



LENT

PRAY, FAST, GIVE

2019 Daily Devotional Guide

Compiled & Written by

Rev. Steve Baccus

Senior Pastor, Gardendale-Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church

(NOT for Sale – to be given away freely)

March 6, 2019 - Ash Wednesday

Let us take inspiration for our Lenten journey from **prayer** and the reading of Scripture, from **fasting** and from **giving alms**.

Prayer – Lent is essentially an act of prayer spread out over 40 days. As we pray, we are brought closer to Christ and are changed by the encounter with him.

Fasting – The fasting that we all do together on is but a sign of the daily Lenten discipline of individuals and households: fasting for certain periods of time, fasting from certain foods, but also fasting from other things and activities.

Almsgiving – The giving of alms is an effort to share this world equally—not only through the distribution of money, but through the sharing of our time and talents.

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 / Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm: Psalm 51

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:10

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

PRAY

As we begin Lent, we pray for the strength to commit ourselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving so that we may grow to love God and others more each day.

ACT

As we pray, let's think about our offerings. To what is God asking us to give? Will we give an extra offering of our time, talents, and income?

March 7, 2019 - Thursday after Ash Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 5:10-23

Psalm: Psalm 91:1-2

Acts of the Apostles: Acts 7:30-34

PRAY

Prayer Focus: Persecuted Christians around the globe.

ACT

Choose something to abstain from this Lent to help you grow in your spiritual journey.

March 8, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9

Psalm: Psalm 51:3-6, 18-19

Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:14-15

MEDITATION

Are you hungry for God? Hungering for God and fasting for his Kingdom go hand in hand. When asked why he and his disciples did not fast Jesus used the vivid picture of a wedding celebration. In Jesus' time the newlywed couple celebrated their honeymoon at home for a whole week with all the guests! There was a time of great feasting and celebrating. Jesus points to himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as friends of the bridegroom. He alludes to the fact that God takes delight in his people as a groom takes delight in his bride.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for true humility.

Act

Fast from sunrise to sunset. Be sure to drink plenty of water.

March 9, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 58:9-14

Psalm: Psalm 86:1-6

Gospel Reading: Luke 5:27-32

MEDITATION

When Jesus called a despised tax collector to be his disciple he surprised everyone including the tax collector, Levi (also known as Matthew). The religious leaders were especially upset with Jesus' behavior towards public sinners like Levi. The Jewish people were divided into roughly two groups: Jews who rigidly kept the law and all its petty regulations, and the rest who did not keep all the regulations. The legalists treated the latter like second class citizens. They scrupulously avoided their company, refused to do business with them, refused to give or receive anything from them, and they would not sit at the table with them. Jesus' association with the rule breakers, especially tax collectors and public sinners, shocked the "sensibilities" of the legalistic religious leaders.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for God to open your heart to love all people.

Act

Do something kind for someone the rest of the community looks down upon.

March 10, 2019 – The First Sunday in Lent

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Psalm: Psalm 91:1-2, 10-15

Gospel Reading: Luke 4:1-13

MEDITATION

Luke tells us Satan's first temptation directed at our Lord appealed to Jesus' physical desires and hunger. He had not eaten in forty days. Did the Spirit lead him into the wilderness to die? When the children of Israel were led into the wilderness for forty years without any source of food, they complained to Moses that he was punishing them with starvation. Moses took the matter to God in prayer. God intervened by sending them manna – bread from heaven – for their daily provision. Satan tried to get Jesus to turn stones into bread, both to prove his supernatural power over nature and to satisfy his own personal hunger. Jesus knew he had been anointed with supernatural power for performing great signs and wonders, just like Moses and Elijah. Jesus chose to fast from physical food and pray for a lengthy period of time in order to prepare himself for the mission his Father was entrusting to him. Satan then tempted Jesus with great riches, privileges, glory, fame, and power. Jesus knew he could claim title to anything he desired, but his desire was to do the Father's will. Satan's last temptation directed at Jesus was to try to convince the Lord to throw himself from the very top of the temple to show he was invincible. Jesus, instead, chose the disgrace of being crucified on a Roman cross. Jesus knew he had come into this world for great self-sacrifice. By Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we are raised to newness of life!

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray to be delivered from temptation.

