



Adapted from the Breakthrough Sermon Series *Through the Valley: A Lenten Series on Lament* © 2023 United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania & Greater New Jersey

Greetings,

The United Methodist Church defines Lent as “a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. Today, Christians focus on relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others.”

As we begin this season of Lent, I pray that you take the time to observe a holy Lent in whatever way that may look for you. I encourage you to be purposeful in your time with God and to help with that, I offer to you these scriptures as a stepping point for your Lenten Journey. I pray that they help you to meditate on and solidify the weekly themes that correspond with our sermon series.

Each week begins with an opening prayer, focus statement, quote, questions to consider, and a closing prayer. All of this is based on a common theme for the week. While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Sunday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic. I also encourage you to revisit the opening and closing prayer each day to help begin and end your devotion time.

Again, I pray that this time of preparation is meaningful for you. I pray that God will bless you during this season and help you to experience the endless love that was poured out for you. And finally, I pray that whatever you choose to do and however you plan to spend this Lenten time, that it be meaningful for you and brings you even closer to God.

Blessings,

Rev. Zachary Hopple

**Please note: all readings within the devotional are from the NRSV translation.*

Week of Ash Wednesday (Wednesday - Saturday)

OPENING PRAYER: O God, maker of every thing and judge of all that you have made, from the dust of the earth you have formed us and from the dust of death you would raise us up. By the redemptive power of the cross, create in us clean hearts and put within us a new spirit, that we may repent of our sins and lead lives worthy of your calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. Ash Wednesday focuses on the dual themes of sin and death in the light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

QUOTE: “God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.” - Pope Francis

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What does Ash Wednesday mean to you? What does Lent mean to you?
2. What can you do to observe a holy Lent?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Adapted from the Communion Liturgy Prayer of Confession)

Merciful God, I confess that I have not loved you with my whole heart. I have failed to be obedient. I have not done your will, I have broken your law, I have rebelled against your love, I have not loved my neighbors, and I have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive me, I pray. Free me for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Wednesday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic.]

Ash Wednesday - Feb 14, 2024

Psalm 51:1-17

Prayer for Cleansing and Pardon

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy,
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Thursday - Feb 15, 2024

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Friday - Feb 16, 2024

1 Peter 3:18-22

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight lives, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Saturday - Feb 17, 2024

Matthew 4:12-17

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

**Please note: all readings within the devotional are from the NRSV translation.*

Week 1 - Why Lament?

OPENING PRAYER: God of joy and sorrow, help me in this time to listen to you to make space for all the thoughts, questions, and feelings that might arise. Give me courage to trust that you can handle it all and meet me in every circumstance. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: In Lent, lament invites us to face our humanity. Lament is a natural part of our faithful, loving response to a world marked by sin and brokenness.

QUOTE: "Nobody knows the trouble I see, nobody knows but Jesus; oh, nobody knows the trouble I see, glory hallelujah!" - African American spiritual

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Is it hard for you to express emotion as part of your prayer to God? What allows you to feel safe enough to express emotion? Do you notice you tend to move through lament too quickly?
2. The psalms (as well as some other scriptures) are texts we pray together as community. In what ways can the church hold space for lament? Is it hard for your church to lament together? Why or why not? If it does not already, in what ways can you encourage your church community to include lament as part of its spiritual practice?
3. What are some ways you can show support or comfort to someone who is going through a period of lament in their life?

CLOSING PRAYER: Faithful God, I thank you for this time. I thank you for the example your scripture gives that shows me how to be honest with you, even in my deepest pain. Help me to grow in honesty and trust and also to make my church a place where others can safely cry out to you too. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Sunday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic.]

Sunday - Feb 18, 2024

Psalm 13

Prayer for Deliverance from Enemies

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Monday - Feb 19, 2024

John 11:31-33

The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

Tuesday - Feb 20, 2024

Psalm 102

Prayer to the Eternal King for Help

A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the Lord.

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

let my cry come to you.

