



# Lenten Devotional

First Christian Church | Grace Presbyterian Chapel

San Angelo, Texas

2024

## FORWARD



A minister once told the story of a church in need of funds to help others in their community, and the church decided to sell fried chicken dinners to raise the money. The church easily reached their goal and quickly decided that they hold the fundraiser every year. Over time, they began to become so busy preparing chicken dinners that they completely lost sight of why they had begun the fundraiser in the first place. When the minister neared the end of telling this story, he simply asked the congregation, "Are we just cooking chicken?"

Lent is a time for us to contemplate our relationships with others and most importantly with God. What changes do we need to make this year during Lent so that we won't just be "cooking chicken?"

Our hope is that the devotionals written by members of First Christian Church and Grace Presbyterian Chapel will help you find purpose on your Lenten journey.

# Ash Wednesday, February 14

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:10-12)

Ash Wednesday is the day when the journey toward Easter begins. It is a day of preparation -- and the very beginning of preparation at that. All of the Lenten season is focused upon preparation for Easter. Ash Wednesday is about how we can begin those preparations. It is "to make a right beginning of repentance," as the Book of Common Prayer puts it, and, by observing it, we are reminded of "the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith."

We honor this holy day by meditating on these reflections:

- Jesus reminds us that repentance (true regret) can include sackcloth and ashes. The ashes from last year's palms remind us that although we may have received Christ enthusiastically at the beginning of our Christian walk, we have perhaps lost our first love.
- Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to examine again our need for a Savior right now, today. Have we forgotten that our need is daily?
- As Ash Wednesday begins our voyage through Lent, we are also aware that our final destination is Easter Sunday -- a high, holy day about far more than a commemoration of the past. It's also about a future filled with hope.

There are riches waiting in Ash Wednesday. No matter how we mark the day, whether with ashes on our forehead or with reflection on the meaning of Easter, Jesus invites us to journey on to Easter Sunday with Him.

Merciful God, As the holy season of Lent begins, turn my heart towards you. Throughout this season, let the fleeting mark of ashes remind me of the call that you have placed upon my life. And every day till Easter, may my repentance be sincere; may my prayer be open to your grace; and may my giving be generous and open-hearted. In the name of your holy and precious son, Jesus, the Christ, we pray. Amen.

## Thursday, February 15

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant. (Psalm 25:1-10)

Psalm 25:1-10 expresses some of the most central and important theological themes in the Bible: dependence on God for protection from enemies (verses 1-2); requests for God to direct and teach (verses 4-5); confession of sin and cries for forgiveness (verses 6-10); and confidence in God's abiding presence and faithfulness (verses 6, 10).

Psalm 25 begins with a reference that indicates dependence and humility. It indicates that we should be open to God's grace, leadership, and direction. The outstretched soul does not depend on self but on God. As verse 3 makes clear, however, it is not a petty or purely personal plea. Rather, the psalmist asks God to set everyone's opinion in order according to faithfulness to God. Verses 4-5 then show that the psalmist's dependence on God is intended to lead to a right way of life. Verse 6 asks God to "remember" God's faithfulness in the past. It asks specifically to recall "mercy" and "steadfast love." In verses 7-10, the psalmist asks God for forgiveness and guidance and affirms God's gracious instruction. We have all had transgressions in our lifetime. It would be good to know that God forgives us for those and continues to lead us in loving and faithful ways.

**Prayer: Father, help us to be open always to Your grace, leadership and direction. Amen.**

## Friday, February 16

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but, having their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, be sober in everything, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

This letter is one of four letters that Paul wrote and are included in the New Testament. Timothy, who received two letters, is from a mixed family. His father was Greek, and his mother was Jewish. Because his mother and grandmother were believers in the Christian community where Paul was preaching, Timothy was introduced to Paul and later converted to Christianity by Paul. Timothy had a good reputation with the early believers, so Paul set out to groom him for preaching the word to all the house churches. Paul even circumcised him so that his credibility with the Jewish Christians would make him more acceptable as he traveled about preaching.

The key verse here in 2 Timothy 4 is verse 2: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” The charge to Timothy from Paul was to stay on message and to stand firm in his teachings to reveal God’s truth. No matter how tough things got, Timothy had to teach the Word to Jews and Gentiles alike in order for Christianity to spread. The message for us today is just as clear as it was in Timothy’s time: “Preach the Word.”

**Prayer: Holy God, bless us with the will to preach the Word in good times and in bad, with love and patience. Help us to strengthen believers who have become disillusioned through false teachings. Help us to help our brothers and sisters find the Holy Spirit within them. Amen.**

# Saturday, February 17

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:12-13)

Today is my father's birthday. He is 94 years old, living and still sharp as a tack. This is so even though since childhood he has suffered from the pains of a vascular problem in his foot. Fortunately, in the 1930s and 40's, a San Antonio surgeon performed multiple miraculous surgeries to reconstruct his veins, saving his foot from amputation which was the usual solution of that day. I believe this surgeon's talents were guided by Jesus to enable my father to live a full life, even with some pain and limitations. (His current doctors marvel at the work of this surgeon from over 80 years ago.) Today's Bible readings are just so very applicable to my father's life. He has been the recipient of the same miraculous physical reconstruction as the paralyzed man in Matthew 9, as well as the saving of his soul by the mercy of the Triune God.

I am so blessed to still have my father as an example and mentor. He is certainly human and imperfect, that is just to say he is also a sinner. However, he remains an example of a courageous, spiritual and faithful servant. For 94 years he has experienced a multitude of the challenges that this world can throw our way; but his trust in the Lord has not faltered. (94 years times 52 Sundays per year totals 4,888 Sundays. I can easily say that he has physically attended a Lutheran Church service on over 4000 Sundays in his life.) Moreover, my father has never been dishonest about the fact that he is a sinner, that I am also a sinner and that every man is equally a sinner. One of his favorite sayings is that "everyone puts their pants on one leg at a time." Beginning from a very young age, I was correctly taught that neither money nor power would make me a righteous man and that I should fear, love and trust in the Lord above all things. Psalm 32 verse 10: "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him." My Dad is a kind man and many people in this community have told me how kindly he treats everyone. I think others can witness from his persona the unfailing love surrounding him. Happy Birthday Dad!

In his explanation of the First Commandment, Martin Luther states that "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." This explanation has served me well, but only because I know Christ desires mercy, not sacrifice, and Christ came to call us sinners! Amen... and Amen.

# Sunday, February 18

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." (Mark 1:9-11)

Imagine this scene: Standing in the turbid river is John the Baptizer – shaggy bearded, dressed in animal skins, wild-eyed, and scruffy-looking. On the muddy riverbank, stand the onlookers, some dripping water from being baptized, others still dry and perhaps contemplating the advisability of getting into the river with this strange-looking man. Murmurs can be heard among the crowd. Then, Jesus steps forward into the river. John dunks him, and, as Jesus rises from the water, suddenly the clouds split open, and a dove descends to land on him. Conversation ceases, and a heavenly voice says to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased" (vs. 11) Wow! What a declaration! What a vote of confidence! Some people on the shore probably wonder just what Jesus has done to get such accolades, and the Bible doesn't give much information about what Jesus has been doing in his life up until this event.

However, maybe that is the point here. God declares love for and approval of Jesus without consideration of whether he has done miracles or even good deeds. God loves Jesus simply because he is God's child, and, because of the goodness of God, each of us is God's beloved child also. We may not get a declaration of that status with clouds parting, doves descending, or a voice from heaven, but we can rest assured that we are loved by the God who made us and is pleased with us simply because we are God's child.

**Prayer: O God who created us, thank you for making us your children. Help us to love others who are your children also. Amen.**



# Monday, February 19, Part 1

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and of sound mind.  
(2 Timothy 1:7)

You may have seen the common statement that the phrase “do not be afraid” appears in the Bible 365 times. Well, that’s not exactly true, but it does show up a lot. Search BibleGateway.com, and it cites 70 times. The various writers of the Bible must have known about our tendency to fear, or they wouldn’t have had so many entreaties against it.

Since Lent is often used as a time to give up things that separate us from God, maybe fear is one of the things we might strive to lessen in our lives. Of course, through the centuries, the church itself has used fear as a motivator of faith by promoting a fear of God, fear of hell, and fear of eternal punishment. It works for some but sadly misses the message about a God of love and grace. Are we to fear a punitive God, or are we to love a God of love?