Act

Give up that sin with which Satan has you bound! These forty days of Lent are the annual retreat of the people of God in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. We are called to journey with the Lord in this special season.

March 11, 2019 – Monday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

Psalm: Psalm 19:8-10, 14

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

MEDITATION

Are we allowing the love of God to rule in our hearts? St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) said, “Essentially, there are two kinds of people, because there are two kinds of love. One is holy; the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal him.” Jesus came not only to fulfill the law of righteousness (Leviticus 19), but to transform it through his unconditional love and mercy. The Lord proved his love toward us by offering up his life on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray to the Lord focusing on his second coming.

Act

Show good will and charity today to someone you don't necessarily like.

March 12, 2019 – Tuesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11

Psalm: Psalm 34:4-7, 16-19

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:7-15

MEDITATION

Do we believe that God's word has the power to change and transform our lives? Isaiah said God's word is like rain and melting snow which makes the barren ground spring to life and become fertile. God's word has power to penetrate our dry, barren hearts and make them springs of new life. If we let his word take root in our heart it will transform us into the likeness of God and empower us to walk in love and holiness.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray to God with an open heart without worrying about how pretty your words may be. Just be honest.

Act

Speak to your next door neighbor today. Make sure you pray with him or her.

March 13, 2019 – Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

Psalm: Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:29-32

MEDITATION

Do we pay close attention to warning signs? How many fatalities could be avoided if people paid attention to such signs? When the religious leaders demanded a sign from Jesus, he gave them a serious warning to avert spiritual disaster. It was characteristic of the time to demand “signs” from God’s messengers to authenticate their claims.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for your spiritual eyes to be attentive to the signs around you.

Act

Buy someone’s meal today. Don’t let them know it was you.

March 14, 2019 – Thursday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Esther 4:10-17

Psalm: Psalm 138:1-3, 7-8

Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:7-12

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for someone you have previously given up on.

Act

Call or text words of grace to someone you have gotten into an argument or disagreement with in the past.

March 15, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Ezekiel 18:21-28

Psalm: Psalm 130:1-8

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:20-26

MEDITATION

Are we letting sin or anger master our lives? The first person to hate his brother was Cain. God warned Cain, “Why are you angry? Sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:6-7). Sin doesn’t just happen; it starts as a seed planted in our souls.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for release from all anger in your heart and soul.

Act

Call a sibling, or cousin, or another, and tell them how precious they are to you.

March 16, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Psalm: Psalm 119:1-8

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for your enemies.

Act

Send an anonymous gift to one you think of as an enemy.

March 17, 2019 – The Second Sunday in Lent

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Psalm: Psalm 27:1, 7-9, 13-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 9:28-36

MEDITATION

What can blind us from recognizing God's glory in our everyday lives? Faith enables us to see what is hidden or unseen to the naked eye. Through the eyes of faith Abraham recognized God and God's call upon his life. He saw from afar not only what God intended for him, but also for his descendants – an everlasting promise of friendship and peace with the living God.

Are we prepared to see God's glory in the face of Jesus? We get just a glimpse of his glory when the disciples see Jesus transfigured on the mountain. What is the significance of this mysterious appearance? Jesus went to the mountain knowing full well what awaited him in Jerusalem – his betrayal, rejection, and crucifixion. Jesus very likely discussed this momentous decision to go the cross with Elijah and Moses who miraculously met him on the mountain top. God the Father also spoke: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." The Father glorified his Son because he was carrying out his Father's will.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for God to reveal his glory in some way every day.

Act

Pray with a group of fellow believers today. Bear your burdens and share your joys.

March 18, 2019 – Monday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 9:4-10

Psalm: Psalm 79:8-11, 13

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:36-38

MEDITATION

God's mercy know no limits. God the Father never tires of showing his steadfast love and mercy to those who seek him. What can hold us back from receiving God's mercy and pardon? Anger, resentment, an unwillingness to forgive others or to ask for forgiveness ourselves? Jesus offers us freedom to walk in his way of love and forgiveness, mercy and goodness.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Daniel not only asked for forgiveness for his own sins, but interceded for the people and asked for forgiveness for them also. Pray today not only for your own forgiveness, but for the forgiveness of others.

Act

Think about the excess money you have to spend on vacations and dinners out. How can you use a portion of that money for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of God's Kingdom? Give generously to a good cause a portion of that money you would usually spend on yourself.