Do not hide your face from me

in the day of my distress.

Incline your ear to me;

answer me speedily in the day when I call.

For my days pass away like smoke,

and my bones burn like a furnace.

My heart is stricken and withered like grass;

I am too wasted to eat my bread.

Because of my loud groaning,

my bones cling to my skin.

I am like a desert owl of the wilderness,

like a little owl of the waste places.

I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.
All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
Indeed, I eat ashes like bread
and mingle tears with my drink,
because of your indignation and anger,
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.
My days are like a lengthening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it;
the appointed time has come.
For your servants hold its stones dear
and have pity on its dust.
The nations will fear the name of the Lord
and all the kings of the earth your glory.
For the Lord will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.
He will regard the prayer of the destitute
and will not despise their prayer.
Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord:
that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die,
so that the name of the Lord may be declared in Zion
and his praise in Jerusalem,
when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to serve the Lord.
He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
“O my God,” I say, “do not take me away
at the midpoint of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations.”
Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away,
but you are the same, and your years have no end.
The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

Wednesday - Feb 21, 2024

Amos 5:1-8

Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel:

Fallen, no more to rise,

is maiden Israel;

forsaken on her land,

with no one to raise her up.

For thus says the Lord God:

The city that marched out a thousand

shall have a hundred left,

and that which marched out a hundred

shall have ten left.

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel:

Seek me and live,

but do not seek Bethel,

and do not enter into Gilgal

or cross over to Beer-sheba,

for Gilgal shall surely go into exile,

and Bethel shall come to nothing.

Seek the Lord and live,

or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,

and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

Ah, you who turn justice to wormwood

and bring righteousness to the ground!

The one who made the Pleiades and Orion

and turns deep darkness into the morning

and darkens the day into night,

who calls for the water of the sea

and pours it out on the surface of the earth,

the Lord is his name,

Thursday - Feb 22, 2024

Jeremiah 4:7-8

A lion has gone up from its thicket;

a destroyer of nations has set out;

he has gone out from his place

to make your land a waste;

your cities will be ruins

without inhabitant.

Because of this put on sackcloth,

lament and wail:

“The fierce anger of the Lord

has not turned away from us.”

Friday - Feb 23, 2024

Psalm 22

Plea for Deliverance from Suffering and Hostility

To the leader: according to The Deer of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night but find no rest.
Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
But I am a worm and not human,
scorned by others and despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they sneer at me; they shake their heads;
“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”
Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is no one to help.
Many bulls encircle me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they bound my hands and feet.
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me
but heard when I cried to him.
From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!
All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.
To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Saturday - Feb 24, 2024

Psalm 23

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.

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Week 2 - Lament and Honesty

OPENING PRAYER: Gracious God, may your Spirit move in me today, nudging me into openness with others and with you. May this time with you be one of learning, growth, and encouragement. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: The first scripture this week is from the book of Job. Job's response to his friends ensures us that we can be honest with God in even the most painful situations, trusting God to be God in the process.

QUOTE: "Prayer is not a place to be good, it is a place to be honest. Prayer is not a place to perform, it is a place to be present. Prayer is not a place to be right, it is a place to be known. Prayer is not a place to prove your worth, it is a place to receive worth and offer yourself in truth." – Kyle Strobel

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How does Job's willingness to confront God honestly challenge us as people of faith in our own prayers and relationship with God today?
2. How do we as people of faith deal with the question of why bad things happen to good people? What are some things you've personally learned about what is helpful and not helpful to say people going through hard times?

CLOSING PRAYER: Holy God, you are truth. Thank you for being with me in this time I as I consider the themes of honesty and faith. Help me to remember that you already know me better than we know myself. As I learn this, help me to trust you with all I have and all I am so that I can become a more faithful follower and grow in relationship with you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Sunday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic.]

