

Devotions for the Second Week of Lent, March 2-6, 2026

Monday of Lent 2 – Prayer of the Week

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

As I pray this prayer this week, I think of an old friend who years ago lay wasting away on a hospital bed. I had been his pastor for some time. He had been one of those men who showed up to help on work days, always cheerful and always ready to lend a hand. Now, we all knew that he had weeded his last flowerbed, at least on this side of eternity. He would never again fix that leaky faucet in the men's bathroom. I doubt the faucets ever leak in heaven. The illness which would take his life had laid waste to his body, but his mind remained with him. More importantly, his faith remained with him. He had come, in these final weeks of his life, to long for Jesus.

We pray in this prayer that God, by His mighty power, would defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body. How is it that my friend lay stricken in his body? Had God not heard this prayer for my friend? Hardly, but he planned to defend him from this disease and death itself by resurrection. That is the moment God uses his mighty power to defend, rescue, and save my friend.

We also ask that God defend us from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul. These are surely the greater but more subtle threats to us. The Lord surrounded my friend with a faithful spouse, good friends, loving children. He was still subject to all the frailties of our human condition, temptations to self-centeredness, covetous greed, and anxious fears. But God had steeled him and protected him. Baptismal promises, incarnate Word, and a net of Christian fellowship had protected him and caught him when he stumbled. He peacefully breathed his last in faith and we rejoiced and wept at his funeral. God hears this prayer. Pray it earnestly.

Tuesday of Lent 2 – Genesis 12:1-9

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to

the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

“I just had to do something,” she said. My friend had witnessed a terrible scene in which a man had publicly abused his wife. We were dealing with the aftermath of her “doing something.” In this case it had been aggressively standing up for this abused woman and calling the fellow on the carpet for his cruel words. Bullies can be hard to dissuade and often do not take kindly to people pointing out their misbehavior, especially when it is directed toward a spouse. It had not gotten violent, but anger was simmering just under the surface of conversations.

God called Abraham to action. He was to pick up his home, family, belongings, everything, and move to a land which God would show him. I have often wondered what that call looked like. I rather doubt it was a disembodied voice speaking from a cloud. God can do that, but He does not often do that. Usually, it is far more mundane and frequently a little ambiguous. Did a man or woman confront Abram and tell him to go? Was it a crisis in Haran? Did he get a letter from someone there who needed him?

My friend was called to act on behalf of a poor woman that day. She heeded that call and acted. How does God call you today? Does He confront you with suffering or violence to move out of your complacency to help someone? That is what happened to my former parishioner who confronted the abusive man. She had to do something; it was a call. Has he planted within you a compassionate response to someone else’s needs? Has he opened your eyes to see an opportunity for the kingdom to come, or for God’s will to be done in some way. God is in the calling business, not the forcing business, at least not yet. That day of judgement and power comes. Until then He calls us. How does He call you today?

Wednesday of Lent 2 – Psalm 121

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

We read these words at baptisms and funerals, especially those last two verses. Those two events are part and parcel of any pastor's life. He pours the water of life over the heads of human beings, especially children, and reiterates this promise made to us all. God commits Himself to us. At funerals the preacher says it again, but this time in the confidence that the promise is kept and the Lord has watched over this person's departure from this life and entrance into heavenly glory. As a pastor, it is my honor to speak these words at both the going out and going in of a person's life.

It so happens that as I wrote these words I was preparing for a baptism and a funeral in close proximity to each other. One day I held a young life in my hands. Less than a week later I joined my parish in putting our arms around a woman who grieved her husband. Both days were marked by these words. Our hope for this young life is shaped by this promise. Our grief at the death of a husband, father, brother, and friend is encompassed in a promise of eternal life and God's careful attentiveness to this promise.

This season of Lent brings us back to the very essence of our faith. We need this God who watches over our comings and goings now and forever more. I may be able to get out the door to the grocery or even to work, but that going out and coming in of death and eternal life is utterly beyond my ability to control or direct. I need the Lord to watch, both in the mundane comings and goings of life, but also in the great exit and entrance to come.

Thursday of Lent 2 – Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

There is a form which pastors fill out on a regular basis. It is an information form which the District President uses as he is considering call lists for congregations. Toward the end of the form, it asks if you have received any honors or awards. When I filled that out for the first time I was somewhat taken aback by that question and pondered it. It is an uncomfortable question for a Lutheran to answer in any case, but particularly for a Pastor. What is an honor which a pastor might receive? At the time there was a little girl, about 7 years old, who gave me a hug after church without fail. She and her family would walk by as I shook hands with congregants after the service, and she would throw her arms around me and give me a hug. I put on the form that I got a hug from Katie every week. That was the honor that mattered most.

When Paul wrote of boasting in this passage from Romans, he used that word in a first century Roman context. For us the word is almost always negative. My parents did not want me to boast. But Paul means something more akin to filling out a resume here. In the Roman context boasting was listing out your accomplishments on your CV or job application. It was a way for the world to know who you are and if you were qualified to do something. If Abraham was justified by works, he would have an item to put on his resume, asserted Paul. But not before God. You see, if you live a perfect life, one in which you do not sin, you still have not done anything special in God’s eyes. A perfect life simply means you have met the minimum requirements.

Paul’s point is brutally clear. God is not rewarding or honoring us for what we have done. Rather, God is graciously including us in His family by uniting us with Christ, His only Son. That is a reality which is ours not through doing something but through believing God’s promise to us, trusting that God has done this thing. Abraham still has nothing to boast about, except as Paul says in Galatians, except in Christ crucified for him (Gal. 6:14)

Friday of Lent 2 - John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the

kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The first baptism I ever performed was on a recently retired man. He had been married to a Lutheran for 40 years at that point. He had attended confirmation classes with his three sons and after each of them the pastor had offered to baptize him. Each time he had declined. Finally, I have no clear idea why, shortly after I started my first call, he said he was ready. His wife cried. She had been praying for this for their whole married life. We celebrated this decision with some great whiskey. A few days later he, his family, and some friends were there for his baptism. He went on to become a wonderful member, generous with his time and wisdom. I miss him.

Jesus meets at night with Nicodemus, a member of the Pharisees. Nicodemus is afraid of what others will say. He has questions, but Jesus seems to say that he is rather thick about some of this. But a careful reading of the Gospel suggests that Nicodemus was on a spiritual journey which began in the middle of the night in chapter 3. In the middle of the Gospel, Nicodemus rather timidly expressed some doubts about the Sanhedrin’s desire to have Jesus killed (Jn. 7:50). By the end of the Gospel, this same Nicodemus will join Joseph of Arimathea in openly and bravely claiming Jesus’ body from the cross. He has changed remarkably over the course of this book John has written, but it took some time.

Too often we imagine that coming to faith is an instantaneous thing. It surely is that way for some folks, much more often, however, it happens slowly, almost imperceptibly. Nicodemus took quite a while. Jesus is very patient. The man I baptized not long after I arrived at my first parish had been invited and loved into Christianity over a long marriage. It took time. Do you have a friend whom you pray that he or she may come to faith? Be patient with Jesus. Love that person today as you are able. Jesus uses you, your words, your deeds, to call and call. His Spirit is gentle. It may take a while. You will not argue them into the faith. You might love them into the faith.