Other fears may find their way into our thinking and feeling. Maybe one of the biggest might be the fear of new ideas and of change - in our individual lives, our culture, or our organizations. After all, a revamped sanctuary might open us to the possibility that we could lose our pews in order to make the largest room in our facility more available for other uses than just worship 2 hours per week. Then there’s the fear of uncertainty and loss of control (until we realize that almost every facet of our lives involves being uncertain most of the time, and the things we think we control, we usually don’t). Then there’s the fear of ideas that challenge our beliefs and might force us to discover why we think we believe them. And fear of the idea that we might have something to learn from those with whom we may disagree. Now that’s scary stuff!

Fear is a common topic in the Bible, but, if you search for “love,” it shows up 686 times. If we could only remember: “Live in love and God lives in you, because God is love...There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.” (1 John 4:16-18)

As this is being written, a sermon series on fear and fearlessness is to start soon and will be fresh on your minds. Let us embrace the challenge not to let fear control us.



## Monday, February 19, Part 2



### Anthem by Mark Nepo

Yes, you fell down.

I feel for you, for I have fallen many times.

Now, you must get up. I know it isn't easy.

I know it will take time.

Remember, the seed can't imagine breaking ground.

And the fledgling can't imagine flying.

And so, your broken heart can't imagine  
finding its way

But life is this repeating journey

from sleep to wakefulness,

from blindness to sight,

from fear to love

No matter how many times we fall,

we are just beginning.

Amen.

# Tuesday, February 20, Psalm 77

## God's Mighty Deeds Recalled.

To the leader: according to Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

I cry aloud to God,  
aloud to God, that he may hear me.  
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;  
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;  
my soul refuses to be comforted.  
I think of God, and I moan;  
I meditate, and my spirit faints. **Selah**

You keep my eyelids from closing;  
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.  
I consider the days of old  
and remember the years of long ago.  
I commune with my heart in the night;  
I meditate and search my spirit:  
"Will the Lord spurn forever  
and never again be favorable?  
Has his steadfast love ceased forever?  
Are his promises at an end for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be gracious?  
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" **Selah**

And I say, "It is my grief  
that the right hand of the Most High has changed."  
I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord;  
I will remember your wonders of old.  
I will meditate on all your work  
and muse on your mighty deeds.  
Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is so great as our God?  
You are the God who works wonders;  
you have displayed your might among the peoples.  
With your strong arm you redeemed your people,  
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. **Selah**

When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.  
The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered;  
your arrows flashed on every side.  
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.  
Your way was through the sea,  
your path through the mighty waters,  
yet your footprints were unseen.  
You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

## Tuesday, February 20, Part 2

Although I'm not a scholar in any sense of the word, I see Psalm 77 split into 3 sections. First, the writer cries out to God for help in his time of distress. He laments his current situation, most likely some type of defeat or military setback. You can feel the deep longing for God and God alone when he says, "I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted." You can feel the depths of his distress when he states, "I was too troubled to speak." Have you been there?

Secondly, he moves into questioning, "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Have you been there?

Last, the writer remembers. He draws on what he knows about God. He states, "Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples." The writer refers to nature's response, "The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed..." Do you remember who God is? When the dust settles, do you draw on scripture, a time you've seen God work in the past, or maybe your church family to remind you?

As we prepare our minds and hearts for Easter, we remember the night Jesus was crucified. Nature also responded that evening: "The earth shook, the rocks split, and tombs broke open." In that dark night of lament, uncertainty, fear, and questioning, there was a new day coming soon, in three days to be exact. A day we were all made new, in Christ. Many of us are hurting, grieving, and in a time of distress. Some of us may be questioning too, but, as we wait for Christ to return, let us remember Christ's resurrection. Let us be made new each day, and let us allow God to guide us, just as he led his people by the hand of Moses and Aaron so long ago.

**Heavenly Father, we come to you with humble hearts -- hearts that are hurting, grieving, and questioning. We remember your greatness, your faithfulness, your love. Please make us new each day as we wait for your return. Amen.**

## Wednesday, February 21

...“It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

(Matthew 4:4)

The Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness to be tested, tempted, and humbled. This account in Matthew, Chapter 4, is not the first account of God doing this. God placed the Israelites between Pharaoh and the Red Sea; He led them to undrinkable water; and He made them wander so long that they ran out of food.

Even Jesus wasn't immune to the temptations of Satan. Those temptations were an evil attempt to subvert God's plan by causing Jesus to fall into sin and disobedience which would have disqualified Jesus as the sinless Savior. But Jesus wore the full armor of God. (Ephesians 6:10-18). The verses in Matthew 4:1-11 prove how tenacious and devious Satan can be. Jesus responds in verse 4 by linking his experience to Israel's in the desert when God tested them through hunger and the provision of manna.

In verses 6 and 7, Satan quotes from Psalm 91 with a blatant misuse of Scripture to try and manipulate Jesus. Then in verses 8 and 9, Satan attempts to get Jesus to break the First Commandment. Jesus resists Satan and stands firm on God's word, setting an example for Jesus' followers (James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:9).

Jesus endured all his earthly trials as a fully human man, but he still retained his status as God's son. The 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness mirror the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. Matthew repeatedly connects the experiences of Jesus to that of Israel. We all will probably have to endure some form of testing. The pressure of surviving this test does not depend on our human strength. God gave us victory through Jesus and we have guidance through the Holy Spirit.

**Prayer: Please, Lord, give me the wisdom to walk away when I am tempted and the clarity to see the way out that You will provide. Amen.**

## **Righteousness through Faith**

But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. Through what kind of law? That of works? No, rather through the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also? Yes, of gentiles also, since God is one, and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then overthrow the law through this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:21-31)

As we read in these verses, God does not make a distinction between the Jews who are under the Jewish law and the Gentiles who have not been brought up under the Jewish law, yet believe in God through their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul, the author of this letter to the Romans, is instructing the recipients that God wants all people, Jew and Gentile, to be welcomed in his kingdom. All are sinners and need God's love, grace, and redemption through Jesus Christ. He rescues us from sin and its penalties and makes us whole. We are forgiven of our sins.

Paul tells them that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Furthermore, Paul tells the Romans that God justifies circumcision by faith (Jews) and uncircumcision through faith (Gentiles). Righteousness attained through faith is acceptable without having to follow the letter of Jewish law. Righteousness is the key to humans' relationship with God.

**Prayer: God, thank you for being an inclusive God. Help us to follow your example and include all people in our worship of you. Thank you for your grace and your redemption through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

# Friday, February 23

You who fear the Lord, praise Him! (Psalm 22:23a)

...but he has not hidden his face from him, but heard when I cried.  
(Psalm 22: 24b)

Early in the morning of July 5, 2023, my life forever changed. My daughter Kathy, 63, passed away into the loving arms of God. She had been ill for a while and was ready to meet God.

God blessed us and showed compassion by providing comfort, prayers, and blessings that Rev. T J Shoop-York and Rev. Brenda Church provided during this time. Thankfully a friend was with me, also. We were so blessed with you as a church and many friends to be with us. Thank you so much. GOD does shine through, especially in difficult times.

As we go through this Lenten season, let us remember that God always has mercy on us. We thank God for taking our sins away. God speaks to me: "I will always be with you." God always hears us.

This is one of the last prayers that Kathy put on her Facebook page:

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."  
(Psalm 51: 12)

**Prayer: LORD, we all run out of hope, of strength, of the will to do what is right. Help us today to trust one more time in You and Your plan for us. Thank You, LORD.**

## **Peter's Declaration about Jesus**

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.  
(Mark 8:27-30)

In this passage, Jesus asks his disciples "Who do they say I am?" Then he asks, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "The Messiah." Then, Jesus warns them not to tell anyone. This puzzled me. Honestly, it still does. Perhaps it would disrupt his timing. Maybe he wanted to fly under the radar, not drawing too much attention to himself. The more I think about it, I feel like maybe Jesus just wanted to allow others to come to know him for themselves.

