From your Valentine

St. Valentine was a priest who was executed around 270 A.D. There are many things we don’t know about this martyr, but there are numerous, sometimes conflicting, stories about his life and death. One says that he was slain for performing weddings in secret after the Roman Emperor, Claudius II, had outlawed them. Another legend says it was because he helped Christians escape from brutal Roman prisons.

In 498 A.D., just over 200 years after Valentine’s execution, Pope Gelasius declared February 14 as St. Valentine’s Day. Valentine’s love for God and humanity has made him “the patron of love” in the Roman Catholic Church and for people around the world.

By the mid-1700s it was common practice for friends and sweethearts to exchange trinkets made in the shape of hearts or to send handwritten notes of affection on Valentine’s Day. It’s believed that Valentine himself sent the first “valentine” while imprisoned. He is said to have written a letter to a young girl who visited him in prison just before his death. He signed the letter, “From your Valentine,” a sentiment still used today.

[Image above: VALEN17.TIF]

Awe-inspired wisdom

George Washington Carver, late in life, was asked by a writer what he thought was the most indispensable thing for science in the modern age. Carver replied, “The capacity for awe.”

The capacity for awe. What a strange thing for a scientist to say! Awe is what opens our finite minds to the infinite intelligence of God. Awe is what connects our limited hearts to the limitless love of the Lord. Awe is what helps us to see God’s glory in the sea and the land and the moon and the sun.

— Homiletics

Special dates

• African-American History Month, Feb. 1-28, 2003
• Boy Scout Sunday, Feb. 9, 2003
• Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week, Feb. 16-22, 2003
• President’s Day, Feb. 17, 2003

Lord, take my lips and speak through them, take my mind and think through it, take my heart and set it on fire for love of you.

— W. H. Aitken

Family life is the most influential factor in the formation, interpretation and support of children’s faith in God.

— C. Elise Nelson

The only assurance of our nation’s safety is to lay our foundation in morality and religion.

— Abraham Lincoln

A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination.

— Nelson Mandela

This is the miracle that happens every time to those who really love; the more they give, the more they possess.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

God is the Source without a Source.

— Matthew Fox

Love is the river of life in the world.

— Henry Ward Beecher

Words of welcome

(Feel free to use these in your worship bulletins.)

With pleasure we greet and welcome all who have gathered for this time of worship. May God’s presence be real, meeting us at our point of need. Please make yourself known to worshipers around you and to the leaders of worship.

A sincere welcome to all who have come to worship. In the spirit of the psalmist who wrote: “How good it is to sing praises to our God ...” (Psalm 147:1 NRSV). Let us lift up our minds and hearts to our loving Creator and Sustainer. May the incomparable blessings that come from God alone touch each of us.

With joy we welcome your presence among us today. Let the words of the psalmist set the tone of our worship: “Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name; joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:4-5 NRSV).

We welcome all who have gathered to praise God, whose promises to us are always fulfilled. St. Paul wrote: “In him [Christ] every one of God’s promises is a ‘Yes’ for this reason ... we say the ‘Amen’ to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:20 NRSV). So may it be!
How sincere are you?

Just how sincere are you? How honest, how pure, how reliable, how trustworthy are you? Think about those important characteristics and consider the original meaning of the word “sincere.”

Sincere is an old Latin word that meant “without wax.” It originated when ancient Romans needed a word to verify that a piece of porcelain or pottery was whole, without cracks or flaws which had been covered over with hot wax. Those wanting “sincere” pieces would hold the objects up to the sun to let the light shine through them to make certain they were not defective.

One suspects that the light of Christ shining through most of us might reveal embarrassing flaws in our character. Yet no doubt we would also discover that there was a lot of soundness as well. The goal is to move away from insincerity and hypocrisy and allow Christ to help us become completely whole and sincere.

As one who serves

Doris Cornett retired after many years of teaching and administering at a school. Not long after retiring, unwilling to simply sit doing nothing, she went to see the chief of police in her community. After introducing herself, she said to the chief, “You need me.”

Taken aback a bit, he answered, “I’m sure I do, but tell me why I need you.”

She knew why. Being a Christian, she saw many needs in her community. She suggested that the police department needed volunteers to help people who have troubles — a sudden death, a horrible accident, someone hurt by a crime, a family in tension, a stranger in need of help, a homeless person needing food and lodging, and so on.

The chief asked Doris to get a program organized, find and train volunteers, set up a communications system, and work with the police so that they would know what services her group could provide.