March 19, 2019 – Tuesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: 2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-16

Psalm: Psalm 89:2-5, 27-29

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

MEDITATION

Are we prepared to obey the Lord in everything? Joseph, like Mary, is a model of faith and justice. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a “just man.” Joseph was a worthy guardian of baby Jesus. Even though his faith was put to the test when his espoused wife, Mary, was with child Joseph, wanted to prevent her from experiencing embarrassment and persecution by privately annulling the betrothal. This was a great testimony to his integrity, character, and loving nature. When the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to take Mary as his wife for she would give birth to the Savior, Joseph willingly accepted this incredible message and obeyed. How obedient, or disobedient, are we in matters of faith much smaller than this?

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for trust, guidance, wisdom, and obedience.

Act

In what is God calling you to obedience? Is there an area of your life where disobedience has a foothold? Intentionally act today to take a step toward obedience in that area of your life.

March 20, 2019 – Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Psalm: Psalm 15:1-5

Gospel Reading: Mark 8:22-2

MEDITATION

What is worse than physical blindness? A mind and heart darkened by sin, unbelief, and prideful rejection of God's light and truth come to mind. Jesus came to set us free from the blinding darkness of sin and death so that we might walk in the light of love, truth, and holiness.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for the opening of your spiritual eyes.

Act

Look at someone you know who is caught in sin in a different light. Purchase them a cross (on a necklace, or a small one to go on a desk) and give to this person as a gift with a nice note to let them know you care.

March 21, 2019 – Thursday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm: Psalm 1

Gospel Reading: Luke 16:19-31

MEDITATION

What sustains us when trials and afflictions come our way? The prophet Jeremiah tells us that whoever relies on God will not be disappointed or be in want when everything around them dries up or disappears. God will not only be their consolation, but their inexhaustible source of hope and joy as well.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Ask for God to give you spiritual riches from the treasure of heaven.

Act

Spend part of today as a volunteer. Who needs your help? Your spouse? Your parents? Your children? A neighbor? Make yourself available to help.

March 22, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28

Psalm: Psalm 105:16-21

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

MEDITATION

Do you ever feel cut off or separated from God? Jesus's story about an absentee landlord and his not-so-good tenants would have made sense to his audience. The hills of Galilee were lined with many vineyards, and it was quite common for the owners to let out their estates to tenants. Many did it for the sole purpose of collecting rent. Jesus' message about the wicked tenants caused offense to the religious leaders because it contained both a prophetic message and a warning directed at them. The story speaks to us all too well. First, it tells us of God's generosity and trust – God trusts us enough to give us freedom to live life as we please. It also tells of God's patience and justice. Many times God forgives the tenants sins, but while the tenants take advantage of the owner's patience, his judgment and justice prevail. How do we take advantage of God's generosity, trust, and forgiveness?

Pray

Prayer Focus: Thank God for all the benefits and blessings he has shown you. Ask God to help you to not squander the many gifts and opportunities he has offered you.

Act

Unplug from your phone, computer, and all electronic devices – including the television and radio. The silence may be jarring at first, but you may find that you are able to connect better with God and others. Be aware of your surroundings and those in your surroundings. This will be especially inconvenient on a Friday!

March 23, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Psalm: Psalm 103:1-4, 8-12

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

MEDITATION

How can you love someone who turns his or her back on you and still forgive this person from the depths of your heart? Micah reminds us that God does not abandon us even if we turn our backs on him. He calls us back to himself over and over again.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Ask God to fill you with the transforming love so that you may be merciful – for no other reason except that God has shown you mercy.

Act

Continue what you started yesterday: Stay unplugged from your phone, computer, and all electronic devices – including the television and radio. Can you do this for two days? Give it a try!

March 24, 2019 – The Third Sunday in Lent

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

Psalm: Psalm 103:1-8, 11

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

MEDITATION

What causes suffering or affliction and what does God want to teach us through it? The people of Israel suffered greatly under the oppressive rule of Egypt for more than 400 years. Did they suffer unjustly or was God angry with them? God was faithful to his people even in the midst of their affliction and ill treatment by their Egyptian taskmasters. God, in his mercy, did not forget them. Throughout their long history of exile and suffering God made them strong and they grew in number. God listened to their pleas for mercy and God raised up a deliverer in Moses. God has raised up a deliverer for us also; his name is Jesus!