I believe Jesus meets us right where we are, just as we are, and offers the opportunity to truly get to know Him. We get to experience Him for ourselves as the disciples did. That is just one of the many reasons our relationship with Him is so special. What a privilege it is not to have to hide to keep it a secret. We get to share the powerful name of Jesus and His wonderful love with everyone around us so they can also experience getting to know Him.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we give you thanks for giving each one of us the opportunity to get to know Jesus on our own, and we thank you for the honesty we find when we do know him intimately. May we work always to reflect this blessing which you have given to us. In Christ's holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.



# Sunday, February 25

## **Genesis 17:1-7; Romans 4:13-25; and Mark 8:31-38 & 9:2-9**

The Genesis scripture describes the covenant that God made with Abraham and Sarah to make them a multitude of nations. In Romans, Paul says that God's promise did not come through the law but through faith. In the Mark scripture, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection and the reality of his suffering, and he rebukes Peter as "Satan" when Peter argues with him, saying, "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

So, what do we do with all of that in this day and time? As followers of Jesus, we are inheritors of the promise made to Abraham and Sarah which was everlasting. Nothing was said about obeying laws made by humanity, but, rather, it is about living in faithful relationship with God, affirmed through faith and the love and goodness of God. It is the reason behind the law that is important, rather than the law itself. We can all think of examples where law made by those who consider themselves to be morally correct create "sin" and "sinners." Perhaps, it is more important to consider how faith in a God of love and grace calls us to behave. Those who plotted against Jesus were law-keepers. They thought they held the moral high ground and failed to see what was good and beautiful and true.

Thomas Aquinas writes that evil must disguise itself as good and, until Christians start understanding that, their capacity for "discernment of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10) remains minimal. Like Peter, we often fail with the temptation of my will be done, rather than God's will be done. In his book, Yes, and..., Richard Rohr says, "For most people, their only citizenship is here, and this is the citizenship they are defending. Not 'all of God's people,' but just 'my people, about which God cares most.' Whatever status quo benefits them is the full and final good... How foolish and how blind that is! Jesus showed no undue loyalty to his religion or his country, but radically critiqued both of them whenever they demanded to be worshiped."

Recently I watched the musical, Journey to Bethlehem, which Herod sings, "My kingdom come, my will be done, and Mine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." We all need to examine where our ultimate loyalty lies, so we don't hear Jesus say to us, "Get behind me, Satan!"

**Prayer: Loving God, as followers of Jesus grant us "discernment of spirits" and help us live in your kingdom above all others. Amen.**

## Monday, February 26

And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of the son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. ...And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. ...And the child grew, was weaned and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. (Genesis 27: 1-3, 6, 8)

If you are like me, you have wants and needs in your life. The most important of those reach the point of asking God for his help in fulfilling what we want or need. It seems as if much of the world we live in is unsettled or disturbing at least. Wars and rumors of wars, cultural changes that seem foreign to our thinking, financial uncertainty, and even changing weather patterns seem to come "at us" from all directions. Those things aren't all we deal with. Our personal lives seem unsettled: An unexpected death in the family, our own health, and worries about our kids and grandkids. The list seems endless.

In the passage above, God enables Sarah to conceive a son. He had promised, twenty-five years prior to this conception, that Abraham would have a son. Abraham was one hundred years old. The name Isaac means laughter in Hebrew. God has promised us that he will provide for us, that he will listen to us. Whatever worries or concerns we lay at God's feet, he hears us, He provides for us in his time and in his way. We may laugh at the timing. We may laugh at the provision. There is no doubt that whatever God's provision is for us, it's what we need and when we need it. Let's celebrate!

**Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your holy provision. Help us accept the blessings you provide and the timing in which you provide them. May we celebrate all that you have done for us. In Christ's holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.**

## Tuesday, February 27

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11: 1)

There are times when we all need a little encouragement. The pressures of life are real; none of us are immune, and on occasions, we can feel weary or discouraged. Sometimes we just need to be refreshed by taking a physical break and applying basic self-care. But there are occasions when one problem can leave us feeling spiritually weary. It is then, when our faith is tested, that perseverance is developed within us. Our strength to persevere is found by receiving and believing the Word of God.

Encouragement is defined as giving someone the courage and confidence to do something. This is often thought to be with kind and supportive words or maybe even practical help which are all a blessing. But true encouragement is found by drawing closer to God. It is here that we find our ever-present help, our refuge and our strength. Let us build ourselves up “in the faith” with the courage and confidence to trust God, through times of great need. One way of strengthening our faith is by remembering all that God has done for us – to remind ourselves of His faithfulness.

The scripture reading today is a call to draw near to God and to keep on preserving in faith, through remembrance of the reconciling work of Jesus.

We have been given this boldness and confidence to approach God, through faith in Jesus Christ. He has made the way, by his death and resurrection, for us to be reconciled to God. We can come to an approachable and relational God, who is attentive to us, because of Jesus’ sacrifice. What greater encouragement could there be of God’s love for us! We receive, by faith, a fresh revelation of His love, and renewed strength. For God’s Word promises that when we draw to Him, He will draw near to us.

written by Sharon Hazel

**Loving God, we come to you through hope, faith, and thanksgiving.  
In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

## Wednesday, February 28

Do you ever play the “what if” game with yourself? What if I had studied harder, listened to my parents more, made better choices? What if I had taken a different job or chosen a different career or worked harder? How would my life have been different? Would it be better? What would I change if I could?

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” (John 12:36a)

This verse was Jesus’ final instruction to the people before his crucifixion. Such a simple, yet profound teaching ... Now is the time to believe, don’t wait; now is the time to act. While it seems simple, faith is complex. In this scripture, we find the same struggles and challenges existed then as they do now. Even faced with clear and proven facts we might remain steadfast in our opposing beliefs. Maybe we don’t want to disagree with the status quo, or we don’t want to draw attention to ourselves by speaking out or sharing our thoughts. Perhaps we fear what others will think of us or we might face the very real act of persecution because of our beliefs and faith.

Yet, we have the benefit of knowing what came next, the benefit of hindsight. We can be reassured knowing that Jesus died for our sins and offers forgiveness even if we fail to be “children of light” sometimes. And as our belief in Jesus’ promise grows and strengthens, we begin to question ourselves less, become more assured of the future, and less concerned with the outside noise.

**God never said that the journey will be easy,  
but he did say that the arrival will be worthwhile**  
— Max Lucado

**Dear Lord, thank you for being the light that guides us as we travel through the daily struggles and challenges of life. Thank you for the joys, kindness and love that give us strength and encouragement. Help us to work through the fears that might slow us down or give us pause and help us to be strong in our faith when not all see or agree with our belief in you. Amen.**

## **God's Glory in Creation and the Law To the leader. A Psalm of David.**

The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their words to the end of the world.

(Psalm 19:1-4a)

I often find beautiful how everything gleams in sunlight, how the yard can be illuminated by the moon in the dead of night. Just the other day while driving, I cheered on the small bit of light trying to creep its way through a sky of gray clouds. I believe we can learn so much from nature and its resilience: the way the trees bend in fierce winds and yet, a few limbs lighter, stand strong again after; how plants boldly emerge from newly thawed grounds; how birds flock and migrate toward healthier, life-sustaining climates.

The Creator was so incredibly thoughtful in designing everything we know to be, and yet, sometimes I forget to stop and notice. I forget that I was thoughtfully designed and given purpose, created to better the world and dance along in joy with the rest of creation. This scripture reminds me to take a beat, to walk outside and get the sun on my face, to breathe in the wonder of this life and breathe out a prayer of gratitude, and to stand in awe of the Spirit.

**O Divine Creator, I thank you for this wonder-filled life, for the challenges and the rewards. I thank you for believing the world needed one of me. Show me how to live to better notice and honor you. Amen.**

# Friday, March 1

“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.’

“It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’ He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai and with our ancestors, and he received living oracles to give to us. Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.’ (Acts 7:30-40)

This speech from Stephen recounts the faith of our spiritual ancestors, as well as the stories of times when they turned their backs on God. Stephen was seized for people saying that he was speaking blasphemous words about Moses and God. This was not the case, and, when given the opportunity, Stephen uses it to tell of the faith struggle that we all sometimes face -- a struggle between fully believing and wondering what if or what might could be. Even Moses told God to find someone else, yet God had faith in Moses. As it was for Moses, faith can be a hard and challenging path, but, regardless of the struggles, God loves us and will give us strength to walk the path of faith if we let him..

