October 2017**

**Monday, October 9, 2017**

A Rose is a Rose

Ross Putnam

“As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” Psalm 103:15-16

Everybody loves flowers. Perhaps you have a specific flower you like more than others. But do you know what about the flower you love the most? And what stage of the flower’s life span pleases your senses the most? It could be just as the plant emerges from the earth. Perhaps your imagination is grabbed by the wonder of how this tiny speck of green will bring forth a blossom. Or do your senses get triggered most by the full, delicate blossom? It is nothing short of miraculous that the same force of holy energy could cause mountains to erupt from the earth could also give us flowers.

There are parts of flowers which, as a general rule, do not elicit such wonder and thanksgiving. Consider the thorn of a rose. Or the flower’s leaves chewed to bits by little insects.

I will add here that I have a soft spot in my heart for the left overs flower shops accumulate. All those branches, stems and marred blossoms. They make wonderful compost. Or they can become a part of a bird’s nest or another animal’s den. The flower has purpose at each stage of life. This is a good thing to remember when dealing with people.

Too often too many people with disabilities are cast aside or not appreciated or encouraged just because society has decided along the path they do not have enough value to be celebrated.

This month is set aside for being aware of those who are disabled. Or it could be they look disabled but really are as functional as anyone else. No matter where we are in our lives, we are important parts of God’s creation. Our task is to help each other live fully into that gift and promise.

Prayer: Help us, O God, be the means to help each other reach our full potential as we strive to reveal and share the beauty of God’s creation. Amen

*Rev. Ross W. B. Putnam was ordained forty years ago in his hometown of Lyme, New Hampshire.  He served churches in Indiana, Connecticut, Vermont, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and California.  He self-published a book of original poems and art called “An April Shower of Poems.”  He is now writing a second book of poetry — this time about Parkinson’s disease with which he has been dealing for about twelve years.*

**Friday, October 13, 2017**

 Dismay, Diagnosis, and Delight

 Rev. Dr. Nadyne Guzman

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

You probably wouldn’t notice the first time you meet me, because I typically have a bright smile and an upbeat demeanor. There is no way you could know that my mind is racing and I may not be fully focused on what you are telling me. And I’m too embarrassed to tell you because I want you to think of me as a professional, intelligent woman. What you don’t know is that I have been diagnosed with Adult ADHD. And it’s likely you don’t know much about it, or that ADHD affects adults differently than it does children and can be misdiagnosed as “only” depression or anxiety. In fact, I was on antidepressants for over 12 years for depression that was brought on because I wasn’t able to sleep—and the sleeplessness was a factor in my ADHD. And the older I got, the worse my symptoms became. Now that I’ve been properly diagnosed and medicated, my anxiety is minimized and I seldom get depressed—unless I don’t sleep enough or eat regularly. But if you meet me on a day when I’m under more stress than usual, or I have several deadlines coming up, or I am overtired, you may notice my inability to recall words or I may ask you to repeat what you’ve said until I can really understand.

I wasn’t diagnosed until I was 66 and in seminary. I nearly had to drop out because my performance was being affected by the ADHD. I was confused, worried, and afraid that I would be judged as incompetent. Thank goodness for the young women who sat me down and told me firmly and lovingly I needed to get an appointment with a psychiatrist to get diagnosed. The Lord God was definitely with me that day! At nearly 70 years old I have been recently ordained as a minister in the UCC and I’m serving as a hospital chaplain. I’m giving thanks that, even with a disability, my gifts have been honored by others in the church, just as God has honored me with this Call to Ministry.

**Prayer:** Loving Creator, you are with me wherever I go—often in forms I haven’t anticipated. I am so grateful for the loving encouragement of friends and the blessing of ever-improving medical support. I give thanks that I have been able to answer my Call to Ministry, so that I may offer loving encouragement and spiritual care to those who live with challenges or who suffer trauma, serious illness, or loss. My heart is filled with your Grace. Hallelujah! Amen!!