Pray

Prayer Focus: At worship today look around for someone you do not know that well. Simply pray for that person.

Act

At the end of the worship service today, simply go to the altar to pray. This might encourage someone who is a little timid or hesitant to join you there. It may even encourage someone to ask Jesus into their life for the first time.

March 25, 2019 – Monday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Psalm: Psalm 40:7-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-38

MEDITATION

How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered in person by the angel Gabriel? She knows she is hearing something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that God has done previously. Her question is, "How can this be?" It is not prompted by skepticism or doubt, but by awe and wonder. She is a true hearer of the word and she responds with faith and trust, even though she may be fearful. Mary believed God even when his promises seemed impossible. She was willing, even though the decision would bring great personal cost, and the pain of seeing her Son hung on a cross.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray to be filled with wonder, awe, and faith even when things in your life are painful and confusing.

Act

As a part of your Lenten offerings, give to a foreign missionary supported by the church, or give to something you are passionate about – human trafficking, racism, environmental issues, the poor, education, poverty, etc.

March 26, 2019 – Tuesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Daniel 3:25, 34-43

Psalm: 25:4-9

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

MEDITATION

God has done everything he can do to make peace with us. Have we made peace with God? If we believe and accept God's love and pardon, then we must be merciful to others because God has been merciful towards us. Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) has given us this prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury let me sow pardon. Where there is doubt let me sow faith. Where there is despair let me give hope. Where there is darkness let me give light. Where there is sadness let me give joy."

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray the prayer of Saint Francis (above) as you go about your daily prayers.

Act

What do you have in your closets that you are not using? Clear some clutter and give it away to someone else, or to a local charity.

March 27, 2019 – Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

Psalm: Psalm 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:17-18

MEDITATION

How do we view “The Law?” It is known as the Torah (“Instruction”) in Hebrew. The Old Testament Law was given to guide a nation of slaves into being a people called by Yahweh to be holy and bring salvation to all the earth. Jesus not only taught reverence for the Law – for God, for the Sabbath Day, for parents, for life, for property, for another person’s good name, for our neighbors, etc. – he also taught that he came to fulfill the Law.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will help us fulfill the moral law by living as people of grace.

Act

Find an encouraging article or devotion and send it to friend or coworker.

March 28, 2019 – Thursday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Jeremiah 7:23-28

Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:14-23

MEDITATION

Jesus makes it clear that there are no neutral parties. We are either for Jesus or against him, for the Kingdom or against it. There are two opposing Kingdoms – the Kingdom of God, or the kingdom of darkness led by Satan. If we turn away from God we open the door to the power of sin and Satan in our lives. If we want to live in freedom from sin and Satan then our “house” – our lives and possessions (all that we rely on for livelihood, peace, and security) – must be occupied by Jesus where he is enthroned as Lord and Savior. Is Jesus the Lord of our homes, hearts, minds, and wills?

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will give us victory over the kingdom of darkness.

Act

Here is fun one: Make today “Chocolate Thursday” for someone. Gift someone with many forms of sweet, chocolaty goodness!

March 29, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Hosea 14:2-9
Psalm: Psalm 81:6-10, 14, 16
Gospel Reading: Mark 12:28-34

MEDITATION

What is it that makes our love for God and the most important commandments grow within us? Lots of things can make us grow in our love – listening to other people, sometimes without feeling the need to respond, but to just be there to listen. Prayer – individual, with your spouse, or with other is a great way to grow in love of God and others. Spending time in the Bible – learning, comparing, reading, making notes is conducive to spiritual growth. Following in the example of our Lord – sacrifice helps us to grow. What is it that we can sacrifice for the benefit of others or for the glory of God?

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will open your heart to love God and neighbor as much as yourself.

Act

If you are married, do something unexpected for your spouse today. If you are single, do this for another family member or friend.

March 30, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Hosea 6:1-6
Psalm: Psalm 51:1-4, 16-19
Gospel Reading: Luke 18:9-14

MEDITATION

God hears the prayer of the humble. Jesus reinforced this with a vivid story of two people at prayer. Why would the Lord not hear one person's prayer, and yet hear the prayers of another? Despising one's neighbor closes the door to God's heart. Expressing disdain and contempt for others is more than being mean-spirited. It springs from the assumption that one is qualified to sit in the seat of judgment and publicly shame those who do not conform to our standards and religious practice. Jesus' story caused offense to the religious-minded Pharisees who regarded tax collectors as unworthy of God's grace. All of us are unworthy of God's grace but, thank God, he offers it to us nonetheless!