**God of mercy, give us strength and help us to be faithful people.  
Bear with our doubts. Amen.**

## Saturday, March 2

The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their words to the end of the world.  
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes out like a bridegroom  
from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course  
with joy.  
Its rising is from the end of the heavens  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and nothing is hid from its heat.  
The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
But who can detect one's own errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.  
Then I shall be blameless  
and innocent of great transgression.  
Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

(Psalm 19)

As a former English teacher, I cannot help admiring the language and structure of Psalm 19. In relatively few lines, this song-poem moves from universal praise to personal reflection. In my Bible, Psalm 19 is attributed to David and is preceded by the directive "For the director of music." In the first section (verses 1-6), the poet describes the ways in which the natural world joyously proclaims God's power and glory as the Creator of all. The second section (verses 7-11) moves to more personal thoughts which consist of reflection on how knowing and following God's laws results in a life of "great reward." The third section (verses 12-14) becomes even more introspective as the poet recognizes that he has not always followed God's way and asks forgiveness for sins he may not even be aware of. Additionally, he asks God to keep him from committing "willful sins." In closing he asks that what he says and what he does will be pleasing to God.

I must admit my own prayers are never so beautifully written or so carefully structured. Could a pattern for prayer which moves my thoughts from the outside world to the inner world enhance my own prayer life? Psalm 19 calls me to reflect on this question.



# Sunday, March 3

## **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)

The practice of selling animals for sacrifice and the changing of money at the Temple probably started as a service for the people who traveled a long distance. It would have been extremely difficult to transport an animal for a sacrifice. Since people came from many different areas, their money would have been different. As time passed, it was obvious that these ventures were money-making. Greed entered in and the Temple became more of a marketplace than a House of Worship. Jesus' anger was to remind the people that the Temple, God's House, was a place to pray and worship.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves why we come to worship. Psalm 122:1 reads: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." When we attend worship, we are the participants and God is the audience. We are expressing our praise, love, and thankfulness.

We don't have a chaotic marketplace where we worship, but often our minds detract us from worshiping. Since Lent is a time to examine our relationships, especially with God, we need to spend time to make sure that we are truly worshiping God with our hearts and minds.

As my closing prayer, I am using a song that we sang to begin each Children's Worship and Wonder session.

**O God, we adore You. Lay our lives before you. How we love you.  
Jesus, we adore You. Lay our lives before you. How we love you.  
Spirit, we adore You. Lay our lives before you. How we love you. Amen.**

# Monday, March 4

Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
    sound the alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
    for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
    a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
Like blackness spread upon the mountains,  
    a great and powerful army comes;  
their like has never been from of old,  
    nor will be again after them  
    in ages to come.  
Fire devours in front of them,  
    and behind them a flame burns.  
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,  
    but after them a desolate wilderness,  
    and nothing escapes them.  
They have the appearance of horses,  
    and like war horses they charge.  
As with the rumbling of chariots,  
    they leap on the tops of the mountains,  
like the crackling of a flame of fire  
    devouring the stubble,  
like a powerful army  
    drawn up for battle.  
Before them peoples are in anguish;  
    all faces grow pale.  
Like warriors they charge;  
    like soldiers they scale the wall.  
Each keeps to its own course;  
    they do not swerve from their paths.  
They do not jostle one another;  
    each keeps to its own track;  
they burst through the weapons  
    and are not halted.  
They leap upon the city;  
    they run upon the walls;  
they climb up into the houses;  
    they enter through the windows like a thief.  
The earth quakes before them;  
    the heavens tremble.  
The sun and the moon are darkened,  
    and the stars withdraw their shining.  
The Lord utters his voice  
    at the head of his army;  
how vast is his host!  
    Numberless are those who obey his command.  
Truly the day of the Lord is great,  
    terrible indeed—who can endure it?  
Yet even now, says the Lord,  
    return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning...

## Joel 12:1-12

Sound the Trumpet for the day of  
the Lord is coming!

This sent out an alarm to all people  
in effect to quit pointing fingers at  
others and to make an effort to  
get their own “spiritual house” in  
order.

Do we assume that if we attend  
church regularly, give some  
money, make a donation to a  
charity now and then that we are  
good Christians?

What do you do from Sunday to  
Sunday? Do you show love,  
kindness, and compassion to  
others? Do you ask God’s  
forgiveness for your  
transgressions? Do you truly  
worship God by your actions as  
well as words?

“There are occasions when we,  
the people of God, need to  
conduct an audit of what is really  
going on in our own inner world  
and our relationship with God.”  
~Michael W. Marsh

**Prayer: Oh, God, we pray  
that you would help us find  
the true and meaningful  
relationship with you. Lead  
us to reject false teachings  
and help us to extend a  
loving kindness to all people.  
Amen.**

# Tuesday, March 5

## **Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin**

Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the holy place year after year with blood that is not his own, for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:23-28)

For the most part, I'm a fan of Martin Luther. However, there are a few things that he did in his lifetime that have me just saying, "What?..." For example, he was deeply entrenched in the belief that once a person became a Christian and accepted the gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, the individual would be able to live a sinless and blameless life. This however did not really work for Luther himself, which led him to do things like whip himself.

...What?

What I like about this passage from Hebrews is that the writer states that Jesus did not enter into the things made by human hands; he entered directly into heaven itself and won our salvation by defeating death through resurrection. This is because human hands will never be able to truly be blameless.

The hands of people require blood to be shed to purify the community over and over. The hands of God just need a stone to be rolled away to redeem the whole world.

**God, we thank you for this season of preparing for the stone to roll away. Thank you for loving us and restoring us to your side. May we never take that gift for granted. Amen.**

Marshall Breedlove

## Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves, and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'

But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him, for they were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. (Mark 11:15-19)

This passage has Jesus once again arriving in Jerusalem and going to the temple. Upon entering the temple Jesus proceeds to disrupt all the activities that are taking place in the temple which consisted of money changers and merchants selling their wares. Jesus is very adamant about making everyone, including the chief priests and scribes, understand that the temple was a place of worship and more specifically "a house of prayer for all nations."

Jesus wanted the people to understand that the temple was "the" place to worship God and as such should never be clouded by hosting other activities which could diminish the worship experience. He wanted people to understand that some of the former practices were no longer acceptable, i.e. animal sacrifices, because his message was about a celebration of a new life. Jesus wanted people of all walks of life to come to the temple to experience the presence of God without fear or doubt. The Jesus we know as a gentle, kind, and passive man is changed into an angry one who intends to make sure his authority is asserted. Because Jesus' time on earth is nearing an end, he has to be more pronounced with his teachings. Jesus' cleansing of the temple shows us how important our relationship with God is by being able to connect with him spiritually in the temple or place of worship. In this age, it is important for Christians to know that they have a place where they can feel safe, loved, and accepted as they practice their faith.

**Loving God, we give thanks for this church. Help us to have faith in knowing that you will not let us down, but that it is us who let you down. Help us to seek your guidance in our lives by working at it, being patient and consistent in our actions with you. Amen.**

## Thursday, March 7

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-17)

Chapter 9 of Genesis is about the covenant that God started, outlined, and guaranteed with the human race and all the animals of the earth. God made a promise to never again send a flood to destroy the whole earth. In addition, He gave humankind a “sign” of his covenant, a natural phenomenon called the rainbow.

The New Interpreter’s Study Bible (NISB) of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) states: “The Hebrew word is simply bow, which, except here and in Ezek 1:28, always refers to the weapon used by ancient Near Eastern soldiers and deities, including Israel’s God (Lam 2:4; Hab 3:9). Thus, the divine instrument of war and death, perhaps recalling the flood, is laid aside in the clouds and becomes the sign of peace and life assured in the covenant.”

In addition to giving us the rainbow as a sign of His covenant, God also uses it to remind Himself of the covenant. Verse 16 says, “And I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”

What a wonderful God we have! He decides to find another way to reconcile humankind to Himself (other than destroying everything and starting over with creation). He decides we are worth saving. He creates a covenant (or promise) and creates a way for both Himself and humankind to remember the promise.

**Prayer: God, thank you for being a loving parent. Thank you for wanting a relationship with each of us. Thank you for your love, grace, and mercy. Thank you for rainbows. Amen.**

Sarah Schulz

## Friday, March 8

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always... (1 Thessalonians. 5:15-16)

During this time of Lent, it is common for us to consider adopting ways to nurture our inner lives. Spiritual fathers and mothers throughout the history of Christianity have taught spiritual practices that help to "put a new and right spirit" within us. Often these include intentional times of silence, meditation, and prayer.