Sunday - Feb 25, 2024

Job 13:1-13

“Look, my eye has seen all this;
my ear has heard and understood it.
What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
But I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to argue my case with God.
As for you, you whitewash with lies;
all of you are worthless physicians.
If you would only keep silent,
that would be your wisdom!
Hear now my reasoning,
and listen to the pleadings of my lips.
Will you speak falsely for God
and speak deceitfully for him?
Will you show partiality toward him;
will you plead the case for God?
Will it be well with you when he searches you out?
Or can you deceive him as one person deceives another?
He will surely rebuke you
if in secret you show partiality.
Will not his majesty terrify you
and the dread of him fall upon you?
Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defenses are defenses of clay.
“Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.

Monday - Feb 26, 2024

Proverbs 12:22

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,
but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Tuesday - Feb 27, 2024

Proverbs 19:1

Better the poor walking in integrity
than one perverse of speech who is a fool.

Wednesday - Feb 28, 2024

John 8:32

And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

Thursday - Feb 29, 2024

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Friday - March 1, 2024

1 John 3:18

Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.

Saturday - March 2, 2024

Proverbs 6:16-20

There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:

haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that hurry to run to evil,
a lying witness who testifies falsely,
and one who sows discord in a family.

My child, keep your father's commandment,
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

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Week 3 - Lament and Surrender

OPENING PRAYER: Ever-present Lord, open my heart and mind to your wisdom as I study the Scriptures. As I open myself up to you, guide me from where I am to where you are leading me. May your Holy Spirit guide this time and inspire me to surrender my own desires and concerns to your perfect plan for my life. I thank you for your love and presence in all seasons of life. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: Jesus did not always love his options and in the midst of lament, he still freely chose to surrender to God.

QUOTE: “We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can - namely, surrender our will and fulfill God’s will in us.” - Saint Teresa of Avila

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What practical steps can I take to cultivate a deeper prayer life and become more willing to surrender to God’s will, even during my personal struggles? How can I apply the lessons from this passage in my daily life to face my own trials and difficult decisions with a spirit of lament and surrender?
2. How can I support and pray for others, just as Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray with him in his moment of need?
3. In what ways can I engage in acts of service or outreach to demonstrate surrender and obedience to God’s will in my community?

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, I am grateful for the example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. His unwavering surrender to your will in his time of deepest distress inspires me to do the same. May I find strength in surrender and comfort in my laments, knowing that you are with me through every trial. Please guide and empower me in prayer and help me remain steadfast in faith. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

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Sunday - March 3, 2024

Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Now the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. Look, my betrayer is at hand."

Monday - March 4, 2024

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Tuesday - March 5, 2024

Galatians 2:17-21

But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Wednesday - March 6, 2024

James 4:7-10

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Thursday - March 7, 2024

Jeremiah 10:23-24

I know, O Lord, that the way of humans is not in their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.
Correct me, O Lord, but in just measure;
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

Friday - March 8, 2024

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Saturday - March 9, 2024

Matthew 26:39

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want."

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Week 4 - Lament and Community

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, I come today with so many concerns on my heart. There is so much in this world and my own life that causes despair. Help me lift my voice with the assurance that even in the darkness, I am not alone. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: When we recognize or experience injustice, crying out together in words and actions can move us closer to God's vision for humanity and stir us to make change.

QUOTES: "The collective wail reminds us that we are not alone. The sheer power and resonance of a grief-stricken chorus reminds us that we are beings of quantum potential. We still have agency in every cell of our being, enough to survive—even this!" - Dennis K. (Center for Action & Contemplation)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What are some of the ways your community can offer space for communal lament to happen? What keeps you from engaging in lament together?
2. What would be the hope that might come out of sharing our lament alongside one another?
3. As we move closer to Holy Week, discuss one way your church community can come together to lament. (For example: A Community Prayer Vigil or a Healing and Anointing Service)

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, I am grateful for this time together to acknowledge my grief, my fears, and my deep concerns for so many situations in this world. Help me to walk alongside of others...to lift our voices together. Help me to remember in both my joys and my deep sorrow, I am never alone. Amen.

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Sunday - March 10, 2024

Esther 4:1-5

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why.