*Rev. Dr. Nadyne Guzmán is an ordained minister in the Rocky Mountain Conference of the UCC.  She has served on the UCCDM Board of Directors and begins service on the UCC Board of Directors October 2017.  She is a chaplain at Sky Ridge Medical Center, Lone Tree, Colorado.*

**Monday, October 16, 2017**

People Say the Darndest Things.

 Rachel Chapman

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you.”  *Psalm19:14*

It always amazes me the things people say when they see me on my scooter, especially at a church function. “What happened?”  “I’m sorry you need that” and a personal favorite (NOT!), “I need one of those, can I borrow that?”…always followed by laughter. Recently at a church event, as I was opting to walk using my cane instead of the scooter, a gentleman (a minister, mind you) commented that it was nice to see me “upright.”  Admittedly, my first thought was something that should not be said in church but I settled for just saying, “Thank you.”

I understand that sometimes people want to show care and compassion but just don’t quite know what to say, so they may speak before really thinking it through. Disability tends to make people nervous. I’m not exactly sure why but I think it may go back to that “there but for the grace of God go I” thing.  Have you ever said that?  Have you really thought about it?  I admit that I have said it but now having been the person it’s been said about, I have a different perspective.

From my standpoint (and it is just my opinion), that speaker is saying that she/he is so privileged, so special, that they are blessed by God’s grace but the other person isn’t. Surely they must have done something ‘wrong’ to ‘deserve’ whatever it may be.  In today’s society we tend to think of and treat those who are differently abled as the other or less than.  And unfortunately our church membership can sometimes be the worst offenders. I have been to churches where I am totally ignored while those I am with are greeted with enthusiasm. I have also been to churches where I’m given too much attention such as being led down the center aisle to the front where it’s believed I’ll “be more comfortable.”  It’s as though my issue is my hearing instead of my mobility and making me walk further, in front of others, is going to fix that.

I challenge each of you, collectively and individually, to be mindful of those who enter your church, workplace or even home who may talk, walk, think, etc. differently than you. Talk to them as a person. Do not be stifled by worry of not being politically correct. Do not use words of judgement or pity. Just use words of compassion and kindness...words acceptable to God.

Prayer: Most Holy One, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you. Amen

*Rachel Chapman is a UCC Disabilities Ministries Board Member and currently lead on the Advocacy and Education Committee. She is an editor for the SCNC e-news magazine and a member of her Association’s Church and Ministry Committee. Rachel lives in Southern California with her husband, Kevin.*

**Friday, October 20, 2017**

Sidewalk Angels

 Rev. Ross W. B. Putnam

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

 Even when a wheelchair-bound friend pointed it out, I didn’t pay much attention to just how uneven sidewalks can be and how difficult to navigate. Then I became dependent on a mobility scooter and realized how significant the problem is.

 Granted, many improvements have been made in the travel ways for pedestrians and mobility-challenged folk over recent years. Sidewalks still not only have rough spots like cracks and missing or crumbling sections, they slope when crossing a driveway or intersecting a street.

 I was riding on one such sidewalk recently. My wife, Paula, and I had been out and about. Suddenly a number of factors conspired and before either of us could process it — let alone stop it — the scooter and I tipped over and landed at the edge of the travel way. It was, to say the least, a frightening moment.

 Convinced that I was alright (one could as easily say “embarrassed to be sprawled out at the edge of the street,”) I tried to get up. Paula tried to help, but given the positions of me and the scooter, getting up was proving to be a challenge.

 At that moment a vehicle on the street stopped. A man got out and after making sure nothing was broken, he helped Paula get me back on the scooter.

 There have been instances when I have encountered “challenges” and no “sidewalk angel” has appeared. This time one did.

 We live in what more than a few call divisive, self-centered times. We are witnessing attacks on various programs for the disabled; not the least of which is funding for research.