A reasonable question to ask might be: What is prayer for? What is its purpose or goal? I would posit that a purpose of prayer (similar, to me, to the purpose of worship) might be to connect with the Holy - both within us (immanence) and to something greater than ourselves (transcendence). In pursuing this connection to the Holy, what if prayer is not about praise or asking for things. What if prayer is not what you say, not even about words? What if prayer might include not saying anything at all?

A common, wordless form of prayer taught around the world is known as contemplative or centering prayer. An old traditional Christian practice, it has been popularized by teachers such as Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation and Father Thomas Keating. It is a form of prayer in which you are not saying, not doing, not thinking - just being in the presence of the Holy, simply sitting in intentional silence, open, awake, aware, communing, connecting with the Sacred.

The practice of prayer without words can include multiple forms. Jane Vennard's book [Praying with Body and Soul](#) has been helpful to me in understanding what prayer can be. She says it's all about our intention. Our activities become prayers if we approach that activity with the intent of knowing the Holy more fully. If it is my intention, then prayer is kayaking down the river observing nature, running on trails through the woods, reading poetry, walking the labyrinth, listening to music, playing in a band, singing in the choir, meeting friends at the brewpub after a downtown jog, or giving out food at our food pantry (praying with our hands and feet). It's prayer if I approach it with that intention - being open to finding the Divine in all encounters and all things.

When Paul encourages his churches to pray without ceasing in today's scripture, it's likely that he's not telling them to continuously be talking or thinking, but to live life as a prayer. Maybe he's teaching them to practice being in the presence of the Holy in all that we do. So maybe if we expand our understanding of prayer, it might open us to new possibilities. If prayer includes silence and stillness, movement, laughter and play, work and service, we might be amazed at all the ways we are already praying. So, with or without words, practice living your life as prayer. So maybe if we expand our understanding of prayer, it might open us to new possibilities. If prayer includes silence and stillness, movement, laughter and play, work and service, we might be amazed at all the ways we are already praying. So, with or without words, practice living your life as prayer. If we use words, perhaps we could do no better than theologian Meister Eckhart who said: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is "Thank You," it will be enough."

## **The Wedding at Cana**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they remained there a few days. (John 2:1-13)

In the early 1970's I read a book entitled, Surprised by the Spirit. I don't remember much of the content, but the title has inspired me since. This scripture story that John tells about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana reminds me of that title.

Jesus appears convinced that his mother's request is not something he wants to do. Then the story makes a U-turn. The finest wine of the day comes from the water that filled the jugs. And only the servants and John knew.

Jesus had already been busy: getting baptized, having God announce that he was God's son, running away to the desert and not eating, having a personal visit with Satan who used his tricks and persuasion to get Jesus to follow him, being bullied by his own synagogue family when he gave his first sermon, and finding strangers who hardly knew each other to become a group of followers. So, can you blame him for not wanting to call attention to himself?

The Spirit had something else in mind. And, surprise! Jesus decides to turn water into some very fine wine. The wedding came off without a hitch and only the servants who filled the containers with water and John knew.

Have you been led by the Spirit to head in a different direction that you never suspected might be the right one? Or been surprised by an unanticipated affirmation?

**Prayer: Creator God, Lover of all creation, visit us with anticipation and awareness of the surprising ways you guide our actions.**



## Sunday, March 10

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” (John 3:14-21)

During the pandemic we spent so much time disinfecting everything. Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes were hard to find so, if you found any, you stocked up. Hospitals and other businesses turned to UV Light as a disinfectant. It was an effective way to eliminate bacteria and virus without using toxic chemicals. It was environmentally safe.

What does UV light have to do with a Lenten Devotional?

Jesus is frequently called “The Light of the World.” When we emerge from the darkness to follow “The Light”, our sins are revealed. Through Jesus our sins are “disinfected” just like viruses and bacteria exposed to UV light. The light of Jesus reveals our need for God. Jesus tells us that as his followers we are to be a light in the world and that our actions should give glory to God. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. (verse 21)

**Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending us Jesus to be the light of the world. The light that leads us from the darkness into grace. Help us to live our lives so that your light will shine through for others to see. Amen.**

## **Psalm 107**

### **Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Many Troubles**

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.  
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble  
and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.  
Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;  
hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress;  
he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.  
Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things.  
Some sat in darkness and in gloom,  
prisoners in misery and in irons,  
for they had rebelled against the words of God  
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.  
Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor;  
they fell down, with no one to help.  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress;  
he brought them out of darkness and gloom,  
and broke their bonds apart.  
Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
For he shatters the doors of bronze  
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

When I begin to praise God, it makes me realize that he is so big and so good that all things are possible with Him. Yes, we have needs, and yes, God wants to hear and help, but we need to build a relationship. He wants to know our hearts, to be close to us, and to share things with us. Every day, you and I have a choice to thank God. When we praise Him, we start to have hope, and then faith, that we will be ok...

### **How Praise Helps:**

- Helps magnify God, not only focus on problems.
- Reminds us that we need Him; we are not in this alone.
- Provides us with Grace...God's power beyond your ability.
- Turns dark thoughts to thoughts of hope.
- Stirs up faith.

**Prayer: Thank you, God, for all your blessings. As we devote more of our prayer time to Praise, we rejoice knowing that you will internalize our unending love for you. Amen.**

## Tuesday, March 12

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 107:1)

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12)

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Today’s passages remind us that we are not the first to struggle through life. God has proven through the ages that he will stand by his people.

In the passage from Psalm 107, the writer reminds us to give thanks to the Lord. We may forget his love, but he never does. Many have suffered bleak times when it seems God has abandoned them, but he has not. I find comfort in knowing that God is there to carry me through those rough patches, so let us go to him with a grateful heart.

In the passage from Numbers 20, Moses and Aaron are frustrated with the people of Israel. They are yet again complaining about the journey to the promised land, citing that Egypt was lush and they have no water. Moses and Aaron took the people’s complaint to the Lord. The Lord’s response was to take the staff, gather the people, speak to the rock and water will come forth. Moses, in his anger, struck the rock twice instead. For this, the Lord banned him entry into the promised land. God’s message here is clear. He expects us to act with faith, trust, and obedience. In our own lives, God calls on us to trust his plan. It is hard sometimes not to respond with impatience or doubt but if we do we risk missing out on the beauty of his imagination in our lives.

In the passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul points out that we will not be challenged beyond what we are capable of handling with God’s help. Millions have gone before us and have faced similar challenges. We will face temptations in this life, but, with faithfulness in God, we will be able to handle them. We are not alone.

## Wednesday, March 13

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story-- those he redeemed from the hand of the foe... (Psalm 107: 1-2)

I have attended one funeral a week for the last 6 weeks. That's a lot, but the one common thread in all the services was that each person was a follower, a believer, a Christian. Not only were they Christians, but they all had a strong Christian faith. These six people were vastly different people, from different walks of life. Some had big families while others, not much to speak of, but their common denominator was that they believed in a life after death that none of us yet know.

I think that this passage speaks to that. We all are on a journey, traveling different paths, on the way to the same place, seeking the same God. Let's each be happy and grateful for our own journey and the people traveling with us.

**Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the people you gave me and the path I follow. I love my people, and I love my God. Thanks for loving us too. Amen.**

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:  
In returning and rest you shall be saved;  
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.  
But you refused and said,  
'No! We will flee upon horses'—  
therefore you shall flee!  
and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds'—  
therefore your pursuers shall be swift!  
A thousand shall flee at the threat of one;  
at the threat of five you shall flee  
until you are left  
like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,  
like a signal on a hill.

## **God's Promise to Zion**

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you;  
therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.  
For the Lord is a God of justice;  
blessed are all those who wait for him. (Isaiah 30:15-18)

These are the words of the Lord God the Holy One of Israel: Come back, keep peace, and you will be safe; in stillness and in staying quiet, there lies your strength. Earlier in this chapter, Isaiah was telling all of the happenings that occur when one ventures off the chosen path – “piling sin on sin.” But then he tells of God’s promise to those who wish to change their plights.