Today, several years after going to the police chief, Doris has 120 volunteers helping her. Furthermore, the program she envisioned and implemented has spread to other cities across the nation. These volunteers literally demonstrate the words of Luke 22:27 (NRSV): “I am among you as one who serves.”

Four things

Four things a man must learn to do if he would make his record true:
To think without confusion clearly;
To love his fellow-men sincerely;
To act from honest motives purely;
To trust in God and heaven securely.

— Henry van Dyke

The test

A young pastor, fresh out of seminary and new in town, stopped his car and entered a small “Mom and Pop” store. “Mom” was the only person there. The pastor ordered what he needed, chatted a bit, paid the lady, shoved his change into his pocket and returned to his car.

Later, when he took time to put the change into his wallet, he realized that the woman had given him too much money. He looked at it awhile thinking about the situation. Should he take time out of his busy schedule to go back and return the extra money? Should he bother to rectify the situation at all? He recalled other occasions in his life when he’d been given back too little change. Wouldn’t it all even out if he just kept the money?

Heeding his conscience, he drove back to the store to make things right. “You gave me too much change,” he said to the woman.

“I know,” she replied, almost as though it didn’t matter. “But you gave me $20.00 more than you should have.”

“I know,” she replied again.

“You knew that you gave me too much change?”

“Yes.”

“But why would you deliberately do that?” he asked.

Her eyes twinkled as she answered, “I know who you are and I know what you’re doing in town. I just wanted to see what you’d do if I gave you too much change. And you did the right thing.”

Loving kindness

A Sunday school teacher asked her class, “What do you think the Bible means when it speaks of loving kindness?”

“Well,” answered a young boy, “If I was hungry and someone gave me bread with butter on it, that would be kindness. And then if they put a spoonful of jam on it, that would be loving kindness.”
The effect of crisis on worship

Church leaders were hopeful that the crisis of 9/11/01 would increase attendance at worship services. And during the days and weeks that followed that horrible day of death and destruction, there was a measurable surge in church attendance.

But the Associated Press has found, that just six months later, there was a change in the trend:

- In March 2001, six months before 9/11, 43 percent of Americans went to worship weekly.
- Six months after 9/11, in March 2002, just 40 percent of Americans regularly attended church.

One reason for this drop in attendance, according to Heather Morton of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, is that during a crisis, people look to religion for comfort. But when life becomes more normal again, the need for meaning and comfort fades.

—Based on an article in The Arizona Republic by Jaimee Rose

A mission statement

The mission of this church is to be a people faithful to God. We pledge ourselves to seek the mind of God and to serve God in every manner possible by thought, word and deed. We vow to invite others to join us in acknowledging and spreading the incomparable Good News of Christ here and throughout the world. “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen” (Revelation 22:21 NRSV).

Something a little extra

Wilfred Grenfell (1865-1940) was an English medical missionary famous for his work among the fishermen and Eskimos in Labrador. He built nursing stations and hospitals, helped establish cooperative stores, schools, libraries, orphanages and agricultural centers. He was well known for his compassion and concern toward people in need, especially in the cold rugged land of Labrador. It’s reported that inscribed on his little black medical bag were the words: “Be kinder than necessary.”

Bible Quiz

There are several names in the New Testament given to the followers of Christ. Below are hints about some of the names. Fill in the blanks. If you’re stumped, use an NRSV Bible to find out what letters are missing.

D __ __ __ __ __ __ s (Acts 6:7)
C __ __ __ __ __ __ s with the S __ __ __ __ s (Ephesians 2:19)
S __ __ __ __ __ __ s and S __ __ __ __ __ __ s (1 Corinthians 4:1)
C __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ s (Acts 11:26)

Other names for the first believers were: The brethren (1 Thessalonians 4:9,10, also translated as “brothers and sisters,” See NRSV); believers (Acts 5:14); witnesses (Acts 1:8); God’s own people (1 Peter 2:9).

Our unfailing helper

A young pastor preached about Christ healing the man with the withered hand (Matthew 12:10).

A few days later, the pastor visited a man who had suffered a stroke that had left him with a withered arm and hand. This man had heard the pastor’s sermon and said to the pastor, “I know of no one who can touch and heal me, but I can tell you one thing. I have learned that Christ is the only one who can help me deal with it. Others are nice to me, but Christ is the only one who can really help me.”

Because of the depth of his faith, the man had found healing for his spirit and thus could handle the weakness of his