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray that God will put all contempt and arrogance from your heart.

Act

Offer a compliment to everyone you encounter today.

March 31, 2019 – The Fourth Sunday in Lent

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm: Psalm 34:2-8

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

MEDITATION

Jesus illustrates the passing over from slavery to sin to the freedom and new life in Christ with the longest parable recorded in the Gospels. What is the main point of Jesus' story about two ungrateful sons and their extravagant loving father? Is it the contrast between a grudging, obedient son and a rebellious son who had wished his father was dead? Or is the point of the story the warm reception and love the father offers to the resentful son AND the son who had fallen into the pigsty of an outwardly sinful life?

Pray

Prayer Focus: Are you holding resentment toward a family member? Ask God to help you let it go.

Act

Buy some flowers and hand them out to people you meet today.

April 1, 2019 – Monday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 65:17-21
Psalm: Psalm 30:2-5, 11-12
Gospel Reading: John 4:43-54

MEDITATION

It took raw bold courage for a high ranking court official to travel twenty miles in search of Jesus, the Galilean carpenter. He had to swallow his pride and put up with some ridicule from his friends. And when he found the healer carpenter, Jesus seemed to put him off with the blunt statement that people would not believe unless they saw some kind of miracle or sign from heaven. Jesus likely said this to test the man to see if his faith was in earnest. If he turned away in irritation or with discouragement, he would prove to be insincere. Jesus, perceiving his faith, sent him home with the assurance that his prayer had been heard.

Pray

Prayer Focus: Pray for God to give you the courage to surrender all stubborn pride, fear, and doubts to the love, knowledge, and wisdom of our heavenly Father.

Act

Take the time to write notes and encouragement cards to send to seriously ill children.

April 2, 2019 – Tuesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

Psalm: Psalm 46:1-5, 7-8

Gospel Reading: John 5:1-16

MEDITATION

The lame man that Jesus stopped to speak with had been paralyzed for more than 38 years. He felt helpless because he had no friends to help him bathe in the purifying waters of the pool. Despite his many years of unanswered prayer, he still waited by the pool in the hope that help might come his way. Jesus offered this incurable man not only the prospect of help but total healing as well. Jesus first awakened faith in the paralyzed man when he put a probing question to him, "Do you really want to be healed?" This question awakened a new spark of faith in him. Jesus then ordered him to "get up and walk!" Now the lame man had to put his new found faith into action. He decided to take the Lord Jesus at his word and immediately stood up and began to walk freely.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, help me to look to you as the Great Physician – the One who can make me whole in body, mind, and spirit. Amen."

Act

Focus on yourself today. What can you do for yourself to help you focus or refocus on your own physical, mental, and spiritual health?

April 3, 2019 – Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 49:8-15

Psalm: Psalm 145:8-9, 13-14, 17-18

Gospel Reading: John 5:17-30

MEDITATION

Who can claim authority and power over life and death itself? Jesus not only made such a claim, he showed God's power to heal and restore people to wholeness of life. He also showed the mercy of God by releasing people from their burden of sin and guilt. He even claimed to have the power to raise the dead to life and to execute judgment on all the living and dead. The Jewish authorities were troubled with Jesus' claims and looked for a way to get rid of him. He either had to be a mad man and an imposter or who he claimed to be - God's divine son. Unfortunately, they could not accept Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the anointed one sent by the Father to redeem his people. They sought to kill him because he claimed an authority and equality with God which they could not accept. They failed to recognize that this was God's answer to the long-awaited prayers of his people.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, increase my love for you and unite my heart and will with yours, that I may only seek and desire what is pleasing to you. Amen."

Act

Call a shelter for women or men today, or maybe the Salvation Army, and ask them how you might help.