Yet the Lord is waiting to show his favor, yet He yearns to have pity on us; for the Lord is a God of Justice. Happy are all who wait for him! This is a promise of relief from earlier thoughts and actions that were not acceptable to God. He is waiting for us to make our own decision to accept the promise; and if we do so, we will be safe as we increase our strength in our belief of faith in the life before us.

**Prayer: Lord, we pray that we may keep peace and stillness and faith in your promise as uncertainties and challenges arise before us as we wait. Amen.**

# Friday, March 15

Psalm 51: 1-2

Exodus 30: 1-10

Hebrews 4: 14-5:4

I have 7 granddaughters and 2 grandsons. Today happens to be the Ides of March as well as granddaughter Alys's 9th birthday. Alys is unique in that she is a redhead and our only March born grandchild. According to Wikipedia, the Ides of March was a turning point in Roman history. For some reason I feel certain that Alys will face one or more turning points at some time in her history.

As a grandfather now for 16 years, I have determined (finally) that God gave my wife and I grandchildren for one main purpose: to shepherd them (by actions or words) toward a deeper relationship and journey with the Triune God. That is really it, I think! For a number of years, I mistakenly thought my purpose was, instead, to teach them everything about ranching: to be shepherds of sheep, goats and cattle. But that was not it, for there is a much deeper call to shepherding.

With today's reading of Hebrews 4 in mind, I know Alys and all my grandchildren will experience times of physical, mental, and emotional needs. That is the challenge of life on earth that we experience. My prayer today is that all of my grandchildren will receive and accept the legacy and shepherding of their parents and grandparents. I hope that they always keep in mind the words of Martin Luther "to fear, love and trust in God above all things," that they hold firmly to the faith, AND that they approach the throne of Grace with confidence at all times to receive mercy and find grace.

**Prayer: Happy Birthday, Alys! May God Bless you, keep you and shine his countenance upon you. And, may all of our descendants receive God's mercy and grace!! Amen... and Amen.**

## Saturday, March 16

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. The chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

### **What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?**

It is six days before Passover; the very Passover in which he would be crucified. And he has come to Bethany where Mary and Martha and the resurrected Lazarus live. His disciples are with him, the evil Judas Iscariot among them. And they are standing on the brink of the greatest event in history, the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of His people.

**Prayer: Pray for your neighbors and even your enemies, but let us always value the Lord above all else, for your treasure is where your heart will be too. Value the Lord above all else. Thank him and praise him who was, who is, and who is to come, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



## Sunday, March 17

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,  
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:5-10)

I believe Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, is saying that they should not feel their own piety. Every high priest is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God -- not self-appointed but chosen by God. He reminds them that Christ did not glorify himself, but recognized that he was a son and that he learned obedience from the things he suffered. Once having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. That is our lesson to teach the world.

**Prayer: Dear God, as we strive to be your hands and feet in this world, never let us forget we are representing you to the world and not relishing in our own piety. Amen.**

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are qualified of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our qualification is from God, who has made us qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses's face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has in this respect lost its glory because of the greater glory, for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory! (2 Corinthians 5:5-10)

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is explaining the greater glory of the new covenant by comparing it with the glory of the Law in the Old Testament. Verse 9 says, "If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!" We know that the ministry that brought condemnation Paul is speaking of is the Old Testament Law. I think the most interesting part of verse 9 is that Paul can write that, even though the Law brought condemnation, the Law was glorious. How can Paul write this? How can a Law that God's chosen people continuously failed to keep and ultimately fell short time and time again be called glorious? Perhaps Paul can make such a bold statement about the Law because of his understanding of its true purpose. The Law was given to the Israelites not to oppress or punish but to set them apart and to be a light for other people groups. Ultimately the purpose or "glory" of the Law was to point the Israelite people and those who observed the Israelites towards a relationship God. From this perspective the Law truly is glorious, but, as the second half of verse 9 says, "How much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness," or the gospel of Jesus Christ. The new covenant, "the gospel of Jesus Christ," like the Law, points us toward God and leads us to reconciliation and salvation. The glory of the Law provided temporal right standing with God; the greater glory of Jesus Christ provides eternal righteousness. Paul's comparison of the Law and the gospel of Jesus Christ connects the Old and New Testaments and continues to reveal the character of God and his desire to be in relationship with his people.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for your Word and how it is still applicable to our lives today. Thank you for showing through the Law and Jesus that you desire to be in relationship with us. I thank you for your continued grace and constant seeking of our hearts, Amen.**

# Tuesday, March 19

Pentecost is a Christian Holiday that commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary and the Apostles of Jesus while they were in Jerusalem. Pentecost is an opportunity for Christians to honor the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives and celebrate the birth of the Christian church.

Pente means 50; the Pentecost follows the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus and is a celebration of the beginning of the early weeks of harvest which occurs fifty days after Easter Sunday and is meant to memorialize the descent of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, Pente, which is a Greek word, was originally referred to by the Jews as the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks. They noticed a dark cloud accompanied by thunder from all around gathered for the festival lightning and a loud trumpet blast. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit blessed them with the ability to speak in different languages, but all those around could understand what they were saying in their native tongue. This phenomenon caused the people to know they were filled with the Holy Spirit. God declares that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

This year Pentecost will be May 19, 2024. Are you with God?

Compare Exodus 19 with Acts 2.

Read Leviticus 23:15-21 and Deuteronomy 4:10-13.

While this was tantalizing and scary, the people knew that God had spoken and that the Holy Spirit was with them throughout life. This is as true today as it was all those years ago!

**Prayer: Dear God, help me to always look forward to Pentecost. Help me to praise God for Jesus's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as Pentecost for the entire church. I have been saved by the Holy Spirit, and will thank God for forgiving my sins. The promise of Pentecost is so enlightening and reassuring to me. Thank you for everlasting LIFE. PRAISE GOD! Amen.**

## Wednesday, March 20

Yet now be strong, oh, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, oh Joshua, son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong all you people of the land,' declares the Lord. 'Work, for I am with you,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'According to the covenant that I made with you when you came up out of Egypt, my spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.'" (Haggai 2:4-5)

In chapter 1 of Haggai, God was unhappy with the people who had returned from exile. They were busy rebuilding their houses. Haggai, the prophet, reminded them that they needed to be rebuilding the temple. It turned out to be a much harder job than they expected. They ran into many obstacles and became discouraged and disappointed. Then once again, God sent another message through Haggai that God was with them, so they needed to be strong and continue the work.

When I accepted the position of deacon at church, one of my responsibilities was to serve communion to members who were hospitalized. The week before my first turn, I prayed all week that no one would be in the hospital. That Sunday, I checked the board in the Office. Two people were in the hospital. My first visit was to an older gentleman who was very kind and did the communion service for both of us. The woman had company, but they all wanted communion. I made a mess filling up the cups, stuttered through the words of institution, and forgot to pray. I left the hospital thinking, "Never again!" The next time that I was scheduled, I prayed once again that no one would be hospitalized. God answered my prayers, but not the way I expected. A dear friend who had been an elder for years offered to go with me. It was a totally different experience. Afterwards I thought, "I can do this." That was thirty years ago. Now serving communion to people who are homebound or in the hospital is my favorite church job. I still can make a mess pouring the grape juice, but I always take paper towels with me.

When my mother encountered difficult tasks, she always said, "With God, all things are possible." That's the truth.

**Prayer: Faithful God, thank you for helping us to be strong when we encounter obstacles and disappointments. They may not turn out the way we planned, but your plan is so much better. Amen.**

Patti Tharp

# Thursday, March 21

His steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 118:1b)

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others. (Philippians 2:4)

This verse from Philippians got me thinking about a bible story in a different book of the Bible - in fact, my favorite Bible story. It started with a sermon by Jimmy Cobb at First Christian Church in San Marcos. The sermon started out simply enough - "what if?" It was the story of the loaves and fishes, but Pastor Cobb's question was this: What if this story was not a story of a miracle, like we normally think of it, but a different kind of miracle story?

In the story, it is getting late, and the people are hungry. Instead of sending them home, Jesus says to feed them. His disciples complained that there was not enough to feed everyone. But people coming out for a long day following Jesus would very likely bring some food or snacks along with them. What if the message from this story is that we all have enough if only we will share what we have with others? There would be enough for all with 12 baskets of food left over.