 It is enough to foster cynicism. On this day I witnessed just the opposite. The accident has made me more cautious for sure. That act of caring reminds me to give thanks for experiences of God being “a very present help in trouble,” and to do what I can to make that truth come to light in other people’s lives.

Prayer:

God, help us to be alert to those moments when we are open to your help being offered and ways we can bring that presence and reality to the lives of others. Amen

*Rev. Ross W. B. Putnam was ordained in the United Church of Christ forty years ago in his hometown of Lyme, New Hampshire. He served UCC churches in Indiana, Connecticut, Vermont, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and California. He self-published a book of original poems and art called “An April Shower of Poems” (available through him at* *rwpbest@att.net**). He is now writing a second book of poetry — this time about his living with a neurological debilitating disease for about twelve years.*

**Monday, October 23, 2017**

What does “Disabled Enough” Mean?

 Rev. Lynda Bigler

“The number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my People,” instead it shall be said to them, “You are Children of the Living God.”” HOS 1:10.

 In the disability community, there are some people who were born with disabilities who feel that in some way they are “more authentic than” those people who have acquired disabilities later in life. The belief is that those with acquired disabilities have not suffered enough. The belief is that those with acquired disabilities lack a depth of understanding about what having a disability really means. The belief is that people with acquired disabilities have a shallow activism, their advocacy insincere. The belief is that their theological views are those of the able-bodied who see people with disabilities as victims rather than survivors.

 Those acquiring their disabilities later in life do escape the bullying and teasing that people born with disabilities endure throughout childhood into teenaged years. However, they are often more likely to lose or become estranged from those who were once considered close family and friends who cannot accept that newly acquired disability status. People born with disabilities process their grief and anger about those disabilities in a very different way than people who acquire disabilities later in life. Those acquiring their disabilities later take an emotional crash course in grieving (which is revisited with each new symptom of progression), anger, and (hopefully) acceptance. Those born with disabilities have the “luxury” of spending their whole lives working through those things.

 But in the end, whether born with a disability or after acquiring one later, we are all left with a disability; our challenges and barriers may differ, but each of us faces them. Whether born with a disability or after acquiring one later, we all endure emotional damage and depression somewhere during our journey with a disability. Whether born with a disability or after acquiring one later, those of us who find God, worship the same God.

 Whether its race, ethnicity, gender orientation or ability related, no marginalized group should be subjected to discrimination within their own group. No group huddled along the margins should consider themselves to have higher value than another group because together, we are all at the margins, as numerous as the grains of sand in the desert or the grains of sand on a beach. Together, we are all Children of the Living God.

Prayer: Forgive us, O God, when people slip through our fingers like sand. Forgive us, O God, when the needs of others stick to us like mud, and all we want to do is wash it off. Forgive us, O God, when we believe others are of less value; remind us that from grains of heated sand comes glass, that glass can be colored, and that colored glass pieced together is beautiful. Help us, O God, to find a way to hold onto sand, love the messiness of mud, and see the future through stained glass – together.

*Pastor Lynda Bigler is a past member/chair of UCC Disabilities Ministries. After graduating from Yale Seminary she became the third person with a visual impairment to be ordained into our denomination since its American beginnings in the 1600’s. Pastor Lynda received the Virginia Kreyer Award at General Synod 31. Pastor Lynda lives in Portland, OR.*

**Friday, October 27, 2017**

Am I so wonderfully made?

 Dr. Kevin Pettit

“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Psalm 139:14

Dear God,

I have been reflecting on ***Psalm 139***, a song concerning your inescapability, pervasive knowledge, and power. As a child, I might have believed that I was “fearfully and wonderfully made”; however, as I have lived 50 years on this earth, I struggle to see how all my life’s “blessings” suggest your power, mindfulness, or even your very existence!