April 4, 2019 – Thursday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Exodus 32:7-14
Psalm: Psalm 106:19-23
Gospel Reading: John 5:31-47

MEDITATION

Do you know the joy of the Gospel - the *good news* of Jesus Christ - and a life freely submitted to the wisdom and knowledge of God's word? Jesus' opponents refused to accept his authority to speak and act in the name of God. And they refused to believe that he was sent from the Father in heaven. They demanded evidence for his claim to be equal with God. Jesus answers their charges with the supporting evidence of witnesses. The law of Moses had laid down the principle that the unsupported evidence of one person shall not prevail against a man for any crime or wrong in connection with any offence he committed (Deuteronomy 17:6). At least two or three witnesses were needed.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may listen to your word attentively and obey it joyfully. Amen."

Act

Offer to babysit someone's child or pet.

April 5, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Psalm: Psalm 34:17-22
Gospel Reading: John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

MEDITATION

What can hold us back from doing the will of God? Fear, especially the fear of death and the fear of losing the approval of others, can easily rob us of courage and the will to do what we know is right. Jesus met opposition and the threat of death with grace and determination to accomplish his Father's will. Jesus knew that his mission, his purpose in life, would entail sacrifice and suffering and culminate with death on the cross. But that would not be the end. His "hour" would crush defeat with victory over sin and Satan, condemnation with pardon and freedom, and death with glory and everlasting life.

Prayer

"Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Act

Prepare a meal for your family and friends.

April 6, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Jeremiah 11:18-20

Psalm: Psalm 7:1-2, 8-11

Gospel Reading: John 7:40-53

MEDITATION

Are we willing to take a stand for the Lord Jesus? No one can be indifferent for long when confronted with Jesus and his claim to be the Messiah and Savior of the world. Jesus' message and the miraculous signs he performed caused division for many in Israel. Some believed he was a prophet, some the Messiah, and some believed he was neither. The reaction of the armed officers was bewildered amazement. They went to arrest him and returned empty-handed because they never heard anyone speak as he did. The reaction of the chief priests and Pharisees was contempt. The reaction of Nicodemus was timid. His heart told him to defend Jesus, but his head told him not to take the risk.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, your Gospel brings joy and freedom. May I be loyal to you always, even though it produces a cross on earth, so that I may share in your crown of victory for all eternity. Amen."

Act

Give up your TV preferences to someone else in your household.

April 7, 2019 – The Fifth Sunday in Lent

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm: Psalm 126:1-6

Gospel Reading: John 8:1-11

MEDITATION

When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice - either to go back to her former way of sin and death or to reach out to God's offer of forgiveness, restoration, and new life in his kingdom of peace and righteousness. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God's grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is - unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God's mercy and forgiveness. We all need to experience the joy of a clean heart and the mercy of forgiveness.

Prayer

"God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Act

Buy dessert for your server at a restaurant.

April 8, 2019 – Monday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Daniel 13:1-6, 15-23, 28, 35, 44-49, 63

Psalm: Psalm 23

Gospel Reading: John 8:12-20

MEDITATION

When accusations are brought against you, how do you respond and where do you turn for help? The Book of Daniel tells the story of Susanna, a godly woman who loved God and his word. She was unjustly accused of adultery by two elder judges who had tried to seduce her. Since adultery was a serious offense punishable by stoning to death, the law of Moses required at least two witnesses, rather than one, to convict a person. Susanna knew she had no hope of clearing her good reputation and escaping death apart from God's merciful intervention. Daniel tells us that she looked up to heaven and cried out to the Lord for his help (Daniel 13:35). The two elders who wanted to sin with her had done just the opposite - they hid themselves from God's sight and they kept their secret sin hidden from the people as well. They brought false charges against her in revenge for her refusal to sin with them. God in his mercy heard the plea of Susanna and he punished the two elders for giving false witness.

Prayer

"O gracious and Holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you, and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Benedict of Nursia, 480-547 AD)

Act

Reconnect with an old friend you have not seen in a long time.

April 9, 2019 – Tuesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Numbers 21:4-9

Psalm: Psalm 102:2-3, 16-21

Gospel Reading: John 8:21-30

MEDITATION

Do you know the healing power of the cross of Jesus Christ? When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). The visible sign of the "fiery bronze serpent" being lifted up in the sight of the people reminded them of two important facts - sin leads to death and repentance leads to God's mercy and healing. The lifting up of the bronze serpent on a wooden pole points to Jesus Christ being lifted up on the wooden cross at Calvary where he took our sins upon himself to make atonement to the Father on our behalf. The cross of Christ broke the curse of sin and death and won pardon, healing, and everlasting life for all who believe in Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Prayer

"O Lord, help me always to look to you for my healing and hope! Amen."