Maybe this is a story about a traditional miracle where Jesus magically multiplied the few loaves and fishes, but I like to think that just maybe it is more than that.

**Prayer: Loving God, help us to understand that faith is not about having everything figured out ahead of time; faith is about following the quiet voice of God without having everything figured out ahead of time. Amen. (Rachel Held Evans)**

Jon James

## Friday, March 22

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

...Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad. LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD, we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. (Psalm 118:1, 2, & 19-29)

How do we start each day? Do we give thanks to the Lord for the many blessings we have? Do we remind ourselves that God is love and that he loves us unconditionally? Does He deliver us from misdeeds and ill thinking?

As Jesus began His descent towards Jerusalem, the multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise the Lord saying, "Hosanna," or Save now, O LORD. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. It was most appropriate for the people to do what they did since Jesus was entering Jerusalem to provide salvation. Jesus' application of the stone reference to Himself after he entered Jerusalem at His Triumphal Entry was a clear claim that He was the Messiah. Jesus was not just a stone; He was and is the cornerstone.

This psalm teaches us much about the Messiah, but its primary significance was glorifying God for providing deliverance. This deliverance came after a period of evident defeat. God had reversed an apparent disaster and brought great joy and victory out of it. We should praise Him whenever He does that for us.

Each of us experiences defeat in different ways in our lives. Do we remember that, even in defeat, God loves us unconditionally? God loves us, no matter what the situation. Do we always feel the love for God that he has for us?

**Prayer: Lord, we give you thanks for your unending love. Help us to spread Your love to all. Amen.**

Trip Hallman

## Saturday, March 23

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." (Matthew 21: 1-3)

Was the donkey that Jesus rode on the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem chosen by God, like Mary was chosen to be the Mother of God?

You can't think that the donkey was just randomly chosen to be the one to carry Jesus down the road when He entered the procession of palm branches. Nothing in the life of Jesus "just so happens" to have happened. But when was the donkey chosen? Was it before he was born? Was this a special donkey? Could be, and probably was, but Mary... BUT WAIT! Could the mother or grandmother of this donkey have been present when she was born? Could this donkey be the offspring of the donkey that carried a very pregnant Mary as she and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem? Did the donkey observe the birth?

It may be a stretch to think that could be possible, but remember this whole story - the story of Jesus' life - was planned by God, His Father. So maybe God made sure the donkey was in the right place at the right time, with the help of the donkey's caretaker. And as Jesus came closer, the donkey was ready, and waiting. That donkey had a very special mission...But who would have thought a donkey would play any role throughout Jesus' life? Since you don't hear too much about donkeys between Jesus' birth and his entry into Jerusalem, you have to figure that the donkeys were part of the same family as well, and some of them ended up in Jerusalem to be ready for Jesus when He came.

So, this donkey carried Jesus where He needed to go that day. We probably won't ever know what happened to that donkey. The writers of the Bible probably didn't think it was important. But people had to get up to Mt. Calvary somehow, and there had to be some donkeys there. The same family of donkeys who watched a baby be born on that night long ago... did they also watch Him die?

**Prayer: Father, we know that only You know the plans for our lives. Thank You for caring about even the minor details we often overlook. Thank You for caring about the animals, too, including the birds that sing, but those animals that quietly observe, too. In Jesus name, Amen.**

Kathy Boulter

# Palm Sunday, March 24

Isaiah 50:4-9; Philippians 2:1-11; John 12:12-16; Mark 11:1-11

The story behind Palm Sunday observances calls to mind the paradox of the power of humility, surrender, and trust in God. Palm Sunday, today, marks the beginning of Holy Week, in which events of Jesus's arrest, death, and resurrection took place.

We know the story, repeated with a fair consistency throughout the Gospels. Jesus concluded his ministry by entering Jerusalem on a donkey, met by crowds shouting "Hosanna!" The disciples laid their cloaks on the donkey, the people placed palm branches on the path. The people had heard of and witnessed the miracles of Jesus. The excitement of rising expectations greeted Jesus as he rode toward his death. Praises extolled him as the king of the Jews. "Hosanna—save now!" they shouted.

Those who did not "get it"—and that included the disciples—expected more and more. They expected their lives to be bettered. They hoped to be delivered from the Romans by a compassionate king who would look after their best interests in the worldly realm. Rather than conquering the Romans, Jesus would conquer death. Jesus frequently said, "The Father does the works." He did not seek individual credit. He didn't want to oust anyone from any kind of earthly throne. He did not elevate himself in the human form.

On Palm Sunday, he came to Jerusalem on a donkey colt, a gesture recognized as a symbol of peace, not power. In contrast, Pontius Pilate entered the other side of Jerusalem on a war horse, surrounded by legions assigned to keep order among the crowds gathered for Passover festivities. Scriptures that inspire include Isaiah 50:4-9, a servant's song proclaiming strength through God, the source of his "trained tongue." He affirms that he will not be put to shame but vindicated, while his adversaries will "wear out like a garment," eaten up by moths. We are reminded of Jesus's coming trial.

Paul urged the Philippians (2:1-11) to be of the same mind as Jesus, who did not "grasp" for equality with God, but "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." Paul continues: "Therefore God exalted him even more... so that... every knee should bend... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

**Prayer: "Make me an instrument of thy peace.... For it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned, and in dying that we are born to eternal life." ~Prayer of St. Francis**

Dana Glossbrenner



# Holy Monday, March 25

Psalms 107:1-16; Exodus 15:22-27; and Hebrews 3: 1-6

I love Psalm 107 which begins, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." I believe that the greatest gift Jesus gave to us was to reveal and reaffirm the goodness and steadfast love of God. That belief is the rock of my faith and the source of my salvation. Recently, I read the true meaning of the Hebrew word for salvation is "to breathe freely." I can "breathe freely," knowing that, since the dawn of creation, affirmed throughout the Hebrew scriptures way before Jesus was born, God's goodness and love are present. Every breath that I take reminds me that I am part of Creation declared by God to be good! I breathe in the knowledge that I am created in God's image and breathe out my thanks and my commitment to try to love as Jesus loved, to be fully human.

The Hebrew people had a dilemma after Jesus' death. How could they continue to follow a crucified Messiah? He was not what they expected or hoped for. Maybe they should return to Judaism. Perhaps, there are times in our lives when we pray and things do not work out the way we want, or when bad things happen so that we question the value of faith. Hebrews 3:5-6 says, "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belongs to hope." It is our task as his house, his church, to live the love of Christ even when we doubt or find ourselves troubled in spirit, to remain firm in our hope in a God of goodness and love, and to trust God is working even when we cannot see or feel it. Resurrection will come!

**Prayer: Loving God, Thank you! Thank you! We are so grateful that you love us unconditionally, and never give up on us. May we remain faithful and be willing to suffer as you suffer for the sake of love! Amen.**

Trish Aylor

# Holy Tuesday, March 26

## **Prayer for Lifelong Protection and Help**

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;

incline your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a rock of refuge,

a strong fortress to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,

from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. (Psalm 71:1-4)

Steadfast endurance in one's advanced years is the theme. God will not abandon us, no matter how old we might be. The first part of the scripture is a prayer with a bold confession of faith: "In you, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame" (verse 1).

Verse 3 reads, "Be my strong habitation, to which I may resort continually." The elderly psalmist had every reason to trust God who had been sufficient in every trial. And so do we! We have every reason to praise God in our later years. "... for you are my rock and my fortress." Place your trust in God!

Verse 5 says, "For You are my hope, O Lord God, you are my trust from my youth."

"Do not cast me off in the time of old age, do not forsake me when my strength fails" (verse 9). The psalmist was remorseful as he prayed, "O God, do not be far from me; O God, make haste to me" (verse 12).

"But I will keep on hoping for your help; I will praise you more and more" (verse 14).

(with excerpts from Ethan Hansen)

**Prayer: Thank you, God, for our lives, full of time to pray and listen to You, time to accept your unending Grace, time to live our lives with love for all, and time to exemplify, how the Kingdom of God should be, now, on earth and in our life eternal. Amen.**

Ann McQuerrey

# Holy Wednesday, March 27

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews we: 1-3; and John 13: 21-32.