I struggle with this understanding of you especially on this date because it was 19 years ago that I was very seriously injured in an automobile accident. We were in our Subaru wagon driving my son to daycare and me to work as a physics professor at Carleton College when we were struck by a truck that was going more than 65 mph when it ran a red light. It hit the passenger side of the car, right where I was sitting! I was in a very serious coma for 11 days and a semiconscious state for two months. I spent half a year as an inpatient at two hospitals.

I suppose that I needn’t relate to you all my struggles that followed – my learning to eat, walk, and talk again, my efforts to teach physics again, and my attempt to act as a responsible, loving father and husband again. I needn’t explain to you how, because of my injuries, my marriage fell apart and ended in divorce, and my employer fired me. So, I ask you this: God, where was your presence on the morning of October 27th, 1998?

I struggled with this question for years and I stopped believing in you after being unable to find an answer… However, the ‘Divine Lure’ spoken of by Nikos Kazantzakis, your Cry, was never silent within me! After some years of contemplating the status that I would afford you, I realized that I needn’t reject you entirely; I needed to reformulate my conception of God and God’s divine process.

 Now, I can see you at work in the hands of the doctors who saved my life. You didn’t control their hands – that’s a juvenile understanding of you I embraced in my childhood. I understand now that the many doctors and therapists who helped me recover so completely were involved in the divine process of creativity and life enhancement. This process is you: you are relevant because you are the divine process of betterment and enhancement, the divine process of renaissance and evolution that works at all levels of creation. You are that which lures everything forward.

Because of this realization, I have chosen to serve you by helping faith institutions of any nature learn how to better invite, embrace, include and empower people living with disabilities into active lives in their communities. I suppose my efforts, in a way, have become part of what I understand you to be!

 I thank you for this opportunity to serve you!

---- Dr. Kevin Pettit

*Dr. Pettit is a Commissioned Minister in the Rocky Mountain Conference of the UCC*

**Monday, October 30, 2017**

Healing

 Rev. Ross W. B. Putnam

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Matthew 7:7

Flying to San Francisco was an experiment to see if it is feasible to travel with my mobility scooter. The traveling itself was no problem. Airport and airline personnel were — to a person — helpful. The weather, of course, is another issue. But you can prepare for that.

What I wasn’t prepared for was the Uber ride back to the airport. The car radio was tuned to a talk radio program. I asked what it was and the driver said it was a Christian program about the power of prayer.

Eventually the driver asked why I used the scooter. My answer — Parkinson’s disease — led him to ask if he could pray for me when we got to the airport.

I accepted this moment may be especially powerful. Maybe — just maybe — something was “supposed” to happen in that moment. So I agreed.

The car in front of us had a lot of luggage needing to be unloaded. We couldn’t move. So he began to pray. He rebuked the disease, commanded every vestige of the disease to leave and never come back. He called on the name of Allah, Abba, Elohim, El-Shaddai, Yahweh, Jehovah and Adonai.

It was the most intense, powerful prayer I had ever witnessed. This man was sincere. Of that there was no doubt.

We finally reached the curb. As I got out he suggested I try something which had been a challenge and then I would know I had been healed. I did and I wasn’t.

Then I began to think. What is ‘healing?’ Does it mean I would be sixteen again? Does it mean never experiencing physical problems till the day I die?

Or is it possible ‘healing’ means something else? Like gaining insight into the lives of those with ‘disabilities?’

My sense is that Bible stories of healing or getting what we want are, ultimately, stories about people being empowered to help others deal with difficult issues. In the dusty villages of Palestine or the crowded streets of San Francisco. So go out into the world asking, searching and knocking. Spirit will be with you.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us find and celebrate the moments of grace wherever they appear. Amen

*Rev. Ross W. B. Putnam was ordained forty years ago in his hometown of Lyme, New Hampshire. He served churches in Indiana, Connecticut, Vermont, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and California. He self-published a book of original poems and art called “An April Shower of Poems.” He is now writing a second book of poetry — this time about Parkinson’s disease with which he has been dealing for about twelve years.*