Act

Take a nap today – make the time! This is one of my favorite things to do – only for about 30 minutes.

April 10, 2019 – Wednesday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Daniel 3:14-20, 24-25, 28

Psalm: Psalm 18:25-27

Gospel Reading: John 8:31-42

MEDITATION

Why did the religious authorities reject Jesus's offer of freedom, forgiveness, and new life in the kingdom of God? Despite Jesus' numerous signs and miracles, the Jewish authorities could not accept his claim to speak and act in the name of his heavenly Father. They were blinded by their misguided ideas of how the Messiah would restore Israel and rule the earth. And Jesus revealed to them how Satan had led them into temptation - both to reject him as the Messiah and to thwart his claim by killing him.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, write your words of love and truth upon my heart and make me a diligent student and a worthy disciple of your word. Amen."

Act

Don't complain about anything today...not one, single thing.

April 11, 2019 – Thursday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Genesis 17:3-9

Psalm: Psalm 105:4-9

Gospel Reading: John 8:51-59

MEDITATION

Jesus, the Word of God, was one with the Father before time existed. When the Jewish authorities asked Jesus who he claimed to be he answered, "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus claims to be timeless and there is only one in the universe who is timeless, namely God. Scripture tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus was not just a man who came, lived, died, and then rose again. He is the immortal timeless One, who always was and always will be. In Jesus we see the eternal God in visible flesh. He is God who became a man for our sake and for our salvation. His death and resurrection make it possible for us to share in his immortality. Do you believe the words of Jesus and obey them with all your heart, mind, and strength?

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, let your word be on my lips and in my heart that I may walk in the freedom of your everlasting love, truth and goodness. Amen."

Act

Wash someone else's car.

April 12, 2019 – Friday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Jeremiah 20:10-13

Psalm: Psalm 18:2-6

Gospel Reading: John 10:31-42

MEDITATION

Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God and he made himself equal with God. The law of Moses laid down the death penalty for such a crime: "He who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him" (Leviticus 24:16). As they were picking up stones to hurl at Jesus, he asked for which of his good works were they there stone him. I can't help but believe Jesus had a sense of humor when he asked this, but he did have to slip away from them to prevent getting arrested.

Prayer

"Write upon my heart, O Lord, the lessons of your holy word, and grant that I may be a doer of your word, and not a forgetful hearer only. Amen."

Act

Leave a not under someone's windshield wiper telling them how much God loves them.

April 13, 2019 – Saturday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Old Testament Reading Ezekiel 37:21-28

Psalm: Psalm 22:1, 6-10

Gospel Reading: John 11:45-56

MEDITATION

Do you allow fear or opposition to hold you back from doing God's will? Jesus set his face like flint toward Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaited him there (Luke 9:51; Isaiah 50:7). It was Jewish belief that when the high priest asked for God's counsel for the nation, God spoke through him. What dramatic irony that Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus must die for the nation. The prophet Ezekiel announced that God would establish one people, one land, one prince, and one sanctuary forever.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, may we your disciples be ever ready to lay down our lives in conformity to your will, to willingly suffer and die for you, that we may also share in your victory and glory. Amen."

Act

Start today to prepare yourself for Holy Week. At the beginning of the week, Jesus was praised as palm branches were waved. Be the end of the week he would hang from a Roman Cross. What can you do to keep the week "holy?"

April 14, 2019 – Palm Sunday

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: Luke 19:28-40

MEDITATION

Does the King of glory find a welcome entry in your home and heart? Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing full well what awaited him - betrayal, rejection, and crucifixion. The people of Jerusalem, however, were ready to hail him as their Messianic King! Little did they know what it would cost this king to usher in his Kingdom. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem astride a colt was a direct fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah (9:9):

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, and riding on a donkey and upon a colt the foal of a donkey.

The colt was a sign of peace. Jesus enters Jerusalem in meekness and humility, as the Messianic King who offers victory and peace to his people. That victory and peace would be secured in the cross and resurrection which would soon take place at the time of Passover.

Prayer

"Lord Jesus, be the King and Ruler of my heart, mind, life, and home. May my life reflect your meekness and humility that you may be honored as the King of glory! Amen."