It was Wednesday of the last week of Jesus' life. John tells us that Jesus was "troubled in Spirit." I can only imagine the depth of despair felt by Jesus, but I think we have all had times of being troubled in spirit, experiencing the darkness of despair. It is helpful to realize that Jesus was human and had choices about how he dealt with these feelings, and we, too, have choices. He drew upon his faith in the presence of God deep within himself and in the faith stories of his ancestors who drew strength from God in times of trouble. The longer we live and experience difficult times, the more we know that God has helped in times past, and the more we know and have faith that God will help us again. Also, Jesus sought out his friends and followers and prepared a table for them. He found comfort in the presence of others, and joy in his commitment to the ministry for which he was called even in the midst of a troubled spirit. We can do the same when those times of troubled spirits assail us. It is not easy, but it is possible with God's help. Recently, I read that love is worth the grief! John seems to be telling us that, for Jesus, this was true. It was his ministry of love that led him to experience the grief of loss and the suffering of the cross.

John tells us that Jesus dipped a piece of bread in a dish and gave it to Judas, revealing the one who would betray him. After Judas ate the bread, Satan entered into him, and Jesus said, "Do quickly what you are going to do." There it is again, that tempter who is present in all of us saying that my way is better than God's way. We saw it in Peter and now we see it in Judas, two of Jesus' disciples. Perhaps it was the pain of Judas betrayal which caused Jesus to feel broken and to say, "This is my body broken for you." It is important to see that even when Peter and Judas put their own interest above the divine path, Jesus still loved them. His love allowed Peter to rethink his position, and his love allowed Judas the freedom to choose; both were still welcome at the table. That is good news for all of us. This John reading ends with, "And it was night." The darkness surrounded Jesus, but the light inside him still burned helping him to endure and finally conquer!

**Prayer: Loving God, when our spirits are troubled and we are surrounded by the darkness of despair, help us to follow the example of Jesus to find the light of your presence and hold tightly to our faith in your goodness and love. Amen.**

Trish Aylor

# Maundy Thursday, March 28

God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

In our week-long journey toward Easter, today is known as Maundy Thursday, a significant day in the life of Jesus and for us. Somedays, all of us question God's love for us. So today, may we be reminded of the depth of love and the lengths he went to in order to restore a relationship with us.

Have you ever wondered if God loves you? For me, when my sister, brother, and my dad all died of cancer within 3 years of each other with great suffering, I began to question God's love and had a hard time admitting my feelings to myself. I knew that God was able to prevent these deaths, but he didn't. What option was left, except that He chose not to? And if HE chose not to save my family and me from such heartache and pain, what does this say about His love for us?

When you question God's love, I encourage you to make your way back to Maundy Thursday. This was the night when Jesus told his friends, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:28). And three times his Father said no to his Son so that he could say yes to you.

We need to remember that he said to his Father, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26: 42). Jesus then waited in the Garden of Gethsemane for the soldiers to come. As he watched, he could have fled. Instead, he watched and waited for the shame, the thorns, the whipping, and the nails that he knew were coming. He chose to do all that for you.

This was all before you could do anything to earn or receive His love, even before you asked Jesus to forgive your sins and become your Lord and Savior. Scripture is clear: "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The next time you wonder if God loves you, return to Maundy Thursday.

Mike O'Donnell

# Good Friday, March 29, Part 1

## John 19

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against Caesar."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover, and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

## The Crucifixion of Jesus

So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

T.J. Shoop-York

## Good Friday, March 29, Part 2

Much can be said about the cross, as there are plenty of theological discourses available with a quick Google search. However, this Lenten season, I find myself drawn to the narrative in John's Gospel. His retelling of Jesus's final hours is particularly compelling. While there are similarities between John's account and the other gospel stories, John's narrative invites us to imagine the cross and resurrection as a continuous, unified event.

In the opening of John's Gospel, we read the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Here, John makes it clear that when he uses the term, "the Word," he's referencing Jesus. It is important to note that he highlights the divinity of Jesus. Contrasting this with Matthew's Gospel, where the writer outlines the genealogy of Jesus, emphasizing his humanity, we begin to see the mystery of who God is—fully human and fully divine.

Reading the Easter story through the lens of John's Gospel, we come to believe that Jesus was fully in control and that he used the cross not as a way of being defeated, but as a way of being lifted up. Even in the final moments of Jesus's life, he seemed to be in control, as evidenced by his last utterance, "It is finished."

This is a beautiful and tragic story—the end of the story reminds us that God, revealed through Jesus (fully human and divine), is ultimately in control. I use that language cautiously, suggesting that God's ultimate control means God is present in the beauty and tragedies of life. God can use the cross—a painful crucifixion—for resurrection. Simultaneously, God can use resurrection and still understand our experiences of brokenness.

On this Good Friday, prayerfully reflect on the presence of God in your life. How have you experienced the risen Christ and the crucified Christ walking alongside you?

**Prayer: As we reflect on the story of salvation revealed to us through the power of scripture and pause to recognize your presence in our lives, help us, O Lord, to understand the meaning of the cross and the resurrection in our daily lives. Amen.**

# Holy Saturday, March 30

## **The Burial of Jesus**

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. (John 19:38-42)

If I was to be completely honest...Holy Saturday is my favorite day of Holy Week. I think a large part of that is because it is the day that I think a lot of Christians live every single day of their faith-life.

Think about it.

On this day...Jesus was dead. There had been rumors that he had promised people he would rise again, but people don't just resurrect. Jesus had resurrected people, we saw that...but who would resurrect Jesus?

This is a day that is full of doubt and deep sadness. The one who was promised to save the world was dead.

I wonder if Joseph of Arimathea thought Jesus was going to stay dead and that's why he asked for his body and buried him? Or did Joseph believe Jesus would rise from the dead and wanted Jesus's first breath to be lying down and not outstretched on the cross?

I wonder which answer I would give? I wonder if I would even think to do anything at all?

**Prayer: God of waiting and revelation, help me to remain faithful in these times of in-between. Help me to act upon the nudges you give my heart. Help me to be in tune with your Spirit as I await the return of Christ. AMEN.**

Marshall Breedlove

# Easter Sunday, March 31

## **The Resurrection of Jesus**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed... (John 20:1-8)

"He has risen!" When reading through the resurrection appearance in John's gospel, there is a focus on individual characters: Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and Peter.

From a theological perspective, this is not done by accident. By highlighting individual characters and their response to the resurrection, as preaching professor Caroline Lewis would say, it emphasizes "the importance of the individual's relationship with Jesus, as essential to believing who he is, and the necessity of reciprocity in that relationship."

What I appreciate about the Easter story from the perspective of John are the symmetries between what is and what will be, which are designed to bring us into a closer relationship with Jesus. For example, when Mary approaches the tomb, it is still dark. This gives us the freedom to imagine the contrast between light and dark (belief and unbelief). As the story progresses, light appears, and Mary Magdalene comes to believe.

Often, it feels as if our faith is surrounded by darkness, but the resurrection story reminds us that, through the relationships we cultivate, light appears. Like the disciples who went to the tomb that day, we're not expected to have all the answers; we may doubt or even get things wrong. But through cultivating and trusting in the ongoing cycle of light to darkness, and darkness to light, truth is revealed. Truth is rooted in God's word, and God's word points to the power of love – love that brings about transformation and resurrection.

On this Easter Sunday, regardless of whether you find yourself surrounded by darkness or light, may your relationship with Jesus sustain you.


**Prayer: Holy God, for the gift of resurrection, for the promise of everlasting light, and for your faithful presence even in our unbelief, we give thanks. Amen.**

T.J. Shoop-York









## SPECIAL THANKS

---

This publication was made possible through the love and grace of each contributor. Without their time, their effort, and their courage to share, this booklet would not have happened, and each of our one of our Lenten experiences this year would have been a little bit lacking. We are grateful.

Also, a very special and heart-felt thanks to Patti Tharp for her tireless enthusiasm and willingness to do the work behind the scenes. Thank you, Patti!

Finally, we are so appreciative to Debbie Young for her keen proofreading eye and her willingness to share the copy-machine secrets. Thank you, Debbie!!

## NOTE

---

All scripture references are made in the New Revised Standard Version translation.

*Happy Easter!*



**“Lent is about becoming, doing, and changing  
whatever it is that is blocking  
the fullness of life in us right now.”**

**~ Sister Joan Chittister**