Monday - March 11, 2024

Galatians 6:1-2

My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Tuesday - March 12, 2024

John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Wednesday - March 13, 2024

1 Peter 4:1-8

Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.

Thursday - March 14, 2024

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Friday - March 15, 2024

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Saturday - March 16, 2024

Psalm 133:1

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!

**Please note: all readings within the devotional are from the NRSV translation.*

Week 5 - Lament and Hope

OPENING PRAYER: Holy God, I give you thanks for this time I have to spend with you. Though we face trouble and challenges in our human condition, we also want to remember the hope you have promised us. I need help to do that sometimes – to look for the hope and to rely on the hope. I want to love you and trust you with everything I have, but often I get in the way. Please clear a path for me to see your faithfulness in a new way today. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: In a world of “either/or,” lament can bring us to a more honest place of “both/and.” We can both reckon with the full weight of our sorrows and experience hope in our faithful, loving God.

QUOTE: “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” - Desmond Tutu

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What words can you say to yourself when you need to remind yourself of God’s faithfulness?
2. We know family and friends who are going through difficult times. What are some ways we can offer hope? What can we say or do? How can we point them to the hope that comes from God?
3. It only takes a minute or two watching the news or scrolling on social media to see the despair and trouble of our communities and the world. How can the church change that narrative? How can the church highlight the good in the world without ignoring the bad? How can the church be a beacon of hope?

CLOSING PRAYER: Holy God, you are my light, not just at the end of the tunnel but in the tunnel as well. I need to rely on your faithfulness to give me hope. I need to allow you to show me your new mercies every morning. Please change my eyes to be like yours, my thoughts to be like yours, my heart to be like yours. As I learn to see, think, and love more like you, may I become a messenger of your goodness and your hope to this broken and hurting world. Amen.

[While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Sunday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic.]

Sunday - March 17, 2024

Lamentations 3:19-24

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

Monday - March 18, 2024

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tuesday - March 19, 2024

Psalms 130:5

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

Wednesday - March 20, 2024

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For our slight, momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Thursday - March 21, 2024

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.

Friday - March 22, 2024

Psalm 42:11

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Saturday - March 23, 2024

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

**Please note: all readings within the devotional are from the NRSV translation.*

Week 6 - Lament and Action

OPENING PRAYER: Ever-present God, the events of Palm Sunday hold despair and hope together. May I listen for your Spirit as I cry out to you in lament, and may my crying out open my eyes to see how I can act with compassion and courage as Jesus did. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT: While facing reality can sometimes cause us great pain and sorrow, Jesus shows us how this important step can lead us to necessary, God-seeking action.

QUOTE: “Despair and hope. They travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take—despair at what in our madness we are bringing down on our own heads and hope in him who travels the road with us and for us and who is the only one of us all who is not mad.” - Frederick Buechner

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How can fully grieving and lamenting your losses or injustices prepare you to move forward in ways that bring change for you as an individual?
2. What losses or injustices does your church need to lament to be able and ready to move forward?
3. What is the role of lament in our commitments toward social holiness and actions for justice?

CLOSING PRAYER: Empowering God, I have witnessed Jesus weep and lament for the pain and injustice in his world, and I have witnessed how lament moves him into action. As I learn from him and follow him, give me the hope I need to pour out my pains before you and the courage to act for justice with compassion in response. Amen.

[While the questions may focus on the first scripture (Sunday), the following days help to reinforce the weekly topic in new ways. Feel free to meditate only on the scriptures each day, or refer back to the questions and see if the daily scriptures change your view on the topic.]

Sunday - March 24, 2024

Luke 19:41-48

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Monday - March 25, 2024

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Tuesday - March 26, 2024

Hebrews 9:11-15

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

Wednesday - March 27, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,
“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Holy Thursday - March 28, 2024

John 13:1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Good Friday - March 29, 2024

Matthew 27:45-51

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

Saturday - March 30, 2024

John 19:30-42

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth, so that you also may continue[b] to believe.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.