April 15 – Monday of Holy Week – Jesus is Anointed at Bethany

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: John 12:1-11

MEDITATION

Mary's gift was extravagant. Whatever Mary's intentions, whatever her thoughts or feelings, Jesus sees it in reference to his coming death. There is no reason to believe Mary knew the great, overwhelming significance of what she was doing; she was simply acting out of her love and devotion to Jesus. When we act out of love and devotion to the Lord, we just never know what kind of impact we may be making on the Kingdom of God. We just never know what kind of an impact we may be making on others.

PRAYER

"O Lord, increase our faith, increase our devotion to you and one another. Amen."

April 16 – Tuesday of Holy Week – Jesus Predicts His Death

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: John 12:23-26

MEDITATION

The mystery of the resurrection, the mystery of life after death, and the victory of light over darkness, the sacrificial lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world – “mystery” is a good word for it. Do we have faith enough to believe in life after death? Do we live as children of light in a world darkened by sin?

PRAYER

For a New Heart: “Create in me a new heart, O God, and put a right spirit within me, in the name of Jesus Christ, who is one with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.”

April 17 – Wednesday of Holy Week – Jesus Predicts Judas’ Betrayal

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: John 13:21-32

MEDITATION

Many of us know the pain of betrayal by someone who is close to us. Jesus shares a holy meal with his closest of followers, even with the one He knew would betray him. He washes the betrayer’s feet along with the feet of his other followers. Haven’t you and I betrayed our Savior many time with our own self-centeredness? Would you and I have been Judas under similar circumstances? O, how great is the love and forgiveness of our Savior!

PRAYER

“Lord, thank you for loving us and dying for us even when we have been betrayers. Amen.”

April 18 – Holy Thursday – Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: John 13:27-38

MEDITATION

Not only would Judas betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, but Peter, the chief apostle, would deny the Lord three times before the rooster crowed. Peter has the intention of dying with the Lord, but his weak flesh failed him. Peter love Jesus, but his love – like ours – is imperfect. Jesus’s love for us, however, is perfect. The Lord, through the Spirit, will bring Peter to a place of maturity in his faith...but not at this point in his life’s journey. The poor showing of Peter is something we can all identify with. The Lord is incredibly patient with us. Thank God for his amazing grace!

PRAYER

“Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart. Here is the citadel of all my desiring, where my hopes are born, and all the deep resolutions of my spirit take wings. In this center, my fears are nourished, and all my hates are nurtured. Here my loves are cherished, and the deep hungers of my spirit are honored without quivering and without shock. In my heart, above all else, let love and integrity envelope me until my love is perfected and the last vestige of my desiring is no longer in conflict with thy Spirit. Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart. Amen.”

(United Methodist Hymnal, #401)

April 19 – Good Friday

Jesus is arrested. Peter denies the Lord. The High Priest Questions Jesus. Jesus Stands Before Pilate. Jesus is Sentenced to Death. Jesus is Crucified,

REFLECT ON THE WORD

Gospel Reading: John 18-19

MEDITATION

It is hard to reflect on Good Friday without reading the whole story. I encourage the reading of all of chapters 18 and 19 of John's gospel. I cannot read this story without weeping. I hope it always has this effect on me. Jesus rode into the holy city on victoriously on a Sunday, but by Friday he had been betrayed, denied, falsely arrested, railroaded into an illegal trial, touted by blood-thirsty mob, scourged beyond recognition, nailed to a tree, and buried in a borrowed tomb. But as S.M. Lockridge so famously said, "It's Friday. Jesus is hanging on the cross. The disciples are questioning. What has happened to their King? But it's only Friday...and **SUNDAY IS COMING!!** Praise God – Sunday is Coming! Death, hell, and the grave will be defeated! **SUNDAY IS COMING!!**

PRAYER

"Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord! You were hung on a Roman cross so that I might find forgiveness! Oh, My Lord! Oh, my Lord! I am undone...but I am waiting for Sunday! Amen."

The lectionary and study sources I have used to write and compile this are in the public domain and free for use by all, but they are not for sale in any form. Some of this is from those sources, and much of it is from me, but I claim no intellectual ownership. This is intended to help guide us through the season of Lent – until we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord during the great 50 Days of Easter. With Much Love, Pastor Steve Baccus.